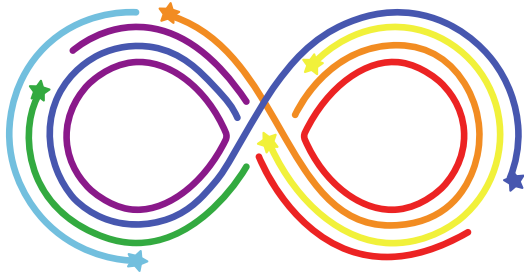


## Emotional Regulation, Executive Functioning and Theory of Mind in Individuals with ASD



### What is Autism?

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disorder that can cause difficulty with how a person thinks, feels, communicates, and relates to others.
- A person with ASD may also engage in repetitive patterns of behavior and motor mannerisms, have restricted ranges of interest and/or inflexibility in adhering to routines or rituals.

### Emotional Regulation

- Emotional Regulation (ER) is the process used to modify emotional reactions
- ER is a common issue for those with behavioral health diagnoses
- Common behavioral health diagnoses in ASD include Depression, Anxiety, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

### How Do Emotional Regulation Problems look in ASD?

- Issues recognizing emotions in one's self
- Goes from "0 to 100"; Unaware of emotional escalation until it's too late
- Unable to let go of an intense feeling
- Meltdowns (can argue, make derogatory comments, be verbally aggressive, disrespectful, etc.)



### What Can You Do?

- Does the person know when a meltdown is coming? Ask how you can help.
- Identify and minimize triggers
- Have a meltdown plan in place
- Give them space and time
- Reduce environment stimuli
- Calming strategies (mindfulness, relaxation)
- Develop a system to help cue them to start using a coping strategy

## What is Executive Functioning?

- Executive Functioning (EF) is a group of high-level processes that help us regulate, control, and manage thoughts and actions
- EF is not a symptom of ASD, but many people with ASD have it
- Sometimes EF creates a gap between skill and performance

## How Do Executive Functioning Problems look in ASD?

- Difficulty with: being on time, prioritizing tasks, talking about a subject even when asked to stop, shifting to a task that needs to be completed immediately, shifting away from a preferred task, and following multi-step directions



## What Can You Do?

- Breaking down multi-step goals (“chunking”)
- Help find and use functional alternatives. Examples include: Making to-do lists, using a planner or digital app for scheduling, and setting own deadlines

## What is Theory of Mind?

- Theory of Mind is the ability to understand other’s beliefs, desire, and intentions
- Knowing that others have different thoughts than you and being able to predict them
- The ability to show empathy at appropriate times and accurately take the perspective of others into account



## How Does Theory of Mind Look in ASD?

- People with ASD have delays in developing Theory of Mind and often continue to struggle
- Examples include: Only seeing one option to solve a problem, becoming upset when someone doesn’t know the answer to a question, unintentionally making a comment that could be interpreted as rude, and an inability to understand sarcasm

## What Can You Do?

- Ask perspective-taking questions, like “How do you think that person feels in this situation?” or “How would you feel in this situation?”
- Use examples as teaching moments, like “What you said could be interpreted in this way.”
- Use movies and TV as examples to identify the emotions and motives of others