

**Autism Spectrum Disorder Case Study Assessment Procedures**

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## **Introduction**

Parents and other adults who work with a child have noticed developmental delays and that overall, the child struggles to meet the same milestones and goals as same-aged peers. The differences are noted, and concerns rise. What do the adults need to do to help this child develop without falling further behind, or what do the adults need to do to assist the child in being successful in life?

A scholarly study into the characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will result in the finding that most research-based studies claim the same characteristics ranging from impaired communication, lack of spontaneous sharing, and stereotype, including inappropriate repetitive movements maintained by automatic reinforcement. (Ally Pediatric Therapy, 2003; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022; and Takayanagi, M. et al. 1, 2022) After closely observing the child, it is determined that he is displaying characteristics of ASD. The parents have him assessed privately, and he receives the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). What are the next steps for the parents to ensure their child with the Autism diagnosis gets the most beneficial education to prepare him for life?

The following paper will discuss the process of having a child with ASD assessed within a public school to provide the child with the educational setting most appropriate to his needs and what interventions may be necessary to help him achieve lifelong success.

## **Case Study**

Johnny is a kindergartener diagnosed with ASD who has just moved to the school from out of state with very little paperwork. He is in a general education kindergarten class but is struggling. He has some limited speech, which is often echolalic and does not respond

consistently to his teacher and rarely towards his peers. He can follow one or two-step directions but sometimes needs multiple prompts to complete a task. He enjoys working on the computer and has been able to do some grade-level math programs on the computer, but will not complete any paper and pencil tasks. His teacher reports that he holds crayons with his fist when coloring and will not color for more than a minute or two. His parents have reported that he knows his alphabet and can read at a beginning level, but the teacher reports she has been unable to confirm that information due to how early in the school year it is and her class size.

In class, Johnny sometimes appears to want to play with or near his peers but often grabs their materials or toys and occasionally gets physical with them - pushing or poking them on the playground when he wants to use the playground equipment, for example. He can sometimes be disruptive in class, crying or throwing his materials when frustrated. The teacher also reports him holding his hands over his ears and sometimes crying during class, and having difficulty staying in his seat.

Johnny enjoys being read to and will sit quietly on the carpet and listen to stories if the teacher has him sit right in front of her. He enjoys playing on the playground equipment, particularly the swings and the monkey bars. Playground supervisors have reported that he likes to jump off the swings or from the top of the jungle gym and that they are concerned he will hurt himself or another student. Teachers and staff report that he is a sweet and affectionate child who loves getting and giving hugs and high-fives.

### **Areas to Assess and Rationale**

Based on the above details, Johnny must be assessed in health, academics, intellectual, speech-language, and social-emotional development. He should be assessed in overall health due

to the possibility of sensory issues and any other health/medical issues that could affect his performance. For example, his hearing may need to be improved to hear his teacher. He reacts negatively to loud sounds. That may be a sensory issue or could have to do with his hearing. His sight should be checked for the same reason. If Johnny is having difficulty seeing, glasses or a way to enlarge materials might be necessary. There could be other medical conditions affecting Johnny's success in school. All of these factors need to be documented or ruled out. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)

Johnny should be assessed on his academic skills to determine his most challenging areas. He may excel in math but struggle with reading. If Johnny needs help in reading but not math, other conditions may need to be evaluated, such as dyslexia, and if he excels in reading but struggles in math. It has been observed that Johnny will work on the computer but refuses pencil and paper. An assessment needs to be conducted to find the possible reason for this. Holding a pencil is too tricky, so writing is avoided, or the content is too complicated, and that is why Johnny refuses to attempt work. Academic assessments will help pinpoint the challenge. Johnny's intellectual ability should be assessed to determine if his current production is to the best of his ability. The assessment may show that Johnny has intellectual ability but is having difficulty accessing his abilities in his current setting. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)

Speech-language should be assessed due to Johnny having limited speech, echolalic tendencies, and limited responses. Assessing these areas will help determine where the challenge with speech-language is happening. Does Johnny have limited speech because he can not hear well? Medical assessments will help with this. Is his speech limited because he has limited exposure or access to hearing people using language to communicate?

Since Johnny has difficulty communicating his wants and needs, as demonstrated by his limited speech and his aggression when frustrated, social-emotional development should be assessed. Johnny also demonstrates weak social-emotional skills when he takes a peer's object or pushes and pokes to communicate that he wants to play or use what the other student is using. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)

### **Who Will Assess?**

Now that the areas of assessment have been established, it needs to be determined who will assess Johnny and what assessment instrument will be best to assess Johnny's needs fully. The school psychologist will typically decide what assessments should be used. To assess health, the psychologist will use observational screeners given to the parent, teacher, and other stakeholders involved with Johnny. These screeners typically ask observational questions regarding Johnny's behavior and developmental milestones. Johnny's primary doctor can also give health reports and data for a complete health assessment.

A special education teacher usually assesses the student for academic abilities. The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test Fourth Edition (WIAT-IV) would be most appropriate based on Johnny's age. The WIAT-IV analyses academic achievement. It supports diagnoses of specific learning disabilities. It aids with academic program placement and intervention planning. It also utilizes a Dyslexia screening. This assessment compares the student's achievement to grade-based standard scores, age-based standard scores, percentile ranks, stanines, age and grade equivalents, and growth scale values. (Wechsler Individual Achievement Test: Fourth Edition)

The psychologist will utilize the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fifth Edition (WISC-V) to determine intellectual development. The WISC-V is an intelligence test that measures a child's intellectual ability and five cognitive domains that impact performance. It supports a more flexible evaluation of specific learning disabilities and two practical approaches to specific learning disability identification. For specific learning disabilities, the WISC-V uses a developed pattern of strengths and weaknesses, analyses, and ability-achievement discrepancy analyses.

The psychologist will employ a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) to assess Johnny's speech and language development. Several assessments could be used to determine the child's range of abilities within speech and communication. One assessment is The Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF). The CELF is used for assessing a student's communication and language skills in multiple contexts to identify language disorders, describe the nature of the disorder, and support planning for intervention or treatment. It is a comprehensive and flexible assessment procedure containing several tests that can be administered independently or in combination. The assessment results in Core Language, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Language Structure and Language Content standard scores, percentile ranks, growth scale values, and age equivalents. (Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals: Fifth Edition)

### **How Will the Assessment Be Completed?**

An FBA is considered an evidence-based practice (EBP) because it is a systematic and data-driven approach to understanding and addressing challenging behaviors in individuals with autism. It involves gathering information about the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences of the behavior, as well as identifying potential functions of the behavior. This information is then

used to develop a behavior intervention plan tailored to the individual's needs and goals.

Research has shown that FBAs effectively reduce challenging behaviors and improve outcomes for individuals with autism.

Conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) involves several steps. First, a target behavior is identified by an observer, typically the classroom teacher, that needs to be assessed. The target behavior could be a behavior that is interfering with the individual's academics or causing harm to themselves or others. Next, information is gathered about the behavior by observing it in different settings and talking to people familiar with the individual, such as parents, teachers, or caregivers. This information can help identify the antecedents (what happens before the behavior occurs), the behavior, and the consequences (what happens after the behavior occurs). Once this information is documented, it can be used to hypothesize why the behavior occurs. This hypothesis should be tested by manipulating the antecedents and consequences to see if the behavior changes. This process can help identify the function of the behavior, which can then be used to develop a behavior intervention plan. When working with individuals with autism, using evidence-based strategies tailored to their needs is essential. (Hall, 2018)

For this case study, Johnny's teacher has identified the following behaviors as areas of concern, grabbing, throwing, pushing, poking, jumping, and crying. Johnny utilizes these behaviors when he has difficulty expressing himself. The psychologist or other assessor(s) will observe Johnny in various settings and record behavioral data noting the antecedents (what happened before the behavior occurred), the behavior (grabbing, throwing, pushing, etc.), and the consequence (what happened right after the behavior) or order to analyze why the behavior is occurring and what purpose it serves for Johnny.

The most common evidence-based practice used to assess social skills in students with autism is the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). It is a comprehensive assessment tool that evaluates social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence.

The psychologist will conduct the SSIS through a series of assessments and observations, including interviews with parents and teachers, direct observation of the student in various social situations, and standardized tests and questionnaires. The results of these assessments are then used to develop individualized intervention plans to help improve the student's social skills.

The most commonly used EBP to assess sensory needs for students with autism is the Sensory Profile. It is a standardized assessment tool that measures a child's sensory processing patterns and helps identify sensory needs and preferences. The Sensory Profile is typically conducted through a teacher questionnaire that asks about the student's sensory preferences and sensitivities in various situations. The questionnaire covers a range of sensory domains, including auditory, visual, tactile, taste/smell, and movement. The questionnaire results can provide valuable information about the student's sensory needs and help guide interventions and accommodations to support their learning and development. (Schaaf et al., 2015)

Based on Johnny's teacher observing him covering his ears when it is loud, Johnny may be experiencing sensitive hearing issues. The observation that he likes to jump could demonstrate that he is seeking sensory input. The results of the Sensory Profile will help determine if Johnny is having sensory input difficulties.

### **Collaborating for Assessment**

Collaboration in assessment involves various individuals, including teachers, parents, therapists, and other professionals working with students with autism. The goal of the



collaboration is to ensure all parties are working together to create a comprehensive and practical assessment plan that meets the unique needs of each student.

Positive outcomes of successful collaboration can include improved communication and understanding between team members, more accurate and comprehensive assessments, and better outcomes for students with autism. By working together, team members share their expertise and insights, identify areas of strength and weakness, and develop strategies to support the student's learning and development.

However, it is essential to understand that collaboration can be challenging, particularly when team members have different perspectives or priorities. It is essential for all team members to be open and respectful of each other's ideas and to work together to find common ground. Additionally, ongoing communication and regular check-ins ensure that everyone is on the same page and that the assessment process is moving forward positively and productively. (American Speech Language Hearing Association, 2017)

## **Conclusion**

Assessing areas for students with autism involves various individuals, including teachers, parents, therapists, and other professionals. The goal is to create a comprehensive and practical assessment plan that meets the unique needs of each student. Successful documentation and collaboration can improve communication, accurate assessments, and student outcomes. However, collaboration can be challenging, and all team members must be open and respectful of each other's ideas. Ongoing communication and regular check-ins ensure that the assessment process is moving forward in a positive and productive way.

For this case study, all individuals involved in Johnny's education have collaborated to assess Johnny as a whole child. Assessing the whole child involves assessing him in areas where he demonstrates needs. Recording the assessment data enables the entire team to see Johnny's performance level across various education and life skills areas in various settings. Using the data, the team will work together to create the most beneficial plan for Johnny.

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