

INFORMATION SHEET*

Spring/Summer 2015

Teenagers with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Health Transitions Part II

Caroline I. Magyar, Ph.D., BCBA & Rachael Schneider, MS, BCBA
Director, Rochester Regional Center for ASD

Overview

This Information Sheet is Part II of the *Teenagers with ASD Health Transitions Series*. Part I, disseminated in the fall, focused on physical health transition. This Information Sheet addresses psychological health transition for teens with ASD and presents considerations for supporting the teen during this period of development.

Psychological Development

Psychological development generally refers to the development of thinking, feeling, and emotion and behavior regulation skills. For teens, it includes the development of self and social awareness, social, relationship, and self-determination skills (setting personal goals and devising plans to achieve those goals); and an increase in the desire to be independent. However, for teens with ASD, development in these areas can be uneven and delayed making it hard for them to identify, communicate, and manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviors and to make realistic plans for the future. This can lead to anxiety, depression, adjustment difficulties, and behavioral regression, making the teen years difficult for child, parent, and the professionals educating/caring for them.

Supporting psychological development in teens can have a positive impact on adjustment. Here are some things to consider:

- It is important for the teen to be routinely monitored for any changes in his/her mood, behavior, or functioning as this may indicate he/she is struggling with something. If changes are noted, try and get as much information as possible about what is going on at school, home or socially to assist with figuring out what may be going on that you may be able to assist with, even if it is just listening. School personnel or community professionals who work regularly with the teen can be a great source of information to assist in determining if there are unmet needs.
- Provide the teen with information about his/her ASD, its symptoms and its effect on his/her functioning, particularly if this has not yet been offered. By increasing the teen's understanding of his/her ASD, he/she is in a much better position to understand his/her social and emotional experiences and can begin learning ways to cope and problem-solve any difficulties. Often teens with ASD will need to be taught directly how to cope and problem-solve. Consultation with a psychologist with ASD experience can be helpful in developing these skills in the teen.
- Teens should learn how to initiate and complete everyday activities needed for adult living. Some may need structure and motivation to do this. So, setting up specific teaching opportunities everyday and a reward system to motivate him/her should be a priority. Areas to consider include:
 - **Self-Care Routines** (e.g., bathing; brushing teeth; grooming hair and nails; dressing/undressing; toileting; and menstrual care);
 - **Domestic Routines** (e.g., meal planning; meal preparation; household chores such as clearing the table, loading/unloading the dishwasher; and money management);
 - **Community Routines** (e.g., social skills; community travel; emergency awareness; consumer behavior; on-line and web-based activities); and
 - **College & Work Routines** (e.g., homework management; volunteer work or part-time job preparation).

Routines should be broken down into a few steps to make learning the routine easier. The number of steps included in the routine should be based on the teen's motor sequencing and working memory abilities (i.e., how many steps can he/she remember in the task). Including an activity schedule can improve the teen's ability to complete the routine independently, particularly after teaching. If he/she is not yet reading, consider using simple pictures in the schedule that shows each step of the routine. If he/she is reading, you can use a Dry-Erase board and just write down each step to be completed. It is best to select one or two routines to teach first so that the teens gets used to this structured learning and the increased demand, particularly if you are doing this at home and historically the teen has not had to perform these routines independently. You can add on additional routines as he/she becomes more independent in completing the selected routines.

To teach the routine the following format can be effective: *TELL WHAT TO DO-SHOW HOW TO DO-PRACTICE WITH THE TEEN & CORRECT WHERE NEEDED-REWARD HIM/HER FOR COMPLETING THE ROUTINE*. Consider setting up a reward system to motivate the teen to learn and practice the routine. A simple system could include stating “*if you do (the routine), you will get (the reward)*” each time prior to teaching/doing the routine. Try and select rewards that are naturally occurring and associated with the routine. For example, making a sandwich can be rewarded with eating the sandwich; withdrawing money from a cash machine can be rewarded with the purchase of a preferred item. It is important to provide praise in addition to any reward you provide. It will also be important for you to **consider setting limits on the amount of time the teen engages in his/her ‘preferred activities and interests’**. Time spent on these activities should be limited so there is time in the day to teach the routines of everyday living.

Find Out More

Below are some resources that you might find helpful.

Informational Products

RRCASD fall 2013 & spring 2014 Newsletter. This 2-part series focuses on emotional and behavior disorders in teens with ASD and provides considerations for difficulties in these areas. <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/developmental-disabilities/Rochester-Regional-Ctr-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder/Training-and-Education/Newsletter-1.aspx>

Books/Curriculum

Books that can assist you in talking to your child about his/her autism and assist you with teaching everyday routines that are socially important.

“*What does it mean to be me?*” <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/aspergers-what-does-it-mean-to-me-catherine-faherty/1112005905?ean=9781885477590>

I Am Special: Introducing Children and Young People to their Autistic Spectrum Disorder:

http://www.amazon.com/Special-Introducing-Children-Autistic-Spectrum/dp/1853029165/ref=sr_1_fkmr1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1430936087&sr=8-1-fkmr1&keywords=I+am+special%3A+Introducing+children+and+young+people+to+their+autistic+spectrum+disorder.+P+hiladelphia%2C+PA%3A+Jessica+Kingsley+Publishers+Ltd.

Hygiene and Related Behaviors for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders: A Fun Curriculum with a Focus on Social Understanding <http://www.amazon.com/Behaviors-Children-Adolescents-Spectrum-Disorders/dp/1934575429>

Training DVD

The RRCASD self-guided training DVD on *Daily Visual Schedule* can be used to help you set up schedules for the routines you want to teach your child. The self-study guide contains a step-by-step process that shows you how to break routines down into steps, develop a schedule and the strategies you can use to teach your child the routine. The RRCASD self-guided training DVD on *Social Skills Using Direct Instruction* can be used to help you teach the teen social skills. The self-study guide contains a step-by-step process for assessing, selecting, and teaching needed social skills.

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/developmental-disabilities/Rochester-Regional-Ctr-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder/Training-and-Education/Training-DVDs.aspx>

Website

Autism Speaks provides information on considerations for supporting your child in learning important life skills: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/community-connections/teaching-important-life-skills>

**This resource is provided for informational purposes only. Information should not be used as a substitute for professional assessment and judgment. Although the information is believed to be accurate and reliable, all information is provided “as is” without warranties of any kind, either expressed or implied, including but not limited to merchantability, non-infringement or fitness for a particular purpose. The University of Rochester shall not be liable for any damages, including direct, indirect, special or consequential damages, which may arise out of the use of the information contained within this resource.*