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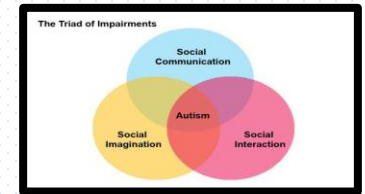
Au
Gold
Valuable
& Rare

Ti
Titanium
Incredibly
Strong

Sm
Samarium
Useful,
Many talents

Source: Crafters Vinyl Emporium, no date.

INTRODUCTION: As suggested by Autism Society (2020) and National Autistic Society (2022), Autism is a developmental condition often emerging in early childhood, that is lifelong and complex. Autism Society (2020) and National Autistic Society (2022) state that autism is a spectrum condition as it affects individual's communication and interaction with others and the world in varying degrees. NHS (2019) highlight several different terms are commonly used when discussing autism including ASD, which is Autism Spectrum Disorder. ASC is also used meaning Autism Spectrum Condition. In Wales, one in one hundred people have autism (Autism Wales, 2020).



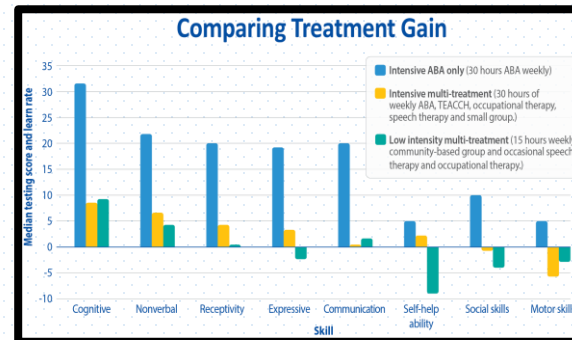
Source:
ASD
Helping
Hands,
2022.

IDENTIFICATION AND DIAGNOSIS: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2022) suggest that reaching a diagnosis of autism can be challenging. Mencap (no date) suggest signs indicative of autism can be noticeable in very early childhood with CDC (2022) stating some children begin showing signs of autism younger than 18 months of age. NHS (2022) state that only specialist professionals are able to diagnose autism. The process of this includes observations, detailed developmental histories such as a Ruth Griffiths assessment and information from others surrounding the child. In line with the key principle of person-centred practice within the *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) 2018*, including parents/carers in the diagnostic process for autism is positive however, Lemler (2012) argues discrepancies can occur due to the unique nature of the parent and child relationship and level of knowledge of autism and related behaviours. Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) parental interview along with the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) clinician assessment are suggested to be the most accurate tools to use when diagnosing autism (Lemler, 2012).

McCarthy (2019) suggests a later diagnosis is more reliable, stating an autism diagnosis at 12 months old is only 50% accurate. However, CDC (2022) argues that significant delays in diagnosis result in children not receiving early support and intervention that is essential to ensure children reach full potential. Elder, Kreider, Brasher and Ansell (2017) agree suggesting early diagnosis and intervention improves the quality of life for children with autism and future outcomes. Griggs and Bussard (2017) and Curran (2020) suggest a lack of funding and training as key barriers to identification of need across the early years care and education sector. However, the statutory role of the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNO) has been developed for each local authority in Wales to work collaboratively to support early years settings to access free training to support in the early identification of need as well interventions to support children, in a bid to lessen the challenges associated with identifying ALN (Welsh Government, 2021).

BARRIERS: Devarakonda (2013) suggests inclusion is a child's right, however, Haug (2017) argues a vast difference in the concept of inclusive education as stated in policy in comparison to inclusive education in practice. In addition, Devarakonda (2013) suggests that within early years care and education settings, inclusive education for children with autism is sometimes viewed by practitioners as idealistic and unrealistic. However, Leonard and Smyth (no date) argue that practitioners having the correct training and resources has a significant positive impact on practitioner attitudes to facilitating inclusive environments for children with autism. In addition, Cote and Gagne (2020) suggest practitioners' attitudes have a direct impact on the implementation of behaviours and practices that influence outcomes for children therefore solidifies the argument for training and resources to be accessible for early years practitioners. As suggested by Office of Developmental and Primary Care (2018) and Scope (no date), these are examples of the both the medical and social model of disability; viewing the individual or society as having responsibility to adapt and change.

Suleymanov (2014) suggests that for inclusive education to be truly realised, traditional teaching methods need to be removed and replaced with a more flexible curriculum and assessment framework. However Waldron, Rhys and Taylor (2014) argue that practitioners feel fearful and reluctant to move away from traditional teaching methods due to the pressure of measuring academic attainment within formal assessment. Douglas, et.al. (2015) argues alternative assessments should be developed and used within early years curricula to be inclusive of children with autism, celebrating the unique child and individual achievements and progress.



Source: Autism Partnership, 2021.

INTERVENTION: UK Society for Behaviour Analysis (2022) suggests using Applied Behaviour Analysis as an intervention strategy can support children with autism to develop communication skills, play skills and academic learning skills to support school readiness. In addition to this ABA can also reduce self-injurious behaviours for children with autism. Autism Speaks (2022) suggests that positive reinforcement is a key technique used within ABA, supporting children to understand behaviours and actions that are sought after and, with intensive intervention, facilitate positive change over time. However, Davison (2018) argues that using ABA as an intervention strategy is not inclusive as it attempts to change a child's behaviour to fit in with what is deemed appropriate by society, viewing autism through the lens of the medical model of disability.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Programs Guide (2020) suggests using strategies within ABA beyond the intensive intervention such as visual supports prove beneficial for children within early years settings. Manikiza (no date) suggests the requirement of practitioners to adapt communication styles when caring for children with autism is essential to promote communication and as well as reduce anxiety and periods of dysregulation.

CONCLUSION: There are several strengths and challenges from identification and diagnosis of autism through to intervention strategies to support children with autism. This reinforces, as suggested by Autism Society (2020) and National Autistic Society (2022), the complexity of autism as a spectrum condition. However, as suggested by Leonard and Smyth (no date) and Curran (2020), accessible training and appropriate funding for the early years care and education sector play a pivotal role in helping or hindering the identification and intervention process for children with autism.

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