Understanding Autism: The Impact of Emotional Regulation Issues and Social Cognitive Challenges on Behavior and Academics

Program Description

Social cognitive challenges and emotional regulation issues are cited as core challenges for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related disorders. As a result, individuals with ASD are prone to a higher incidence of social and behavioral problems at home or at school. Social cognitive challenges not only impact interpersonal relationships, but also academics. This session will provide an overview of these core challenges and outline selected evidence-based social and emotional intervention strategies, which can be implemented to help improve the lives of children and teens on the autism spectrum. As a parent of a young adult with ASD as well as a clinical social worker working with this population, the presenter will share selected stories and examples from both her clinical work and from her son's life to illustrate not only the core challenges, but the positive impact of these intervention strategies. This workshop is appropriate for parents and caregivers of individuals with ASD.

Program Objectives

Upon completion of this session, the participants will be able to:

1. Explain the emotional regulation and social challenges faced by individuals with ASD and related disorders;
2. Describe the origins of social cognitive challenges in individuals with ASD and how these can affect behavior, relationships and academics;
3. Discuss selected evidence-based emotional regulation and social cognitive intervention strategies that can be taught to children and teens with ASD to help improve behavior and flexibility throughout their day.

Program Agenda (6 hours)

9:00 AM – 9:45 AM - Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder
9:45 AM – 10:30 AM - The Framework for Understanding Behavioral and Academic Challenges
- The Role of Emotional Regulation Issues
- The Role of Social Cognitive Challenges
- The Impact on Behavior and Academics
10:30 AM – 10:45 AM – Break
10:45 AM – 12:15 PM – The Framework (continued)
12:15 PM – 1:15 PM - Lunch

1:15 PM – 2:45 PM - An Overview of Emerging, Promising and Established Emotional Regulation and Social Cognitive Interventions
2:45 PM – 3:00 PM – Break
3:00 PM – 3:30 PM – Interventions (continued)
3:30 PM – 4:30 PM - Case Example/Questions/Discussion
4:30 PM - Adjourn

Target Audience

Psychologists; Social Workers; Teachers and School Counselors/Personnel: ASD and I/DD professionals; parents and caregivers.

Credit Hours

4.0 to 6.0 contact hours (6.0 preferred)

Faculty

Sherry Mergner, MSW, LCSW is a Clinical Assistant Professor and the AHEC Liaison at UNC-CH, School of Social Work, where she coordinates continuing education programs for mental health, substance abuse and developmental disability professionals. At the School of Social Work, Sherry serves as the faculty advisor for the Neurodiversity Student Caucus. She is also clinical social work faculty for the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disorders (LEND) training program at the Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities, where she recruits social worker graduate students for this specialized training in Developmental Disabilities. In addition, Sherry provides clinical services to individuals and families at the CIDD. Sherry received her MSW from Florida State University in 1987 and has worked in a variety of clinical and educational settings for the past 32 years. Sherry's passion is working with individuals who have emotional regulation and social cognitive challenges. In March 2016, she completed Michelle Garcia Winner's Advanced Clinical Social Thinking Training in San Jose, California. Sherry is the proud mother of Noah, who is 20 years old and on the Autism Spectrum and Nathan, 18 years old who is typically developing. She has served as a Mother's Mentor for UNC-CH, TEACCH and was on the board of the Orange/Chatham Chapter of the Autism Society of NC from 2005-2007. She is very active in her community promoting neurodiversity awareness, understanding and acceptance.