

Behavior is Communication!

TRAINING SUMMARY:

Children and adults on the autism spectrum are often described as “having behaviors” and/or as “not having communication.” This introductory training demonstrates that everyone communicates all the time, through a variety of different means, and that the activities referred to as “behaviors” have important communicative value. It is vital to engage individuals around their communications and work to understand them better, rather than to ignore these messages or shut them down. Communication is envisioned as a collaborative effort, involving body language as well as spoken language, timing and rhythm, tone of voice, nonvolitional clues reflecting physical or emotional state (such as tics), and many other contextual cues. People with autism may be stereotyped and misunderstood due to their communication differences. Others may talk in front of them as if they could not understand, or talk down to them as if they were much younger than their chronological age. However, we can all learn to become better observers, and to participate more appropriately and respectfully in the different conversations going on around us.

TRAINING GOAL:

The goal of this training is for parents, teachers, friends, and other community members to explore and appreciate the many ways that people with autism communicate through their daily behavior, and to consider how to be more effective communication partners.

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the training are for the participants to:

1. Explore the diverse, sensitive, and subtle nature of communication
2. Consider how and why “behavior” can be misunderstood, and set to rest persistent myths about eye contact and body language in people with autism
3. Become aware of the “hidden curriculum” and what you can do to make it more accessible
4. Learn how to monitor your own communicative behavior for difficult or confusing uses of language, such as joking, sarcasm, and figures of speech
5. Learn how to make accommodations for sensory differences that may interfere with communication, such as noise sensitivity or the need for more processing and response time
6. Appreciate that all people on the autism spectrum communicate, and that “Not being able to speak does not mean I have nothing to say.”

METHODS TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES:

Training content can be delivered via webinar incorporating lecture and discussion (app. 1 1/2 hours). This training also can be delivered in person in a traditional training or classroom setting incorporating lecture, videos, discussion, and interactive group exercises (2-3 hours).