

Main Deficiencies in Autistic Spectrum Disorders How Do They Affect the Development of The Educational Program?

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Abstract: This article discusses modern assistance programs focused on developing communication, education, and socialization, namely the ASSERT program, the Denver Early Intervention Model, PRT, JASPER, and strategies in many other programs. It also explores ideas about social interaction, perceptual characteristics, and information processing.

Keywords: ASSERT, Denver Early Intervention Model, PRT, JASPER.

Introduction: Modern assistance programs aimed at developing communication, education, and socialization are highly effective for people with developmental disabilities. With their help, it is possible to achieve successful functioning and adaptation. They help children with ASD to study, play and develop together with their typically developing peers, live in a family, love and work. Only a thorough assessment can lead to the correct selection of goals when working with a child. At the project sites of the "Naked Hearts" Foundation, programs are being implemented that allow taking into account the individual characteristics of each child. Behavioral approaches form the foundation of any successful program. Modern research shows that behavioral approaches are most effective in working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

What does this mean? With their help, it is possible to achieve successful activity and adaptation. They help children with ASD to study, play and develop together with their typically developing peers, live in a family, love and work. Only a thorough assessment can lead to the correct choice of goals when working with a child. At the project sites of the "Naked Hearts" Foundation, programs are being implemented that allow taking into account the individual characteristics of each child. Behavioral approaches form the foundation of any successful program.

Currently, we cannot "cure" autism, but we know that every behavior has a cause. We can analyze the child's

level of communication, adapt their environment, encourage them to complete tasks and follow instructions, and carefully collect data to create a solid foundation that ensures future development opportunities.

The purpose of this guide is not to fully describe practical behavioral programs; other works, including Russian-language sources, are devoted to this issue. Today, programs based on behavioral analysis, direct work with the child, training of kindergarten and school staff, and involvement of parents are considered the most effective. Since children with autism are very diverse, the assistance program should be structured taking into account their strengths and weaknesses. Individuals with autism are very different, so the assistance program should be based on taking into account their strengths and weaknesses.

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Research confirms that assistance programs should be

intensive and continuous, as the "course-based" approach has relatively low effectiveness. The assistance program should be organized where the child lives and studies: at home, in kindergarten, and at school. It is known that effective support programs are built on a behavioral basis, taking into account the patterns of the child's development, their communicative abilities, and their integration into family and community life. At the same time, behavioral approaches show varying effectiveness for developing different skills: for example, the teaching method of individual blocks/discrete trials is more suitable for developing academic and pre-academic skills, while naturalistic approaches are more suitable for developing social and play skills. The younger the child, the more naturalistic strategies are used, which are also developed within the framework of behavioral approaches. We are referring to strategies in the ASSERT program, the Denver Early Intervention Model, PRT, JASPER, and many other programs. It should be noted that we never use approaches that are potentially harmful to physical or mental health or development; we also avoid using methods whose effectiveness is still being evaluated. In our opinion, any approach that can be applied in the Russian education system can be recommended only if its effectiveness and safety in teaching children with ASD have already been confirmed by serious scientific research. Serious scientific studies have already confirmed this for children with ASD.

Motivation and Encouragement

Motivation is the most important component of education for any child. All children are graded and praised for their successes. However, for many children with autism spectrum disorder, social praise or abstract encouragement is not always effective. Therefore, a successful curriculum should include an assessment of motivation and the development of an individual plan: when and why the student We do not recommend using punitive strategies (depriving the child of their favorite things or activities) in our programs. Such strategies work much less effectively than stimulating social interaction, positive behavior, and academic achievement.

Social interaction

Difficulties in developing social skills are one of the main problems for children and adults with ASD. Despite these challenges, children with ASD, like their peers, need friends and communication. There is no reason to assume that interacting with others is painful or unpleasant for them. Therefore, our program aims to help children with autism develop social skills, communication, and play with peers. We teach them to

engage in conversation, follow certain rules while playing, give up unpleasant things, and more. Various strategies are used, ranging from peer modeling to social stories. The program also includes educating the people (children and adults) surrounding the child. Despite existing difficulties, children with ASD and their peers need friends and communication. There is no basis for thinking that interacting with others might be painful or unpleasant for them. Thus, our program focuses on helping children with autism develop social skills, communication, and play abilities with peers. We teach them to engage in conversation, play according to specific rules, give up unpleasant things, and other skills. Various strategies are employed, from peer modeling to social storytelling. The program also includes training the people (children and adults) surrounding the child.

Communication is the foundation of a child's development.

One of the most significant core deficits of a person living with ASD, which educators often have to address, is difficulties in communication, language, and speech development. Some children with autism begin speaking early, but their speech is not always purposeful or communicative; others do not use verbal language at all. The program's goal is twofold: to teach the child to use communication from the early stages of development, and to provide effective methods for expressing agreement or refusal, conveying desires and needs, asking questions, and expressing opinions. This requires not only teaching the child communicative, language, and speech skills but also introducing augmentative and, in some cases, alternative communication methods. Numerous studies have shown that this approach often prevents the development of behavioral disorders and significantly accelerates language and speech development in children with ASD.

Perception characteristics and information processing

Many children with ASD have distinct characteristics in perceiving and processing information. These include difficulties in distinguishing signals from noise, transitioning between activities, executive functions, and planning. They also absorb information better when visual support is available and during fast-paced activities that maintain attention. Some adults with autism report perceiving sounds and smells more acutely and focusing on details that most people find insignificant. Many also find it challenging to be in crowded places (stations, shopping centers, stadiums), so they need to develop coping skills for complex situations. However, excessive focus on sensory aspects by parents and specialists, and attempts to

select sensory stimuli that meet the child's needs, can reinforce inappropriate behavior (especially if a behavior plan is not developed in advance). It is most effective to incorporate elements of sensory programming, behavioral strategies, and appropriate methods of communication and social interaction into the overall team plan for working with the child. It is crucial to give a child with special needs time to process information, not to rush them, and to support their initiative. It is advisable to avoid using excessively long phrases and idioms. We also use strategies that help organize space, create different learning zones, develop additional visual aids, prepare learning materials, individual and group schedules, and arrange everything that surrounds the child while they are in the educational institution.

Error-free learning

For a child with ASD, the educational process is built on positive experiences. This allows the teacher to provide timely advice and support, as well as determine the necessary level of instructional or physical assistance and plan strategies for gradually reducing this support. In modern curricula, an assistant or tutor often helps the teacher organize work with the whole class, rather than with an individual child. This enables a more effective organization of the learning process and reduces the risk of developing dependence on help.

Principle of partial participation

Some children find it difficult to participate in all group activities in the classroom. They are given the opportunity to participate only in parts of the lesson where they can acquire new social skills (this is called "partial participation"). For such participation to be successful, it is necessary to select supporting materials that interest the child. If the group activity is too long, the "backward chaining" principle is used, where the child joins others only at the final stage. The same principle is often applied when teaching a child self-care skills.

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