

# What to Expect When Working with Children with Various Disabilities

Sarah Merced, OTD student

# Topics of Discussion

- What is Occupational Therapy (OT)?
- ASD
- Down-syndrome
- ADHD
- Dyslexia



# What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapy is an area of practice that “enables people of all ages to participate in daily living.” (American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc, 2023)

- Occupational Therapists work with people on being as independent as possible in all aspects of life. We focus on the goals that the patients may have & what is meaningful to the person.
- OTs work with different populations in a variety of settings
  - homes, communities, schools, and healthcare settings (American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc, 2023)

OT's can incorporate various therapeutic techniques such as Animal-Assisted Therapy into practice to provide unique ways for their patients to succeed.

# What can OT help with?



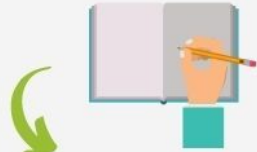
- + Bathing
- + Dressing
- + Eating
- + Care of Others
- + Driving & Community Mobility
- + Home Management
- + Play
- + Leisure
- + Safety Procedures
- + Sleep
- + Financial Management
- + Meal Preparation
- + Social Participation



# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

## Skills for Life

WE HELP KIDS WITH:



Handwriting & cutting.



Social & emotional communication.



Core & posture strength.



Tying shoes, zipping & buttoning.



Using eating utensils & incorporating food variety.



Self regulation, calming & focus.

**A** **U** **T** **I** **S** **M**

# What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain” (CDC, 2022).



## What is autism?



### What it is ✓



A neurodevelopmental difference (different brain wiring), a natural variation



Affects every aspect of a person's being: how they perceive, experience, interact with and interpret the world



A minority neurology



Lifelong

### What it isn't ✗



A learning disability



An illness or disease



Bad behaviour/willful defiance



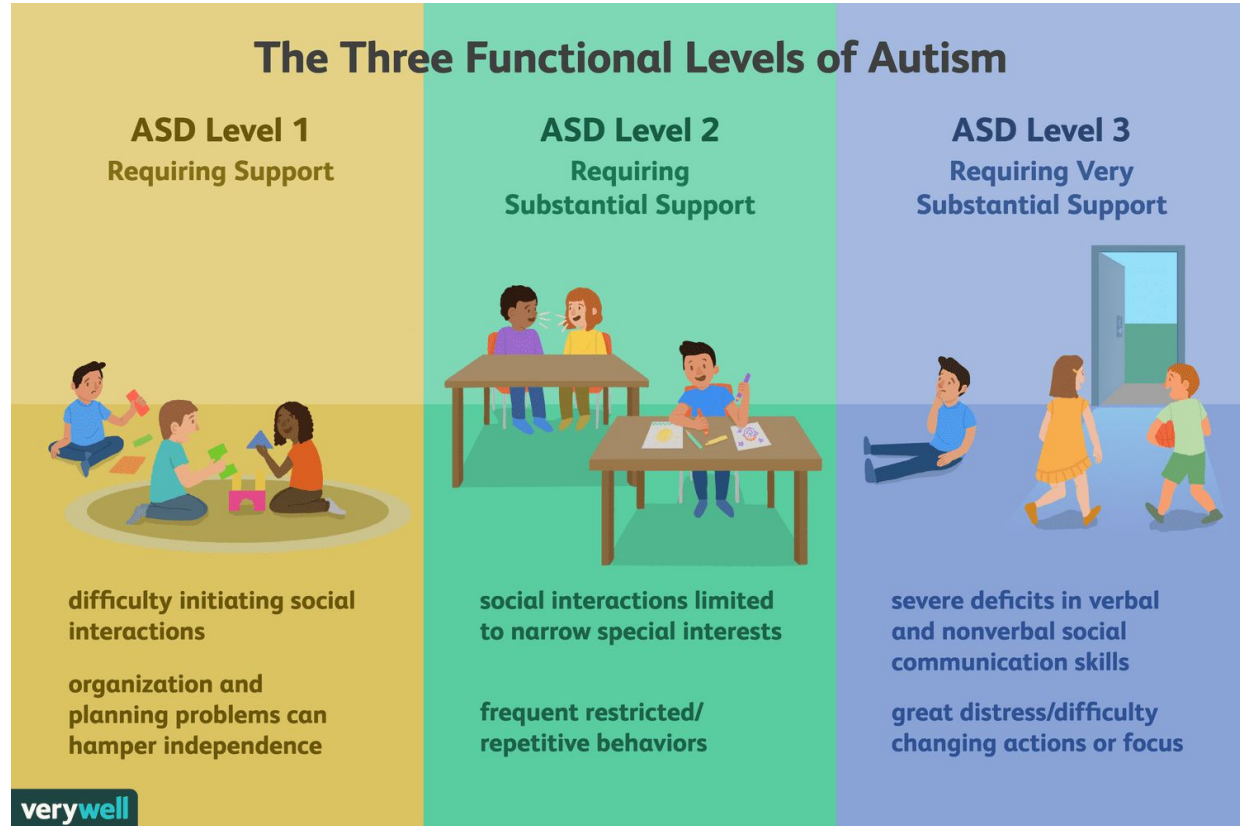
Bad parenting



Affects only children



- Not all autism looks the same. It is on a spectrum.
- Might encounter a child who has a more severe type of autism.





# Individuals with ASD may have difficulties with:

- Social communication & social interaction
- Some can be non-verbal or have few words
- Restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests (making repetitive noises, obsessive interests, may get upset at minor changes)
- May have sensory deficits
- Emotional regulation difficulties
  - Interacting with a dog can help with regulating them
- People with ASD may also have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention.
- Other characteristics:
  - High anxiety, stress, or excessive worry

# SIGNS OF AUTISM



ISSUES WITH COMMUNICATION.  
CHILD DOESN'T RESPOND HIS/HER NAME



PREFERS TO BE ALONE



TROUBLE INTERPRETING WHAT  
OTHERS FEEL



REPETITIVE MOVEMENTS  
OR SPEECH PATTERNS



AVOIDING EYE CONTACT



SENSITIVE TO  
LOUD NOISES



ECCENTRIC WAY  
OF MOVING

# What to be aware of when working with children with ASD

- Sometimes they may have an less or more fear than expected.
  - Often have to be reminded to be “gentle” when interacting with the dog
  - Be aware that they might want to touch the face
  - Sometimes children with ASD might make abrupt movements
  - Might be hesitant to interact with dog at first.
  - Might scream or get frustrated easily/afraid when they see the dog



# How to help?/ What have studies seen with ASD & AAT?

- Studies have shown that Animal-Assisted Interventions have demonstrated a positive effect on the self-esteem, social interaction, and communication skills of children with ASD
- Can get involved with visiting clinics that treat children with disabilities.
- Working alongside the therapist and helping the child who may have anxiety, sensory deficits, or emotional regulation
- Guiding their hand when trying to pet the dog helps with being gentle
- Talking to them and working on their communication skills and socialization skills during the visits

# Down Syndrome



# Down Syndrome & Behaviors

- “Even though people with Down syndrome might act and look similar, each person has different abilities” (National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023)
- Attention difficulties
- Social withdrawal, noncompliance, and compulsions (such as arranging objects and repeating behaviors)
- With increasing age, behaviors associated with anxiety, depression, and withdrawal.



# Down Syndrome & AAT

- For children with DS, research has shown that therapy dogs have a calming and de-arousing influence (Griffioen et al., 2019).
- AAT has been found to help with increase children's social, emotional and cognitive growth (Griffioen et al., 2019).



# How to help children with DS?

- Speak clearly and calmly so they can learn from you
- Do not talk down to them – treat them like anyone their age!
- Try showing them how to do something instead of just giving instructions
- Showing them how to gently interact with the dog.



# ADHD

ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER



# Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

- The most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), behavior problems, anxiety, and depression (CDC, 2021).
- Children diagnosed with ADHD show signs of impairments in self-regulation and frequently are not always aware of proper social cues (Schuck et al., 2015).
- AAT interventions are being used to improve the emotional responses of children with ADHD which in turn enhances their learning and increases adaptive behaviors (Schuck et al., 2015).



# Different Types of ADHD

3 major types of ADHD

- ADHD, combined type:

- Most common type, characterized by **impulsive and hyperactive** behaviors as well as inattention and distractibility.

- ADHD, impulsive/hyperactive type:

- Least common type, characterized by **impulsive and hyperactive** behaviors **without inattention and distractibility**.

- ADHD, inattentive and distractible type:

- Characterized predominately by **inattention and distractibility** **without hyperactivity**.

# Inattentive ADHD vs. Hyperactive/Impulsive ADHD



## Inattentive ADHD

- Easily distracted
- Struggles to learn new information
- Resists tasks that require mental energy
- Regularly loses belongings



## Hyperactive/Impulsive ADHD

- Squirming and fidgeting
- Often described as “on the go”
- Difficulty taking turns



## How to help those with ADHD (specifically READING programs)

- Reduce distractions (keep area quite), as much as possible (this is good for all children)
- Active reading strategies:
  - They can use a fun bookmark, a pointer, or their finger to keep track of which line they're on and avoid the dreaded line repetition that trips them up.
- Engage their imagination:
  - Ask them questions about what is going on in the book.
- While the child is reading the book, stop and ask them what they think might happen next. This allows for the child to be more engaged and help with building their critical thinking skills, comprehension skills, and communication skills

# How to help those with ADHD (continued...)

- Always show interest in what the child is reading:
  - After the child is finished reading you can ask them questions about what they thought about the book.
  - Who were their favorite characters?
  - What they learned from the book
- Define unfamiliar words: Children don't always stop and ask what words mean.
  - If the child is reading a book and you see a word during their reading time that might be difficult for a child their age to understand, define the word for them!
  - This will build up their vocabulary skills and improve their reading comprehension skills
- Translate figures of speech:
  - Some children's books have figures of speech that might be confusing for a child to understand
  - Best to translate the figures of speech for the child that will it will better help their understanding!



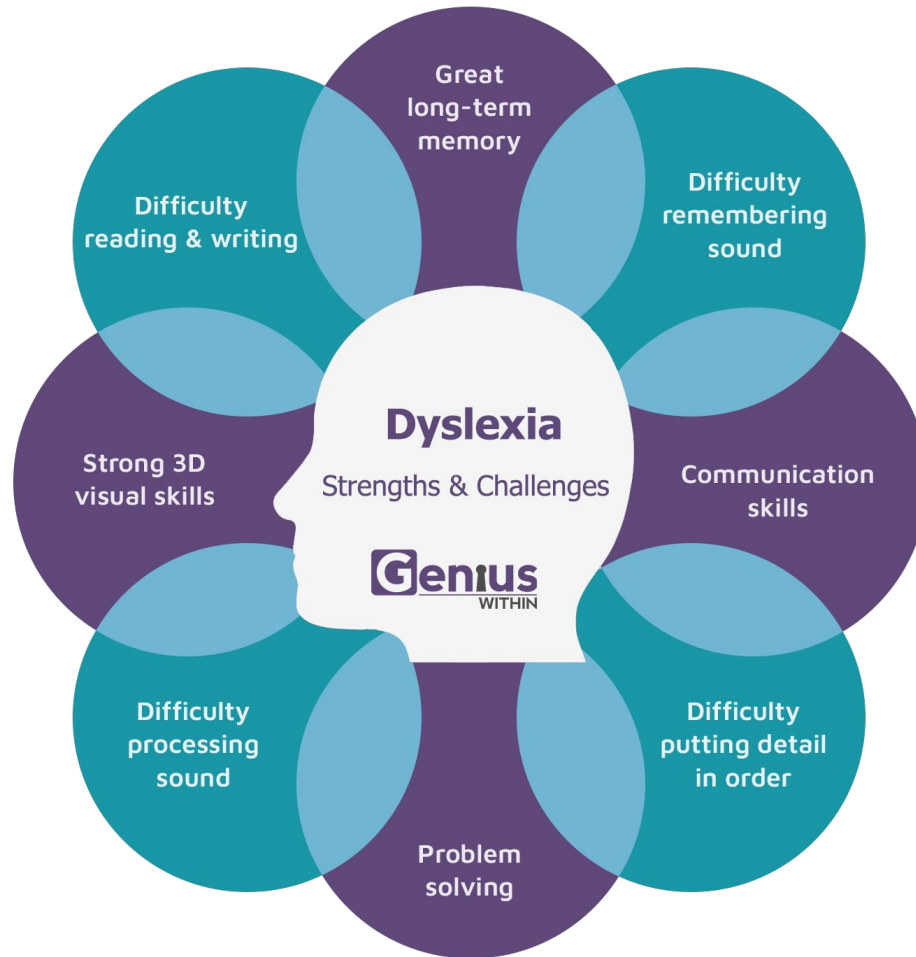
# Dyslexia

## What is it?

- “Learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words (decoding)” (Mayo Clinic 2022).
- Can also be referred to as a Reading Disability
- Is a result of individual differences in areas of the brain that process language
- Not due to problems with intelligence, hearing or vision

## Might notice while they are reading

- Inability to sound out the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word
- Lack fluency compared to other children their age
- Reverse letters and numbers when reading (read saw as was, for example)
- Become tired or frustrated from reading



Great long-term memory

Difficulty remembering sound

Difficulty reading & writing

# Dyslexia

Strengths & Challenges

Communication skills

Strong 3D visual skills



Difficulty putting detail in order

Difficulty processing sound

Problem solving

# How Reading Programs can Help Children with Dyslexia

- Children with dyslexia may have low self-esteem, behavior problems, anxiety, aggression (get more frustrated easily)
- Important to build their confidence and be encouraging.
  - “You did such a great job with sounding out that word/ You did a great job reading today!”
- Have them use their finger or a fun bookmark while they read





A vibrant, abstract background with a blue base, white polka dots, and geometric shapes like triangles and arrows. In the center, a white rectangular note with the word "QUESTIONS" in a black, hand-drawn font is pinned to a corkboard. Surrounding it are several other sticky notes in various colors (yellow, light blue, light green, light orange, and light pink) with question marks drawn on them. The sticky notes are held in place by colorful pushpins (yellow, red, blue, green).

QUESTIONS

# References/Resources

<https://www.oota.org/about/what-is-ot>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/downsyndrome.html>

<https://cdn.dseonline.app/pubs/a/case-studies-2008.pdf>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/adhdadd>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/downs-syndrome/how-to-help-children-and-young-people/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/symptoms-causes/syc-20353552#:~:text=Dyslexia%20is%20a%20learning%20disorder,the%20brain%20that%20process%20language>

# References/Resources

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Schuck, S. E., Emmerson, N. A., Fine, A. H., & Lakes, K. D. (2013). Canine-assisted therapy for children with ADHD. *Journal of Attention Disorders, 19*(2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054713502080>

Griffioen, R. E., Steen, S., Verheggen, T., Enders-Slegers, M. J., & Cox, R. (2019). Changes in behavioural synchrony during dog-assisted therapy for children with autism spectrum disorder and children with down syndrome. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 33*(3), 398–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12682>