



Autism's Affect on Language Development

Did you know

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About 1 in 100 Children have Autism! Autistic individuals are a diverse group of people with differing characteristics but are mainly seen to have social and communication difficulties (World Health Organization, 2023). Autism is a spectrum disorder also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder and will often affect individuals differently, Autism ranges from mild to severe with people usually having similar traits but their level of severity being in different ranges (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2020). Autism has been seen to be 4 times greater in boys than girls with the CDC reporting a higher percentage of 1 in every 54 children in the US being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2020).

How Autism Affects Language Development



There are times when people with Autism seem to be in their own world where they seem to struggle to communicate and may have difficulties learning and understanding what others may say to them. Some people may also have trouble with non-verbal communication including eye contact and facial expressions. The ability to communicate depends on where people lie on the spectrum meaning some may be non-verbal and non communicating some may be non-verbal but able to communicate through signs or an AAC device (augmentative and alternative speech device). Some may have partial to full speech abilities (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2020). Some Autistic individuals may also have selective mutism where in certain situations they are unable to speak in others they are confident enough to have a conversation. Although many Autistic people can speak with no difficulty there can still be a barrier when it comes to social situations due to possibly getting overwhelmed or being put in unpredictable situations (NHS, 2024). Language is on a spectrum in itself within Autism spectrum disorder with each individual having different strengths in their language and communication skills.

There are a few language patterns that individuals with Autism may follow:

- Repetitive or rigid language - When Autistic individuals start to talk they tend to frequently repeat things that may seem meaningless and unrelated to others in a conversation. For example, a child may count from one to five throughout a conversation for what seems like no real reason. Another form of repetition a child or adult may follow is the repeating of a word or phrase they have just heard this

repetition is known as echolalia. For example, if you were to say were going outside to an individual with autism they may repeat the work outside over and over again. There is also a thing called delayed echolalia where a person may repeat a word or phrase that has been said before that represents something to them, for example, when they want a drink they may repeat 'Do you want a drink' to request one. Many individuals with Autism may also tend to have a higher octave voice or a robot-sounding voice. Other people may start their sentences with a common phrase like 'My name is' before saying what they want.

- Narrow interests and exceptional abilities - Some autistic individuals may be able to talk about their special interests in depth but when it comes to carrying out two-way conversations about that subject or other conversation they can't do this.
- Uneven language development - Language development can be uneven and lots with Autism require speech and language skills tho many won't develop them to the typical degree. For example, some may pick up a strong vocabulary in their special interest but may struggle in other typical conversations. Some may not even understand or react to their names and don't develop language in these circumstances.
- Poor nonverbal conversational skills - Some individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder struggle with keeping eye contact and meaningful gestures like pointing at things meaning they struggle to express their needs and feelings as they have a lack of language and communication skills verbal and non-verbal.

(National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2020)

How others can support and help people with Autism develop their Language Development



Those with Autism also struggle with understanding and processing language so to encourage spoken and non-verbal communication and language individuals may use many tactics in their speech to encourage this understanding and later the progress of language development. These include using clear and direct language when speaking like saying

'Please put your coat on your peg' rather than 'Where should I coats go'. Keeping things simple rather than dropping hints like 'put the cars in the red box' rather than 'find the red box and put the toys on the floor in the box'. Avoid using idioms within your speech like 'who let the cat out the bag' and avoid using sarcasm as many Autistic individuals don't understand and may believe you're being literal with your words. Another big way to support children with Autism development of their language and communication skills is by using AAC devices or sheets to support them in non-verbal/semi-verbal communication. While being around children with Autism this is one of the main ways I have seen their language progress and develop allowing a non-verbal language to arise and the promotion of possible spoken language to develop alongside this. AAC is the use of an object, symbols, photographs, signing and electronic aids to help children and others communicate their needs and wants when they don't have the use and understanding of language to do so verbally (NHS, 2021).

Conclusion

Throughout this blog, we have looked at how Autism affects language development and how others can support Autistic individual's progress in their language. We have seen that many Autistic individuals have a lack of understanding and processing which causes the main lack of language with the often inability to not produce spoken language which leads to them being unable to communicate their thoughts and feelings. We have talked about many ways to help those develop their language including using simpler and clearer language as well as not using idioms and sarcasm to avoid misunderstanding allowing them to slowly develop understanding and their language can slowly start to develop. We also talked about the use of AAC devices in language development and how the use of a form of non-verbal communication is amazing for those who can not verbalize their wants and needs without having to use words as a form of language. Overall those with Autism are likely to struggle with their language development but with the right support can make progress and learn to communicate whether verbal or non-verbal.

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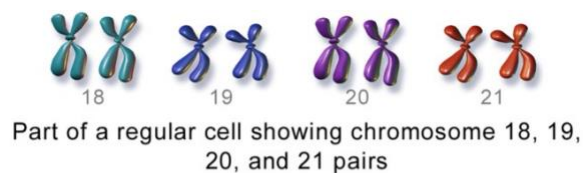
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Down Syndrome and Physical Development



Did you know



Down Syndrome

In one in every 377 births, a person is born with Down Syndrome! (NHS, 2022). Down syndrome is a condition where someone is born with an extra chromosome (Number 21). Those with Down Syndrome will have some sort of learning disability and range in abilities though like everyone have their own personality, things they like and dislike and things that make them who they are (NHS, 2023).

characteristics of Down Syndrome:

- A flatter face
- Almond shaped eyes
- short neck
- Poor muscle tones or loose joints
- Shorter-than-average height

Some may have:

- Congenital Heart defects
- Hearing loss
- Obstructive sleep apnea

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024)

How does Down Syndrome affect Physical Development

Those with Down Syndrome tend to have slower physical development compared to others this could be due to having poor muscle tone which may delay sitting rolling and walking. Although they may be delayed and take longer to meet milestones than others those with Down Syndrome should still be able to join in with other children for physical exercise activities (NHS, 2024).

Those with Down Syndrome may struggle with their gross and fine motor skills;

Due to those with Down Syndrome tending to have low muscle tone their movement can seem more floppy. Having low muscle tone can make it harder for them to hold their bodies up and take more effort when activating their muscles this can result in fatigue and postural issues due to the extra effort it takes. Those with low muscle tone also tend to struggle with decreased muscle strength, decreased activity tolerance and endurance. These factors have a knock-on effect on posture and can affect the facilitation of fine motor tasks. Children with Down Syndrome may also struggle with hypermobility which increases flexibility and range of movement. The flexibility of their joints can make it harder for them to control their movements and support themselves (Down Syndrome Resource Foundation, 2024).

Children with Down Syndrome can often find it harder to use fine motor skills due to low muscle tone and hypermobility in their wrists, elbows and shoulders this can make it harder for them to zip up coats and do buttons (Gympanzees, 2023). A lack of muscle strength can affect their co-ordination making it harder when doing physical activities like catching and throwing a ball and even walking and running. Specifically, children with Down Syndrome can have shorter arms and legs making it harder when learning physical skills like sitting when they need help balancing with their hands (www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk, n.d.).

Although those with Down Syndrome tend to be delayed in their physical development some will develop at the same time as their typical peers though may struggle with their development in other areas. Those with Down Syndrome can also be delayed in their understanding and learning which can have a knock-on effect on their physical skills (www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk, n.d.).

How to support people with Down Syndrome with their Physical Development



There are many ways to support those with Down Syndrome with their physical development. Having realistic expectations of what stage the individual is at is the first step to supporting this person's development the best as it makes planning the next steps easier and more beneficial to the individual. Building on success is very important as using what they have had success on in the past but making it slowly more difficult can allow time to slowly process and learn the new skill. Breaking down the activity into small steps to make it more manageable like when learning to throw start with them just dropping the ball and

slowly add throwing a little harder and further each time to it. Make sure they are in the right environment where there are no distractions allowing full focus on the task you are working on and prevent overstimulation from too much going on. Make sure to try many different activities not just focus on one specific task to keep from allowing boredom as well if an activity is not helping the progression of physical skills it's okay to move on and try a different task. Making the activity fun for all people learn best from having fun and enjoying themselves, they are likely to pay more attention and interact more when they are excited and enjoying themselves (NHS, 2024). Being included in everyday play and family activities will help them meet motor milestones at their own pace without feeling pressured and without extra intervention (www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk, n.d.). Some individuals with Down syndrome may see a physical therapist to help support their physical development and carers and parents may also be taught ways to best help support their child or adult by them.

Conclusion

This blog has looked into how Down syndrome affects physical development and how others can support individuals with Down Syndrome with their physical development. We have seen that the main challenge individuals with Down Syndrome face with their physical development is their muscle tone, the lack of it affects individuals in their everyday lives from posture to carrying out tasks like cutting paper and writing to sitting and standing. They also struggle with hypermobility and muscle weakness which affects their control over the joints and their strength to carry out everyday tasks from sitting and crawling to walking and jumping. We have also looked into how to support those individuals with their physical development by breaking down activities and supporting them with fun activities to develop their physical skills. Keeping activities fun and engaging means people enjoy what they're doing they tend to remember more and have a better chance of developing faster.

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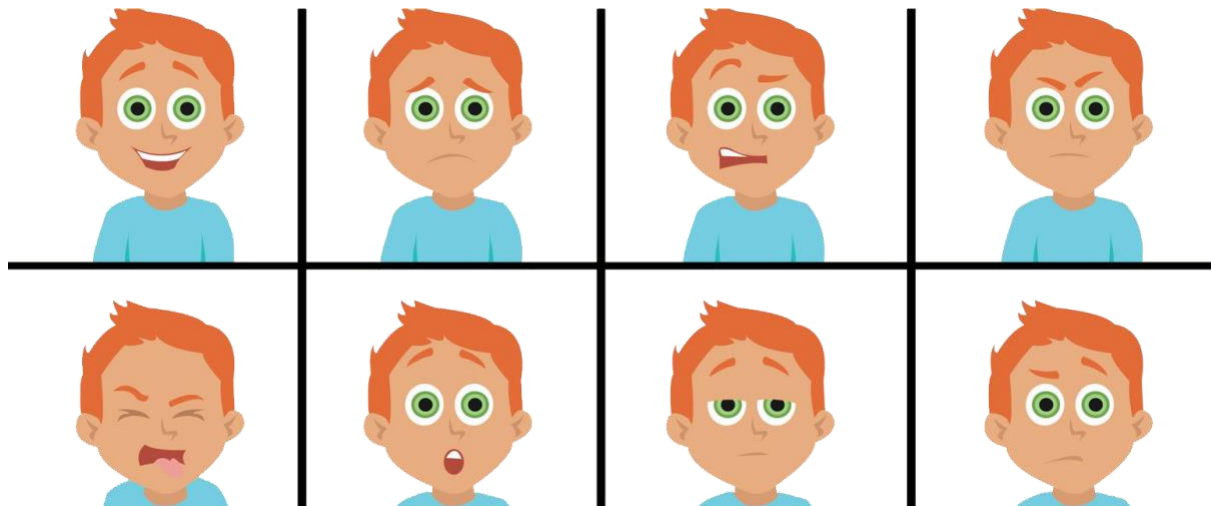
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ADHD and Emotional Development

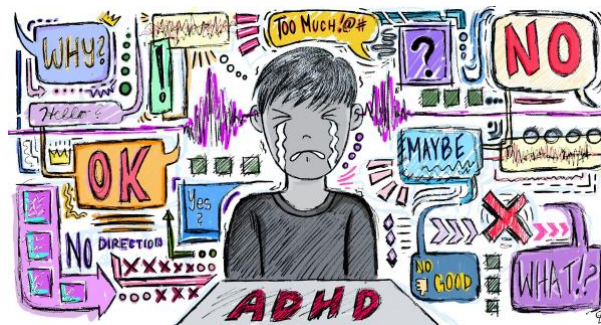


Did you know

An estimated 5% of Children and 3-4% of Adults globally are diagnosed with ADHD! (NHS England, 2024). ADHD also known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a condition that affects a person's behaviour. People with Adhd may have trouble focusing, seem

restless and act impulsively. Most symptoms are seen at an early age but may become more noticeable as a child grows up with most being diagnosed under the age of 12 but sometimes symptoms are not recognised until adulthood. Symptoms of ADHD may improve as children grow up but many still experience many problems way into adult life. Some people with ADHD may also experience issues with sleep and anxiety disorders. The cause of ADHD is unknown though has been shown to run in families. There has also been research that has shown differences in the brains of those with ADHD and those who are neurotypical (NHS, 2021).

How ADHD affects Emotional Development



Many with ADHD experience something called emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation is the diminished capacity to regulate emotional responses, this can result in reactions that do not match the situation. Those with emotional dysregulation may be thought to overreact in many scenarios with some getting angry quickly while others may cry quickly. People with emotional dysregulation tend to feel more intense emotions which may seem like tantrums, especially in younger children. ADHD and emotional dysregulation aren't just about emotional outbursts it can also be seen as struggling to identify and understand your own feelings like feeling two emotions at once e.g. happiness and frustration, struggling to see what the other could be feeling like not realizing someone is sad as well as having an overwhelming amount of emotions at once causing people to shut down. Another characteristic of ADHD is executive functioning which is a collection of cognitive functions in charge of behaviour, attention and emotions. This causes those with ADHD to have problems controlling their impulses and regulating their emotions. Frustration can arise from this and cause outbursts and poorly regulated emotions (Koseva, 2023).

Emotional dysregulation can look very different for each person with some suggesting that there are two main types of presentation of ADHD especially in children. One is the 'irritable' subtype where these children tend to be more angry, sad and fearful and the 'surgent' subtype which displays more emotional impulsiveness and excessive energy. The irritable children tend to have a short fuse and get upset over things and take a while to get over them whereas surgent children can get overwhelmed with excitement which can lead them to act without thinking about any consequences (Weir, 2024).

How to support people with ADHD with their Emotional Development



There are many ways to help support people with ADHD progress in their Emotional Development:

- **Understanding** - Understanding ADHD is the first step in support. Understanding that ADHD is a disorder that affects people's control of their emotions and self-control and negatively impacts their executive functioning.
- **Consider** - Consider where the person is within their development as executive functioning in every person with ADHD varies and each person will react differently to emotions depending on their age so if a 12-year-old is acting more like a 9-year-old they should be treated at the understanding level of a 9-year-old.
- **Provide** - Provide stability for the individual, keep constant limits, and predictable routines and having household rules for children especially can help manage children's upset behaviour. Having rules and daily task written and shown somewhere clearly for both adults and children can be helpful to not cause any surprise to a daily routine which may cause outbursts.
- **Help** - Help by identifying the moments your child may often meltdowns and implement strategies to support their external executive functioning weakness this can also help adults of other can help identify when they may have meltdowns to help them improve on them in the future. For example, instead of giving verbal reminders, provide pictures of daily tasks in the child's bedroom. Also to help kids understand their feelings, it's crucial to label and discuss emotions, encourage open communication, and teach them that all feelings are normal. Avoid negative language, model emotional self-control, and praise their efforts to calm down. Avoid harsh words and encourage open communication, even in the heat of the moment.

- The heat of the moment - Reacting calmly to chaos is challenging, but raising voices, expressing negative emotions, and using harsh language can be harmful. Minimizing eye contact, walking away, and encouraging self-calming strategies like deep breaths can help calm the child.
- Accept - It may be helpful for parents to recognize that their kids' emotional outbursts are not intentional, nor are they deliberate attempts to make their lives difficult. This includes both outward acceptance of your child and internal acceptance. Verbally acknowledging your child's emotions in the moment may prevent it from escalating further. "I can see that you're upset. Maybe stepping outside will help you calm down." Likewise, as parents, we may be able to deal with these challenging moments better when we have an attitude of acceptance towards these confrontations. They are a part of our lives and accepting them for what they are may help us approach them with more calmness.
- Seek - Effective behavioural strategies for managing frequent emotional outbursts in children with ADHD are crucial, as better control reduces the intensity and frequency of these outbursts. If a child has constant outbursts it's okay to seek help from other professionals and teachers.

(PhD, 2019)

Conclusion

In this blog, we have talked about how ADHD affect emotional development and how we can support people with ADHD to work on their emotional development. We have seen that the main thing that affects emotional development within ADHD is emotional dysregulation which can be different within each person but mainly causes the inability to control emotions and the overreaction in many circumstances. We have also looked at the best way to support their emotional development which seems to be the understanding of what ADHD is and learning how to best support those with ADHD through their meltdowns and over time help them learn to prevent a meltdown to begin with.

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