Come and Play: Using Play to Help Families Affected by Autism

presented by Tammi Van Hollander, LCSW, RPT & Joelle Beecher McGovern, Ph.D.

Parenthood Video: The Big Picture

What We Know (not much)

Nature: Younger siblings have increased risk for developmental problems when compared to general population

Nurture: Less clear
  • Both positive and negative effects
  • Sibling with Autism may not be risk factor by itself but when coupled with multiple demographic risk factors, can lead to emotional/psychological difficulties
  • Quantitative data: Majority of siblings are well adjusted
  • Qualitative data: Some emotional and cognitive challenges present

Preschool Siblings

• Don’t completely understand Autism
• Notice differences
• Tries to teach sibling
• Enjoy

Elementary School Age Siblings

• Can define and explain sibling’s special needs
• Possible contagion worry
• Guilt over negative thoughts and feelings
• Overhelpful/too well behaved or noncompliant
• Conflicting feelings

Adolescent Siblings

• Understand complexities of Autism
• Provocative questions
• Embarrassment
• Developmental stage conflict
• May resent responsibility

Adult Siblings

• Genetics
• Independence vs. responsibility
• Long term caretaking

Benefits

• Greater maturity
• More pro-social behavior
• More empathy
• Understand facing challenges
• Increased tolerance
• Pride for siblings accomplishments
• Loyal and caring

Concerns

• Guilt
• Embarrassment
• Anger & jealousy
• Pressure
• Caregiving

12 Needs of Siblings

- Parental attention, individualized, consistent
- Alone time with parent
- Build skills for interacting with sibling
- Choice re: interaction
- "Normal" family & individual activities and opportunities
- Ongoing communication
- Information about ASD
- Safety, for self and property
- Treat sibling as normal as possible.
- Opportunities to feel understood, shared experience
- How to respond to peers

Building A Positive Relationship

• Understand siblings disability
• Well developed coping abilities
• Positive responses from parents and peers toward sibling with autism (McHale, 1986)
• Parents’ reactions, acceptance and adjustment is the most significant influence (Lobato, 1990).

Sibling Play

• Keep it simple
• Learn basic teaching strategies
• Preferred interest, build games
• Coping with rigidity and repetition
• Understand how play can be hard for sibling
News Segment
http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/autism-affect-on-siblings/

“Play” Catch

Why play?

A positive, fun therapist who uses humor and playfulness is going to invite clients to be more fun and playful.

Playfulness is contagious!

You can’t be stressed and worried when engaging in an enjoyable, relaxing activity that generates laughter and fun

Favorite Play Quotes

- You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” ~ Plato
- “We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” ~ George Bernard Shaw
- “The opposite of play is not work, it is depression.” ~ Stuart Brown
- “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.” ~ Albert Einstein

You don’t stop playing when you grow old, you grow old when you stop playing.
~ George Bernard Shaw
Bettelheim talks of how children leave the world of reality to enter a world where fantasies are understood to the forefront.

At the end of the tale the hero and child return to reality (like waking up from a dream).

The dreamer awakens refreshed like a child returns from the fairy tale refreshed and invigorated.

"Fairy-tales help children work through their unconscious pressures in fantasy"

Engaging children through play

- Follow the child’s lead.
- Stay in imagination
- Match child's intensity
- Join child's story and stick with the play theme.

Left Brain
- Thinking
- Rational
- Analytical
- Verbal
- Sequential
- Language

Right Brain
- Pictures
- Intuitive
- Holistic
- Insightful
- Experimental
- Visual
- Nonverbal Imagery

★ Respect the child’s need for silence.

★ Reflect what the child is saying and what you see, without obstructing the play.

★ Ask questions like: "What’s happening?" or "Hmm."
Make Your Own Superhero Gadget

- What powers does it have?
- How does it work?
- Can others use it?
- How do you carry it?

What would you do if you could:
- Travel through time
- Fly at super speed
- Have super strength
- Commit crimes without detection
- Change form
- Run fast

Self Regulation

- red light green light
- engine speeds
- anger thermometer
- remote control

Scribble Drawing

- helps with attention/focus
- building connections
- eye contact
- listening
- self-regulation

Anger Balloon Activity

Palm Tree

Oak Tree

Teaching flexible thinking

Healing Power of Mandalas
The Benefits of Blowing Bubbles

Community Sandtray

Resources/Websites

- Association for Play Therapy: www.a4pt.org
- Tammi's Play Therapy and Sandtray Therapy Page (Facebook): http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tammi-Play-Therapy-and-Sand-Tray-Therapy-page/138352628213125
- www.sandplay.org
- www.sandtraytherapyinstitute.com

The Healing Power of Stones: Interventions that Rock

Resources

Autistic Kids: The Sibling Problem, by Amy Lennard Goehner


Download of sibshops locations, https://www.siblingsupport.org/about-sibshops/find-a-sibshop-near-you
References

The Impact of Autism on Siblings: Suzanne J. Farrak and Sandra L. Harris, PhD, and Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA. Published online: 19 Dec 2009.
SRN Neurology, Volume 2013 (2013), Article ID 417194, http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2013/417194. The Well-Being of Siblings of Individuals with Autism, Laura Green, College of Science, Engineering and Health, RMIT University, Melbourne, VIC 3003, Australia. Copyright © 2013
12 important needs of siblings and tips to address these needs, http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/view/12-important-needs-siblings-and-tips-address-these-needs-autism22032431

Tammi Van Hollander, LCSW, RPT
Main Line Play Therapy
www.mainlineplaytherapy.com
email: tammi@mainlineplaytherapy.com
For more resources, visit my Facebook Page @ Tammi’s Play Therapy and Sandtray Therapy Page

Joelle Beecher McGovern, PhD
Clinical Psychotherapist
Practice in Wynnewood, PA
610-247-5768
&
Child & Adolescent OCD, Tic, Trich & Anxiety Group (COTTAGe) at the University of Pennsylvania
215-746-1230
http://www.med.upenn.edu/cottage

Email: joellebemc@gmail.com