The Dandelion Program
Management Training
Introduction and Learning Objectives

• This training is intended for staff supporting members of the Dandelion Program. It aims to address some of the main issues encountered when supporting employees on the Autism Spectrum. This training is intended to be used as a practical introduction with the following learning objectives:

  1. An overview of the Dandelion Program.
  2. An overview of Autism Spectrum to increase awareness and understanding.
  3. Strategies and Interventions to support individuals diagnosed on the Spectrum.
  4. Strategies and Interventions for successful integration into the work environment.
  5. Performance Management.
Overview of the Dandelion Program

• A partnership between DXC Technology and Specialisterne began in 2014.
• Pilot program implemented at The Department of Human Services (DHS) in Adelaide in January, 2015.
• Clients utilizing Dandelion Teams include:
  • The Australian Government Department of Human Services (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra)
  • The Australian Government Department of Defence (Canberra)
  • The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection (Canberra)
Support Team

- The Support Team in each Dandelion Pod consists of both technical staff and an Autism Spectrum Consultant.

- Members of the Support Team are responsible for providing on the job training and people care to the Dandelion Team Employees.

- The Autism Spectrum Consultant provides autism specific support to the Dandelion Team and to the Client.

- It is vital to remember that each individual on the Autism Spectrum is different. There are common characteristics attributed to Autism but it is important to learn how the condition effects each individual.
Support Structure

- **Autism Spectrum Consultant**
  - Autism Specific Support / Human Care
  - Autism Awareness / Advocacy
  - Daily Support / Case Management

- **Experienced Technologists**
  - On the job training and support
  - Allocation of tasks to the team
  - Management of all work related issues

- **Team Manager**
  - Manage Support Team
  - Liaise with Customer for scope of work
  - Ensure setup and environments have been finalised
  - Provide Progress Reports to HPE and Customer
Brainstorming Activity

- Please think about and write down key words to express and reflect what you already know about Autism.
Autism Spectrum (AS)

- Autism Spectrum is an umbrella term.
- The concept of the Autism spectrum represents individuals diagnosed with autism, high functioning autism, and Asperger syndrome on a continuum.
- The continuum is not clearly defined, some believe it reflects three key makers:

Autism
(Represents 75% of AS population, will have a level of intellectual disability (ID) and significant language delay)

High Functioning Autism (HFA)
(Represents 25% of AS population. No ID, but will have experienced a significant language delay)

Asperger Syndrome
(No ID and no significant language delay, but will have all of the other characteristics associated with autism)
Strengths, Skills & Abilities

Strengths, skills, and abilities may include:

• A good eye for detail.
• An excellent memory for facts and figures.
• The ability to thrive in a structured, well-organised (and sometimes repetitive) work environment.
• Seeing the world differently.
• Being loyal, reliable and trustworthy.
• Not judgmental of others.
• Creative and imaginative.
Triad of Impairments

Communication
• Comprehension (receptive language)
• Verbal and non-verbal interaction (expressive language)

Social
• Relating to and interacting with others
• Sharing, turn taking, attending

Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviours
• Self-stimulatory behaviours, concrete thinking, desire for consistency and routine
Impact on Communication

- People with autism will have difficulties in the area of communication, both verbal and non-verbal.
- Expressive and receptive communication will be impaired.
- May have unusual tone of voice or use an accent.
- Interpretation of non-verbal communication may be difficult.
- Flat affect.
Strategies to Support Effective Communication

• Keep verbal instructions short and to the point.

• Use visual supports.

• Task analysis – break tasks down into small steps (in text form).

• Follow up verbal instructions with an email or a handout repeating the instructions.

• Use instant messaging tools to have conversations to avoid distractions.
Impact on Social Interactions

- May prefer to be on their own.
- May show interest in friendships, but may be unsure how to interact effectively or how to maintain them.
- May seem unaware of social rules.
- May come across as being blunt or rude.
- May appear socially odd or eccentric to others.
- Increased risk of co-morbid mental health diagnoses such as depression due to feeling ‘different’ and inability to “fit in”.

Strategies to Support Social Interactions

- Positive role modelling.
- Be honest and tell the person if they are behaving in a socially inappropriate manner. (e.g. “It is rude to look over my shoulder and read what I am typing into an email”)
- Explain how they could interact in a more acceptable manner – give clear guidance.
- It is important to kindly let them know if they have done something wrong as they will not instinctively know that they have behaved inappropriately.
Difficulty with Change, Need for Routine and Structure

• May have difficulty learning new tasks or being moved from one job to another.

• May have difficulty not finishing or stopping work on a task that they have started.

• Will need to be given clear time frames of how long a task should take to complete.

• May require support with transitions and change well in advance of when the change will occur.

• The individual may be rigid in thinking and have difficulty responding to authoritarian behaviour.

• Will benefit from checklists, schedules, and a predictable routine to support smooth work flow.
What is Sensory Processing?

- Information from one’s environment is taken in by the senses and processed by the brain.
- This information allows us to understand what is happening in the world around us and keeps us orientated.
- Sensory stimulation plays a major role in human development.
- Controlled by the Central Nervous System (CNS).
Autism and Sensory Processing

• People with autism process sensory information differently. They may over register or under register sensory information which can lead to a sense of disorder.
• Inconsistency in processing sensory information can lead to high levels of anxiety and stress.
• Learning how each individual’s senses function is crucial to understanding that person and their behaviours.
Brainstorming Activity

• We all have sensory preferences – let’s all share one sensory preference or dislike that we have: e.g. having the lights dimmed, a dislike of certain food textures, gaining comfort from weighted items, or dislike of certain smells.
Brainstorming Activity

- As you are learning about the sensory system and how it relates to autism, please list any considerations or adaptations that you would make to create an “autism friendly” work environment.
The Seven Senses

- Touch
- Vision
- Hearing
- Smell
- Taste
- Proprioception
- Vestibular
Touch - Tactile

- Receptors on the skin and inside the mouth.
- Information received: light touch, pain, temperature, and pressure.

**Over registration** (tactile defensive) may result in:
1. Resisting being touched.
2. Avoiding getting messy.
3. Overreacting to heat, cold, and pain.
4. Discomfort wearing clothes/shoes.
5. Eating issues due to sensitivity in the mouth.

**Under registration** may result in:
1. Decreased awareness of tactile input
2. Increased need for tactile input
3. May have high pain tolerance
4. Enjoys pressure e.g. Tight clothing
Vision

• Minimal background stimulus can be calming.

• Excessive stimulus is alerting.

• Self stimulatory behaviour may occur, e.g. Stimming in front of eyes to “cut out” excessive visual input from the environment.

• Staring for long periods of time – may seem to look through people rather than at people.

• Eye contact can be painfully intense and difficult for some people.
Vision

**Over registration** may result in:

1. “Super Vision” – an inability to block out or filter out unnecessary visual stimuli.
2. Dislike of dark and bright lights – may cover or close their eyes.
3. Dislike of flashes of light – e.g. camera flash or lightning.
4. May look down a lot to block out excessive stimulus.

**Under registration** may result in:

1. Attracted to light.
2. Stares intensely at objects and people.
3. Fascinated by reflections.
4. Will seek out objects which give visual stimuli e.g. Flashing lights, torches, light up sensory toys.
Hearing - Auditory

- Allows accurate interpretation of speech and environmental sounds.
- Closely linked to the vestibular sensory system (balance/inner ear).

Over registration may result in:
1. “Super hearing” – unable to filter out noise.
2. May cover ears with hands.
3. Avoids noisy environments such as shopping centres, sports arenas, etc.
4. May use own voice to drown out environmental noises (auditory stimming).
5. May impact on self care e.g. cleaning ears, flushing toilet, using hair dryer, etc.

Under registration may result in:
1. Seeks out noisy environments – kitchen or crowded places such as football games.
2. Likes to make a lot of noise – banging objects, slamming doors, loud tapping, etc.
3. May find loud music calming.
Smell - Olfactory

- Smell and taste are closely related.
- Soft and mild odours can be calming.
- All odours have the potential to be alerting.

**Over registration** may result in:
1. Any environment may be overpowering.
2. May show extreme aversive reactions to odours e.g. Perfumes, exhaust fumes, foods.
3. Will not use public toilets or go into restaurants due to strong odours.

**Under registration** may result in:
1. Does not process strong smells.
2. May smell things obsessively in order to become oriented.
3. Seeks out strong odours in the environment.
Taste - Gustatory

- Processed by receptors on the tongue.
- Different areas on the tongue register different tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, salty etc.
- Difficulties in this area are associated with smell and with food textures (tactile).
- Eating difficulties can also be linked to poor motor skills.

**Over registration** may result in:
1. Poor eater – fussy and small quantities of food.
2. May use the tip of tongue for eating.
3. Limited diet and refusal of trying new foods.

**Under registration** may result in:
1. Seeking out strong flavours
2. May over eat, which can lead to health issues.
Proprioception

- Provides the brain with information from the muscles and joints
- Provides the brain with information about movement and changes of position in space
- Provides us with body awareness which allows for accurate motor planning
- All proprioceptive input is calming

**Over registration** may result in:
1. Places body in strange positions
2. Has difficulty manipulating small objects such as buttons

**Under registration** may result in:
1. Low muscle tone, a weak grasp and may appear floppy or lean onto things/people
2. Lack of awareness of their body in space
3. Tendency to fall or bump into things (clumsy)
4. Rocking back and forth
Vestibular

- Provides the brain with unconscious information from the inner ear about equilibrium and head / body movements and the centre of gravity
- Provides the sense of being “tied” to the ground
- Receives input from body movement and movement in the environment (visual & tactile)
- Slow movement is calming, fast movement is alerting

**Over registration** may result in:
1. Fearful reaction of ordinary movement
2. Dislikes being upside down
3. Anxious or distressed when feet leave the ground

**Under registration** may result in:
1. Spinning and running around back and forth
2. Rocking back and forth in an excessive manner
Sensory Impact on Individuals with Autism

- An individual may experience over registration with one sense and under registration with another, this can change frequently but some are constant.

- Sensory information can become so overwhelming that it can trigger acute anxiety.

- The need for sensory information can become so powerful that it can trigger acute anxiety.

- Individuals may or may not be aware of how sensory processing impacts on their sense of well being.

- Increased levels of stress and anxiety lead to reduced levels of frustration tolerance.
Impact on Learning

- Sensory processing impacts on the manner in which the individual reacts to the world and on how they take in, process and learn from information within their environment.
- Sensory information can decrease selective attention and can increase distraction.
- People with autism often lack the ability to adjust to “sensory assaults” that others accept as normal.
- By accommodating an individual’s sensory needs and helping them to interpret this information in a more reliable and predictable way, we can decrease their stress and increase their environmental understanding, which will in turn facilitate their learning.
The Autistic Brain

- The brain of an individual who is on the Autism Spectrum develops differently to a neurotypical (NT) brain.
- PET scans clearly show that there are some areas which are overdeveloped and some which are underdeveloped when compared to a NT brain.
- This results in people:
  - being highly skilled in some areas.
  - thinking differently to a NT person (cognitive processing).
- Some of these differences can be tapped into and can be used in a functional way.
- Some of these differences can cause a lot of confusion and challenges for the individual.
Cognitive Functioning

• Usually good rote memory but can have difficulties with problem solving, forward thinking and drawing inferences.

• When information is stored without meaning in unrelated fragments or chunks, it is often difficult for the person to:

  1. Automatically or independently learn cause/effect
  2. Learn from experience and from the consequences of one’s actions
  3. Explain or relate events and experiences
  4. Predict and/or prepare for coming events

• Be aware that an individual having an uneven IQ profile can result in the person having excellent skills in some areas and poor skills in others.
What is Executive Functioning?

Executive Functioning is performed in the frontal lobe of the brain and consists of high level thinking skills.

These skills allow us to finish our work on time, ask for help when needed, wait to speak until we're called on and seek more information.

Many people on the spectrum experience executive dysfunction and find these thinking skills very difficult or impossible to perform.

Examples

- Planning and forward thinking
- Prioritising
- Keep track of time
- Keep track of more than one thing at once
- The ability to meaningfully include past knowledge when making decisions
- Evaluating ideas
- Reflecting on work
- The ability to change our minds and make mid-course corrections while thinking, reading, and writing
- Finishing work on time
- Asking for help or seeking out more information when working on a task
Strategies to Help Organise and Self Manage

• Provide the employee with autism a time frame for the work day which incorporates regular breaks.

• Help them to make a schedule for the day.

• Support them to create a TODO list to follow through the day.

• Teach them how to prioritise: use concrete reasoning when doing this (remember difficulties related to Executive Functioning)

• Assess if there are any sensory issues in the environment and adapt where possible.

• Hold a daily “stand up” meeting each morning with the team to communicate the days tasks and check in on their progress from the day before.
Common Characteristics Attributed to Autism

- Difficulty with facial recognition, especially when the person they don’t recognise is in a different environment than usual (facial blindness).
- Difficulty and anxiety surrounding conversations involving “small talk”.
- Difficulty leaving work unfinished or swapping from one job to another (shifting attention).
- May push in or interrupt due to not reading subtle social cues.
- Inflexibility of thought – concrete thinking – black and white.
- Difficulty with change – pre-warn as best as you can and explain why the change is occurring.
Planning for Success

• Don’t assume that they hear you - they may not be listening

• Don’t assume that they know you are / were speaking to them - use their name and make sure that they are attending to you to before giving them directions

• Don’t assume they know what to do – investigate by asking questions to check their understanding

• Don’t assume that they know where or when to start or finish a task – give clear time frames

• Don’t assume that they know the sequence of a task – write down a sequence of tasks when possible

• Give clear instructions – the less words you use the better – back up the instructions with an email or task analysis
• There will inevitably be times when things may not go to plan.

• People with autism find it difficult to understand other people’s feelings and sometimes accidentally say the ‘wrong thing’ and may appear to be lacking empathy.

• When conflicts occur, it’s important to remember that it is not deliberate, it’s just that they are often the last ones to know when they have annoyed or upset someone. It’s not unusual for simple acts, like talking too much, or being “brutally” honest or seeming to be “grumpy”, to cause ill feelings.

• Others may be overly sensitive and disproportionately over react to what a colleague says or does.

• As communication and social interactions are two of the major challenges for people with autism, this is an area that constantly needs coaching and intervention.
Brainstorming Activity

• Form groups of 3-4 people. Read the scenario assigned to your group, and develop a strategy to respond to the scenario. Feed back your strategies to the group.
Performance and Management Escalation Process

Performance Issue / Incident Raised

Autism Support Consultant to identify severity of individuals performance issue / incident and raise with appropriate personnel if required.

Team Manager and/or Team Lead

If issue is related to testing performance, the TM, TL and Autism Support Consultant will work on a development plan or look to provide additional support.

DXC Practice Manager

DXC Practice manager advised and consulted if severity of incident is critical &/or where necessary.

DXC Team member informed. Performance issue/incident is recorded and issue is addressed accordingly.

CLIENT & DXC to work on solution & outcome
Dandelion Team Members have a monthly 1:1 with the Autism Support Consultant to discuss work and social performance.

A performance rating scale is provided and updated at every 1:1.

Team Managers and Team Leads provide feedback on work performance for every monthly 1:1 and may be invited to attend these meetings.
Example Rating Matrix

Monthly Ratings
9-10 Achieved above expectation
5-8 Successfully met all expectations
3-4 Met most expectations / Developing into role
1-2 Did not meet expectations

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Thank you for your time and for your attention.

Any questions?