Developing a Gold Standard Curricula for Children & Teens with High(er) Functioning Autism

(and getting your health insurance provider to pay for it)

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Key Points

Approximately 69% of kids on the spectrum are "higher functioning" – in other words, kids with competent to excellent verbal skills. These are kids this discussion focuses on.

CT Bill 301 (Public Act Number 09-115)

- Commercial health insurance is REQUIRED to pay for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), and a variety of other services.
- Diagnosis of ASD from "independent" licensed psychologist, physician or social worker (not school reports) required.
- Required to have routine oversight by licensed psychologist, physician, or board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA).
- Average hours per week: up to approximately 30 hours/week; Average duration of services: several years, when "medical necessity" is demonstrated.

The Struggle with Social Pragmatics

What is "Social Pragmatic Communication?"

- Social pragmatics refers to the social use of language and **how individuals interact with others**.
- This includes what we say, how we say it, our body language.
- Knowing how to engage in verbal and non-verbal exchanges of communication.

Kids who are diagnosed with ASD have an easier time following the story line in a written story (when, as readers, they can control the "speed" of the story), compared to their greater difficulty in listening to and watching a story on video (when they cannot control the speed of the story).

What Creates Social Pragmatic Skills?

- Following Story Lines (not being "bored")
- Understanding Figurative Language (not reliance on "literal" language)
- Awareness and Use of Executive Function Skills (organizing, planning, sequencing, anticipating)
- Theory of Mind (being able to shift between 1st, 2nd, 3rd person perspectives)
- Weak Central Coherence (Being able to see the "big picture")
- Social Referencing (looking at and listening to important other people)
- Deliberative Speed of Processing (being able to slow down conversation to rehearse listening)
- Opportunities for Social Interactions (create as many conversation partners and friends as possible)

What Needs to be Taught to Promote Pragmatic Language?

- Cooperation with adults to facilitate social referencing
- Organization, Planning, Sequencing, and Anticipating (Executive Function)
- Figurative (inferential) vocabulary
- Symbolic (inferential) stories
- Following conversations and story lines
- Understanding others' points of view
- Successful socialization with peers

Need to take the "Long View of Therapy" – progress correlates (in part) with the duration and intensity of services

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