

The CANS-ASP and autism assessment

Building a unified approach to social and cognitive development in children with autism

Mark Naser in cooperation with Professor John Lyons

Introduction: The assessment of autism is key to treatment, and because there is no known cause or cure for autism, treatment is essential. A variety of health professionals are involved in assessment, including psychologists, pediatricians, pathologists and others, making it difficult for families to know where to turn for guidance. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths for the Autism Spectrum Profile (CANS-ASP) is a multi-purpose integration tool designed to represent the shared vision of these professionals. It strives for effective communication that targets the needs and strengths of individuals with autism across 82 different items. One category is illustrated to the right to provide examples of what is assessed. It would be of great assistance to individuals with autism and their families to have widely used approaches such as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) paired with these items to facilitate treatment.

Child/Adolescent Domains Needs

0 = No evidence of problem - No need for action
2 = Moderate need - action required
1 = History - Watchful waiting & prevention
3 = Severe problem/need - immediate/Intensive action required

	0	1	2	3
1. Family Functioning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Social Functioning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Temperament/Emotional Responsiveness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Eating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Sleeping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Elimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Parent Child/Adolescent Interaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Academic Achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Academic Persistence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Methodology: To undergo this project, I had to conduct preliminary research on autism, particularly assessment methods that are used to gauge the skills and needs of those who fall under the Autism Spectrum Profile (ASP). The next approach was to work with staff at the CHEO Autism Program to develop and implement a data collection strategy for the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS-ASP) and be involved in analyzing the first panel of data collected using the CANS-ASP across the province. This would establish the variations on each of the 82 items and then we would be able to match the items to specific interventions within the Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) program expansion.

How does CANS-ASP work?

seeks to integrate a wide variety of areas to identify the needs and strengths of children and adolescents who fall within the Autism Spectrum Profile. Categories that are assessed include Child/Adolescent Domains Needs, Communication, Co-Morbidities, Maladaptive Behaviours, Parent/Caregiver Needs and Strengths, Child/Adolescent Strengths, and finally, Environmental Strengths. One of the key principles underlying it is that each level on the 4-level rating system is designed to be translated immediately into actions. There may be no evidence of need (0) for impulsive behaviour, yet the "cultural stress" item may require immediate/intensive action (3). Alternately, a child or adolescent may be recommended for action to be taken (2) when it comes to solitary playfulness, but only watchful waiting/prevention (1) with regards to temperament or emotional responsiveness. It is critical that a diversity of conditions is closely examined to target individuals on a case-by-case basis rather than issuing one-size-fits-all treatment solutions for those on the spectrum.

What is Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)?

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is an approach that teaches social, motor and verbal behaviours and reasoning skills. It emphasizes behaviour observation and positive reinforcement, and advocates the removal of triggers and reinforcers to reduce undesirable behaviour, ultimately pushing towards more independent and socially active lives for those with autism.

Conclusion

With the CANS-ASP, it is possible to use these approaches while keeping in mind the best interests of individuals with autism and their families. The assessment from a variety of health professionals can be included and taken into consideration so that those using ABA and IBI can monitor patient needs and strengths and work towards developing their skills at social and cognitive levels.

Health professionals who work with those on the ASP must be willing to work with the families of those with autism and encourage them to play an integral part in skills development. If done effectively, the 82-item assessment measure of the CANS-ASP can be used alongside ABA methods to provide an accurate scope of the specific needs and strengths of those with autism.

Some valuable resources

Aarons, Maureen, and Tessa Gittens. *The handbook of autism: a guide for parents and professionals*.

"Autism Assessment, Katherine Tsatsanis – YouTube." *YouTube – Broadcast Yourself*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Mar.2012.<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjlizuWPqV0>>

"CANS Training." <<http://canstraining.com>>

Gabriels, Robin L., and Dina E. Hill. *Autism from research to individualized practice*.

Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI). *Ministry of Children and Youth Services*.<<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdo cs/English/topics/specialneeds/autism/ibi.aspx>>

Verhulst, Frank C., and Jan van der Ende. *Assessment scales in child and adolescent psychiatry*.

Wilkinson, Lee A. *A best practice guide to assessment and intervention for autism and Asperger syndrome in schools*.

Zager, Dianne. *Autism identification, education, and treatment*.

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank John Lyons for guiding me through the research process and Pascale Lafrance for her accommodations. It was a pleasure experiencing this learning curve about a very important field that needs all the research it can get.