

Autism and School Readiness

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Abstract

This paper reviews the complicated literature on acquisition of school readiness skills in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Thanks to the high degree of interest in ASD within the past decade, the health sector has been ever-changing quickly, with progress in each basic science and applied clinical areas. Autism Spectrum Disorder is the entity that reflects a scientific understanding that many alienated disorders are seen under one spectrum with totally different levels of symptom severity in 2 core domains - deficits in social communication and interaction, and restricted repetitive behaviors. Autism Spectrum Disorder is diagnosed in all race, ethnic and socioeconomic groups and since of its extended prevalence its reported worldwide in last few years. Beginning school could be a major event in any child's life and whereas for children with disabilities this transition may be difficult. School based intervention program within the initial years of life will improve psychological aspect, language and daily living. We offer an outline relating to teacher readiness and why it's necessary to require initiative to enhance the talents and the way.

Keywords: School Readiness; Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Autism is a life-long neurodevelopmental condition interfering with the person's ability to communicate and relate to others. Some individuals with the condition are able to lead independent and fulfilling

lives, whereas for others the impact can be severe, interfering significantly with quality of life [1].

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neuro-developmental disorder characterized by impairment in social skills, communication skills, language and receptive behavior. 'Spectrum' is a term that denotes wide variation in challenges and strengths possessed by each person with autism. 2 and 3 years of age is a crucial stage where the most obvious signs of Autism seem to appear. Even at the age of 18 months, it can be identified. Occasionally developmental delays will be associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder which can be identified even earlier.

Communicating is the major problem for children with Autism. These children have difficulty in understanding things happening around them.

What Causes ASD?

Even though the exact cause of Autism Spectrum Disorder is not known, researchers suggest that genetic and environmental factors play a major role. Autism Spectrum Disorder often seems to occur with genetic conditions such as Fragile X syndrome or Tuberous Sclerosis. The interaction with in genetic factors and with environmental factors such as family medical conditions, parental age and birth/pregnancy complications have to be found in future research [2].

School Readiness

Education is central to the life of a child. Going to school is like a developmental milestone. It marks the first transition of a child from home to the macro-environment. A child being made ready for this transition and adjustment to the school environment is the responsibility of all families who want to make the school experience pleasant for their children.

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In India a child joins kindergarten at the age of 3 years and begins the primary education at 6 years [3].

Readiness has been theorized differently over the years. Some consider it as a particular chronological age, or a stage or level of development in children, or a set of skills and competencies, or a process, or a set of relationships. Each of these theories have varying implications on the child, family and society at large with regard to their corresponding roles and responsibilities [4]. The policy makers have discussed readiness as an interactive process in which, a child, her family, the environment and the school interacts in ways that support or fail to support the child's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. Readiness usually begins by examining the child's abilities [5]. School readiness is a measure of the knowledge, skills and behaviors that enable children to participate and succeed in school. 'School readiness' in children includes many different skills and behaviors, such as:

Social Skill

These skills help the child in mingling with the group and it is demonstrated with basic manners, assertive behavior and being able to have solitary as well as parallel play.

Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity makes the child to manage and cope with their emotions with less elderly support when they are placed in large groups, when focusing on a task, when following instructions from the teacher in order to adjust to the new environment at the school and also to understand the rules and regulations.

Language Skills

The skill of language makes the child to be able to talk and listen to others and also will make them to speak clearly to communicate their needs and to understand stories and thereby starting to learn new things.

Physical Health and Coordination

Physical health implies fine motor skills and physical coordination. Fine motor skills are such as being able to grip a pencil and turn pages in a book. Physical coordination includes being able to run, jump, climb, and play ball.

Independence

Certain activities like going to the toilet, dressing, unwrapping their lunch and managing their belongings requires some basic skills to manage their needs without adult supervision.

The unique social, communication and behavioral difficulties that children with ASD experience may present additional barriers to a positive start to school. This is particularly relevant as teachers rate social skills as more important than academic skills for successful kindergarten adjustment. An increasing body of evidence supports the notion that children who have a positive start to school are likely to engage well and experience academic and social success. Children with ASD have a greater risk of poor school outcomes including emotional and behavioral problems and bullying that result in school exclusion or peer rejection. It is therefore critical that protective factors, as well as barriers to positive school transition in children with ASD are identified and understood⁶.

Where and How Transition Begins?

The transition process begins at pre-school age whereby the child is prepared for school while also evaluating if the child is 'ready', described as 'school readiness'. Typically, the focus has been on the child 'gaining competence' in a range of areas; emotional, behavioral, social and academic. However, it is equally important that parents, schools and teachers are prepared for the special needs of children with ASD. Consequently, it is important to identify the strengths and deficits of children with ASD before they start school, as well as obtaining multiple perspectives from all parties. For this transition process to be successful, intervention and support needs to go beyond the preparation stage and continue after the commencement of school. Decades of research has demonstrated the positive effects of early intervention programs for children with ASD and also the success of later intervention programs for school-aged children. However, substantially less research has specifically evaluated school-based interventions [7,8]. Additionally, much of this research has focused on the later years and not the critical "transition to school" period in the first years of primary school [8]. Finally, for children with ASD, interventions targeting socialization and communication skills are critical. In order to provide a successful start to school for these children, it is therefore important to develop school-based programs that target a range of skill development across behavioral and social as well as academic domains. However, to develop evidence based programs, it is important to first establish what

aspects of current school-based interventions have been successful in targeting a wide range of skills and behaviors.

Why is Transition Important?

Most of the children with ASD may have difficulty in school transition. Delays related to communication, problem-solving, and adaptive behavior experienced by children with ASD and other diverse learning and developmental needs may increase the likelihood that these children will experience more problems with educational transitions than their typically developing peers [9]. Very rarely children with ASD may have limited or no functional communication skills or difficulty following instructions and in such case they may require a great deal of adult support. Apart from that children with ASD may have strong visual and memory skills and have acquired pre-academic skills such as letters, numbers, words, and patterns in their preschool intervention programs. However, these children may have difficulty applying this information or have trouble with play skills, or maintaining attention. Even though the school transition is a stressful thing for children with ASD and their families, when it comes to a proper transition planning, the move into school can be a time of new opportunities for learning and developing new skills and new relationships [10]. The preparation of the child and caregivers for the transition and likelihood of success for the child are directly proportional to each other. The well prepared school team and environment can meet the child's needs to the maximum extent. Schools that actively reach out to families and to early childhood service providers are said to be 'Ready schools'. They establish strong connections in order to learn about the strengths and needs of the child and to make the necessary preparations to greet the child with the necessary planning and support in place. Successful transitions may also increase positive parental involvement in their children's schools, which has been shown to have a positive impact on educational outcomes [9]. Parents will be more comfortable to communicate with the school staff and will be more connected to school activities when strong school-based transition practices are followed.

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