

High Functioning Autism(HFA): An Autism Spectrum Disorder

Jenna Jones, M.A.
&

John Strang, Ph.D.

OZAD INSTITUTE, HDGH

February 25, 2016

What is High Functioning Autism (HFA)?

- ▶ A neurodevelopmental life-long brain-related disorder
- ▶ High end of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) continuum
 - ▶ Average to above average achievement on intelligence tests
 - ▶ Early observed characteristics of autism
 - ▶ Reduced autism features as compared with lower functioning individuals
- ▶ Outstanding, life-long social reasoning and interaction problems
- ▶ Dependence on learned rules to direct behaviour

Characteristics of HFA

- ▶ Visual processing strengths; Differences in language competencies
- ▶ Deficits in social awareness and reasoning include:
 - ↳ Social attention
 - ↳ Social intuition
 - ↳ Social context awareness
 - ↳ Social prediction
 - ↳ Social self-awareness

Characteristics of HFA

- ▶ Deficits in social communication include:
 - ↳ Social awareness and reasoning
 - ↳ Language inference interpretation
- ▶ Rule-governed thinking
- ▶ Restricted, repetitive behaviour and interests

Challenging Behaviour

- ▶ Can be driven by:
 - ▶ Uncertainty/lack of predictability in the situation
 - ▶ Anxiety, fear, avoidance drive
 - ▶ Rigid thinking
 - ▶ Routines and patterns of previous learning
 - ▶ Past and present environmental reinforcement
 - ▶ Under-modulated sensory perceptions and aversions
 - ▶ Over represented sensory reinforcement

Recommendations for Success

- ▶ Clear predictable structure for tasks, program, and day
- ▶ Clear expectations and rules for all tasks
- ▶ Learned routines and procedures
- ▶ Verbal explanations replaced by emotionally neutral rule reinforcement
- ▶ Increase visuals for self-direction, calming
- ▶ Clear specific small goals with concrete feedback regarding progress
- ▶ Provide lots of positive verbal feedback
- ▶ Complete consistency for staff expectations and interactions with student