Asperger Syndrome and Traumatic Brain Injury

An Introduction to What You Need to Know as an Employee Assistance Staff Member

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Asperger Syndrome and Traumatic Brain Injury

- What asperger syndrome and traumatic brain injury are
- How each may impact how someone behaves and thinks
- What supports and approaches work best
- Where to find more resources
Asperger Syndrome

- Also known as:
  - Asperger’s Syndrome
  - Asperger Disorder
- Identified by Hans Asperger (1944)
- Case studies in English (1981)
- International Classification of Diseases in 1992
- Entered DSM IV in 1994
- Recognized by schools 1994
Autism Spectrum Disorders

- **Autistic Disorder** ("classic" autism)
  Significant language delays, social and communication challenges, unusual behaviors and interests. Many have intellectual disability.

- **Asperger Syndrome**
  Milder symptoms; Social challenges, unusual behaviors and interests. Usually no problems with language or intellect.

- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified** ("atypical autism")
  Meet some of the criteria for autistic disorder or Asperger syndrome. Fewer and milder symptoms than autistic disorder.

- **Cause**
What is Asperger Syndrome?

- Different criteria
  - 1) Unable to understand social aspects of communication; poor social skills
  - 2) Impairment in communication
  - 3) Narrow, intense, repetitive interests, activities, and patterns of behavior.
  - 4) Sometime clumsy, poor coordination
- More common in males
- Incidence in children and adults
Asperger Syndrome: Impact on How Someone Behaves and Thinks

- Above average intelligence, memory skills, vocabulary skills, and perception to detail.
- Strong sense of social justice
- Invisible disability
- May develop depression, anxiety and OCD
- Many adults marry and work successfully
Aspies and NTs
Adam
Supports and approaches for someone with Asperger syndrome

- Research, read and learn about the disorder.
- Learn about how Asperger Syndrome presents in the person/child.
- Find a team of interdisciplinary professionals
- Help others help the person/child.
- Help the individual turn his or her obsession into a passion.  
  Mayo Clinic, 2009
- nurture and celebrate strengths; use strengths to compensate in other areas  
  Cohen, 2004
- find others in the same situation.
More approaches... for children

- Intensive, engaged early intervention program
- Behavioral support program
- Teach communication and social skills
- Sensory integration and occupational therapy
- Specialized speech therapy
- Assistive and adaptive technology
- Increase flexibility and stress management
- Supervise unstructured time
- Adapt the environment
- Build on person’s interests to teach skills and increase success
Approaches that help adults and children

- Don’t assume that the person understands.
- Communicate clearly, logically, organized, concrete, concise. Avoid sarcasm, jargon.
- Explain abstract concepts in concrete terms; state cause and effect relationships.
- State what you would like person to do.
- State expectations clearly.
- Look out for sensory input in environment.
- Help them learn from other’s reactions what is being communicated.

(YourChild: Development and Behavior Resources, University of Michigan)
More approaches... for adults

- Value a unique point of view
- Different, not defective, way of thinking (Attwood, 2009)
- Not everyone wants to be ‘cured’ or conform.
- Adapt the environment to the person
- Build on person’s interests to teach skills and increase success
- Help support social relationships and flexibility
- Improve communication skills
- Join support and social groups
- Educate others, mediators
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Social support for families of adults with AS
Where to find more resources

- **Autism Speaks** [AutismSpeaks.org](http://AutismSpeaks.org)  
  Family Services Resource Guide by location
- **Wrong Plant** [www.wrongplanet.net](http://www.wrongplanet.net)
- **MAAP** Services for Autism, Asperger's, and PDD  
  [mapservices.org](http://mapservices.org) (219)662-1311
- **Autism Support Network** (resources by location) [www.Autismsupportnetwork.com](http://www.Autismsupportnetwork.com)
- **Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Association** (AHA) [www.ahany.org](http://www.ahany.org)
- **YourChild: Development and Behavior Resources**, University of Michigan  
  [med.umich.edu/yourchild](http://med.umich.edu/yourchild)
- **Autism Network International (ANI)**
  ani.autistics.org
- **Autism Society of America**
  www.autism-society.org (301)657-0881
- **Families of Adults Afflicted with Asperger’s Syndrome**
  faaas.org
- **Autism Research Institute** (619)281-7165
  www.autismresearchinstitute.com
- **Public school system College Living Experience** is a college program for special needs students with several locations in the USA. www.cleinc.net
- **Think College**
- **OASIS**: Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support (free software)
- **ASPEN**: Asperger Syndrome Education Network
  aspennj.org
- **GRASP**: www.grasp.org
- **First Signs**: firstsigns.org
- **Temple Grandin**: templegrandin.com
- **Tony Attwood**: www.tonyattwood.com.au
- **Pro-Ed Inc.**: www.proedinc.com
- **Autism Asperger Publishing Company**: www.asperger.net
Questions...?
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

- Concussion
- Head injury
What is a traumatic brain injury?

- TBI is defined by the Traumatic Brain Injury Act of 1996 (PL 104-166) as:
  - external physical force
  - total/partial functional disability and/or psychosocial impairment.
  - impairments in one or more areas: cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem-solving, sensory perceptual and motor abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech.

- TBI recognized by schools as a category eligible to receive services in 1990 Public Law 101-476, IDEA, 1990
What is a traumatic brain injury?

Each year in the United States:

- 1.4 million people sustain a TBI: 50,000 die, 235,000 hospitalized, and 1.1 million treated.
- 475,000 of TBIs are children ages 0 to 14 years (CDC, 2007)
- Highest rates among males ages 15 to 24 years of age (Brain Injury Association)
- Falls (28%) are leading cause of TBI (0 to 4 years of ages and 75 + years). Vehicle (20%), struck by (19%), assault (11%) (CDC, 2006), firearms
- Rate of 5.4 per 1,000 (CDC, 2003)
- Soldiers
How a TBI occurs

- Open head injury
- Closed head injury
- Diffuse axonal injury
TBI: Initial impact

- Initially and/or after delay there are symptoms
- Loss of consciousness from minutes to days
- Secondary damage
- Amnesia
Recovery

- Rapid recovery initially
- Rehabilitation services
TBI: impact on how someone behaves and thinks

- Invisible disability
- Effects of a TBI are fluid
- No two injuries have the same effect
- Long-term effects vary according to severity of injury, location and damage age, secondary damage, past TBIs, meaning to person, resources available
- Inability to recognize changes from the TBI.
Long-term Effects of a Traumatic Brain Injury

- **Mild TBI**: physical effects, sensory perception effects, cognitive effects, language effects, behavioral/emotional/psychosocial effects, academic effects, memory, social, attention difficulties, interaction of multiple effects (Siantz & Mira, 1999), sleep problems, and fatigue.
- Expression and understanding difficulties
- Problems with thinking, memory, reasoning, attention, concentration... lead to frustration, anger, anxiety and interfere with work/school.
- Personality changes, aggression, socially inappropriate behavior, depression, mood swings
Long-term Effects

- Vegetative state with severe TBI
- Loss of peers
- Can lead to suicide, alcohol and drug use
  (Asarnow, Satz, Light, Zaucha, Lewis, & McCleary, 1995; Tyler & Mira, 1999)
- Change of career path, unemployment
  (Roessler, Schriner, & Price, 1992; Bergland & Thomas, 1991)
Impact on Person’s Family

- Family trauma, shock
- Severe emotional intensity and grief for the person that once was.
- Lingering feelings of sadness, conflict, anguish, feelings of guilt, numbness.
- Changed family structure and social life
- Changed family member (Williams, 1994)
- Family coping
- Siblings
Supports and Approaches for Someone with a TBI

- Interdisciplinary team
- Rehabilitative care to regain/maintain maximum level of independent function.
- If a child, notify the school before discharge
- Cognitive therapy and strategies to increase memory
- Behavioral and psychological services (family and alcohol and substance abuse counseling)
- Assistive and instructional technology
- Accommodation options
- Section 504 Services for students
- Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act
More Supports and Approaches

- Time management and organizational tools
- Stress management skills
- Adapt the environment
- Research, read and learn about TBI
- Organizations, resources, and support groups
Where to find more resources

- Brain Injury Association of America, Inc.
  www.biausa.org  phone: 703-761-0750
- Traumatic Brain Injury
  www.TraumaticBrainInjury.com
- The Brain Injury Ring
  f.webring.com/hub?ring=bir
- Brain Injury Directory
  braininjurydirectory.net
The Brain Injury Network: 1st survivor operated international organization braininjurynetwork.org

National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury  www.neuro.pmr.vcu.edu

BrainLine.org  www.brainline.org  (703)998-2020

The Rehabilitation Research Center
www.tbi-sci.org/main.html

Job Accommodation Network
www.jan.wvu.edu (800)526-7234 TBI Job Accommodation Fact Sheet
jan.wvu.edu/media/employmentbrainfact.doc

U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy
www.dol.gov/odep/index.htm

American with Disabilities Act www.ada.gov

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) idea.ed.gov

Rehabilitation Centers
Questions...?
Thank You