

Investigative Interviewing of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

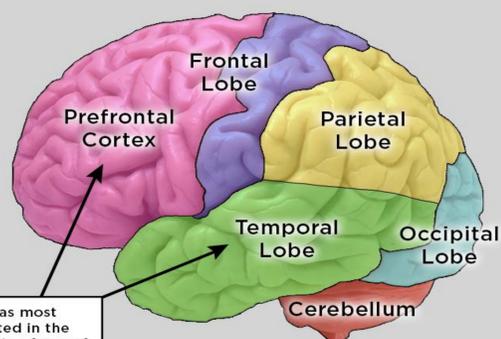
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Introduction

- ❖ Child interviewing has been a topic of research for many years.
- ❖ Official training guides have been available since the early 1990s (Bull, 2010).
- ❖ However, most research and interview guides focused on neurotypical children and not those with neurodevelopmental disorders.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ❖ ASD is recognized by deficiencies in social communication as well as repetitive and/or restrictive behaviors (Lord et al., 2018).
- ❖ ASD is a result of altered brain development at an early age (Lord et al., 2018).
- ❖ The neurological differences found in children with ASD make the current best practices for investigative interviewing of children inappropriate for the investigative interviewing of children with ASD (Mattison et al., 2018).



Statistics

- ❖ In the United States, ASD has been reported in 1 in every 59 births and does not discriminate with regard to ethnicity or socioeconomic status (CDC, 2019).
- ❖ Currently, it is estimated that more than 100,000 children every year participate in the justice system and specifically in court (Pantell, 2017).
- ❖ These statistics show the impact children have on our justice system and children with ASD are included in that impact.



Forensic Implications

- ❖ Courts rely on the trustworthiness of children's testimony; however, if their interview process is compromised, so is the validity of their testimony (Pantell, 2017).
- ❖ To not properly interview children with ASD compromises their integrity in the judicial process.

ASD and Child Interviewing

- ❖ Recent research shows the differences amongst typically developed children and children with ASD in their ability to recall memories (Mattison et al., 2018).
- ❖ Specific challenges for children with ASD in the interviewing process include their difficulties with social communication and engaging in repetitive behaviors.
- ❖ Their misinterpretation of the meaning behind social cues and lack of understanding of people's intentions leaves the communication process difficult for untrained interviewers (Zürcher et al., 2013).
- ❖ The anxious nature of the interviewing process can spark anxiety in a child with ASD resulting in the use of repetitive behaviors to self-soothe (Rodgers et al., 2012).
- ❖ A challenge for untrained interviewers is their ability to recognize and manage a child with ASD's behaviors throughout the interview process.



Future Research

- ❖ Future research needs to focus on the development of best interviewing practices for children with ASD.
- ❖ Research should focus on the strengths that children with ASD possess, as well as investigating alternative interviewing methods for accommodating these children's unique capabilities.
- ❖ Children with ASD make up a portion of our communities and can make viable witnesses.
- ❖ Their statements should be considered in legal proceedings and not be left out of the justice system due to ineffective training on the part of interviewers.
- ❖ Strong activism within the Autism community has shown the gap in current research on investigative interviewing of children with ASD and their abilities within the judicial process.

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