

# Therapeutic and Creative Approaches for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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# What is Autism?

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.



- ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some persons with ASD excel in visual skills, music, math and art.

# Characteristics of Autism

## Strengths

- Auditory memory
- Visual memory
- Memory for routines



## Weaknesses

- Stimulus over-selectivity
- Attending to irrelevant stimuli
- Failure to generalize
- Impaired language & imitation skills
- Issues with attention/focus
- Crave routine and sameness
- Sensory and behavioral issues
- Cannot process visual and auditory information simultaneously

# Misreading Behaviors in Autism

Observed Behavior	What may be happening
Inattentive/daydreaming	Doesn't understand what to do or where to start (executive functioning)
Child asks visitor, "When are you leaving"/rude behavior	Child may have an obsession with time, doesn't know it is rude to ask
Child interrupts or acts outs, attention-getting behavior	May not know what questions are for him or the group, or that others may want to speak, too
Angry, upset, or frustrated for no reason	Sensory issues/ sensitivities

# Sensory Issues = Behavior Issues

## Recognizing the Child's Response to Sensory Input

- Auditory Processing
- Auditory Sensitivity
- Visual Processing
- Motor Planning
- Tactile Defensiveness
- Overstimulation: too much happening at once
- Creating a soothing environment

# Art and Play Therapy Techniques

- A “Child–Centered” Approach
  - Meeting the child where they are
  - Following their interests (child leads)
- Behavioral/ Structured (Works best for severe ASD)
  - Setting limits
  - Making schedules
  - Creating incentives/rewards
- Combining structure and non-structure
  - Using what works for that moment

# Child Centered Approach

- Create a supportive and healing atmosphere
- Offer a variety of art and play materials
- Nurture the child's emotional, physical, sensory, and cognitive development
- Meet the child at their level



# Behavioral Approach



- Sessions are more structured
- Goals are established
- Modeling of behaviors
- Reward systems
- Use of praise



# Treatment Goals for Children with ASD

- To help with behavioral issues
- To enhance sensory integration
- To increase coping and transitional skills
- To build social skills
- To develop communication skills
- To develop the imagination
- To help with visual and fine motor skills



# Assessment Through Observed Creative Expression

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Social & Communicative
- Behavioral
- Sensory
- Developmental Functioning
- Fine Motor Challenges
- Symbolic Play Skills
- Tactile Defensiveness

# Individual and Dyad (2 individuals) Art Therapy

- Benefits of 1:1- customize
- Setting goals
- Structure, yet allow for changes
- Routines, materials and methods
- Not as over stimulating as a larger group
- Parent/Child Dyads
- Child/Child Dyads

# Group Art Therapy with ASD

- Establish structure to session
- Have appropriate ratio of help for function level (trained aides or volunteers)
- Incorporate a theme (optional)
- Allow for flexibility-go with the group
- Make it fun and social
- Reinforce good behavior and model for others
- Use of alternative forms of communication (picture boards, schedules, or behavior charts/rules)

# Telling a story and using art materials

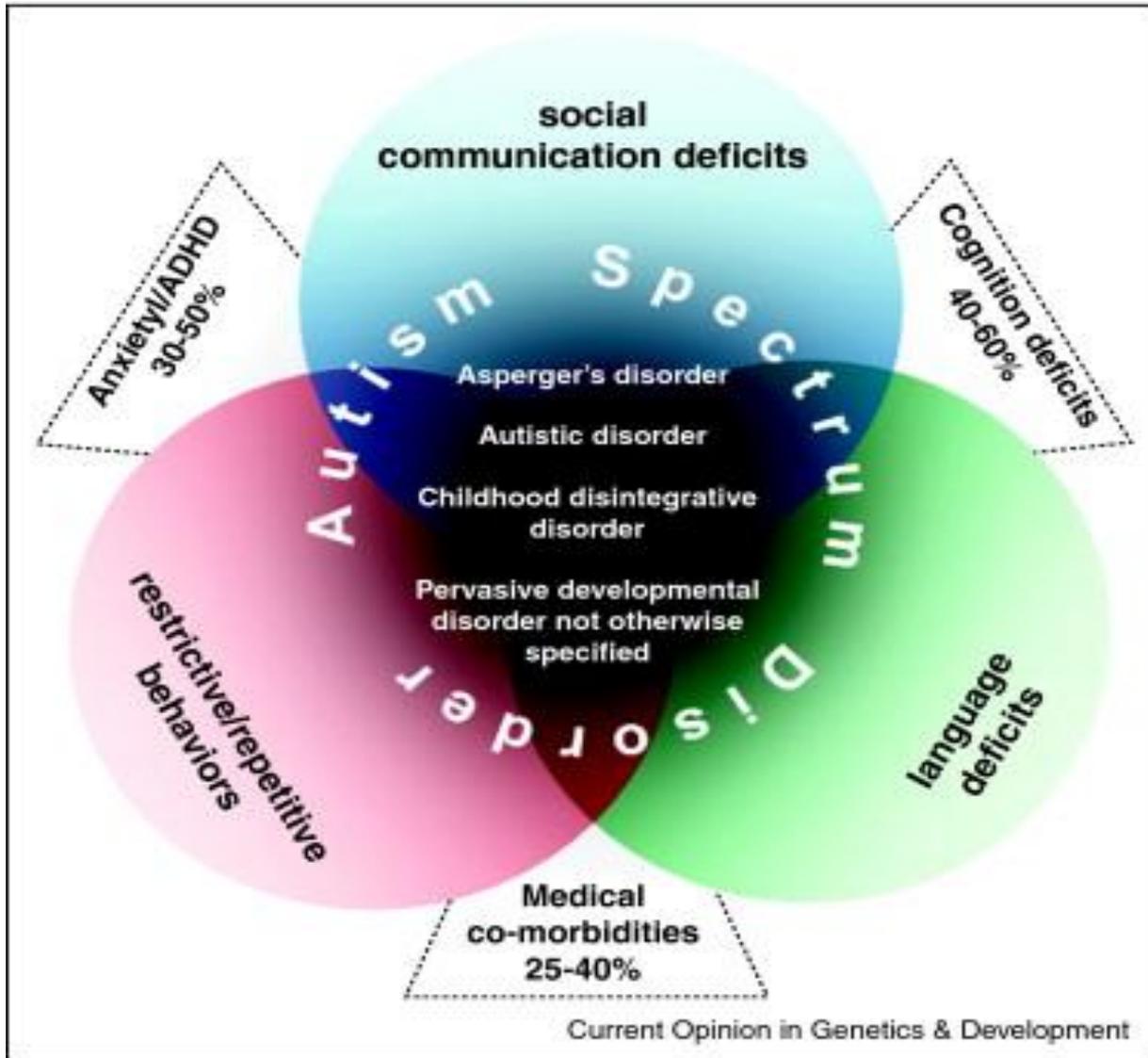
Model magic used as flat, 2-D image making and having child and mom create together a story about horseback riding; helping child to express- needs “prompts” at times



# Helping with transitions

This child was starting a new school. Mom and therapist talked to him about “what to expect” by creating images and talking about it. The child chooses placement colors and repeats back about scenarios.





# Websites and Contact Info

## WEBSITES

[www.colorsofplay.com](http://www.colorsofplay.com)

[www.healingartsfc.org](http://www.healingartsfc.org)

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