

# **Employment Counseling Program (ECP) for Young Adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders**

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**Edward S. Brodtkin, M.D.  
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry**

**J. Russell Ramsay, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry**

**University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine**



# Commercial Financial Disclosure

- **Dr. Brodkin**
- **Former consultant to Gerson Lehrman Group, now resigned**
  
- **Dr. Ramsay**
- **Consultant - McNeil Pediatrics - National Adult ADHD Steering Committee**



# Objectives for today

*This program is designed to help you:*

- 1) understand the social skills involved in job searching and job interviewing that are difficult for individuals on the spectrum.
- 2) understand the social skills necessary for the work setting.
- 3) understand the ways in which cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be useful in improving skills and motivation necessary to obtain and retain jobs.
- 4) learn more about the particular ECP treatment program that has been initiated at Penn.
- 5) discuss employment-related issues encountered by attendees.



# Characteristics of more able individuals with autism spectrum disorders

- Neurodevelopmental disorder
- Impairments in social interactions, social reciprocity, nonverbal social communication
- Behaviors (including speech), interests, and activities that are commonly:
  - Restricted
  - Stereotyped
  - Repetitive
- $IQ \geq 70$



# Areas of Difficulty

- Theory of Mind
  - Emotional Empathy
    - (“I feel your pain”)
  - Cognitive Empathy
    - (“I understand why you feel the way you do”)
  - Sympathy
    - (“I want to do something to help you”)
- What is **meant** (implied meaning) v. what is **said** (literal meaning)
- What is communicated *nonverbally* v. *verbally*



# Real World Difficulties

- “Reading” looks from others
- “Deciphering” non verbal communication
- “Hearing” voice inflection, tone
- Projecting situations into possible future outcomes
- Sorting through “hidden agendas” or understanding “politics”



# Strengths

- **Intelligence**
- **Distinct area of interest and/or skill**
- **Single minded focus**
- **Systematic thinking style**
- **Large overlap with non-ASD peers on standardized measures**
- **Honesty, forthrightness**



# **Employment and Career—major issues for individuals on the spectrum**

- **Transition to employment—a crucial issue for individual on the spectrum**
- **Many individuals on the spectrum have many of the cognitive and other abilities necessary for high quality jobs and careers**
- **However, many individuals on the spectrum are unemployed or severely underemployed**
- **This un/underemployment represents a waste of talent, and causes financial hardship, and may be associated with low self-esteem or depression**
- **A major reason for this un/underemployment seem to be difficulties in interpersonal and communication demands of the job interview and workplace setting**



# Employment Counseling Program (ECP)

- To help individuals on the spectrum with these employment issues, we recently initiated the ECP in 2007
- Directed by Russell Ramsay, Ph.D. and Edward Brodtkin, M.D.
- A component of the University of Pennsylvania Adult Social Learning Disorders Program (SLDP)
- Purpose of ECP—to assist individuals with ASDs who are having difficulty with work or employment issues to develop social skills necessary to obtain and keep a satisfactory job, or to make progress in a career.



# Skills Necessary for the Workplace (1)

- Job Search

- Motivation
- Specific goals
- Realistic expectations
- Balanced search involving
  - Information gathering
  - Contact and follow through (i.e., application)
  - Follow up
- Diligence and organization
- Frustration tolerance and persistence
- Ability to maintain a positive attitude, even in the face of some rejection



# Skills Necessary for the Workplace (2)

- Get a job
  - Demonstrate appropriateness - “on paper”
  - Demonstrate appropriateness – “in person”
    - Appearance
    - Interaction
    - Interview
      - Answer what is asked
      - Answer what is “meant”
- Handling setbacks



# Skills Necessary for the Workplace (3)

- Keep a job
  - Work “hygiene” (i.e., arrive on time, appearance)
  - Follow directions
  - Independent problem management
  - Handling interactions
    - Supervisors
    - Co-workers
      - “Office politics”
      - Personal v. work v. topics to avoid
    - Customers
  - Frustration tolerance
  - Organization, time management



# Why focus on the job interview?

- End stage of job “search”
- The social demands of the job interview may be particularly challenging
- Vital part of “getting” job
- Skills required in job interview are same required to “keep” job
- Distinct nature of job interview
  - Defined roles for interviewer and interviewee
  - Defined objective
  - Defined “rules” and “scripts”



# Why CBT?

(Ramsay, Brodtkin et al., 2005)

- **Structured approach**
- **Focus on specific situations**
- **Important interplay of**
  - **Cognitions**
  - **Emotions**
  - **Behaviors**
- **Portable skills**
- **Effective for co-existing depression, anxiety**
- **Use therapeutic relationship as a “lab”**



# ECP Study: Goals

- **The purpose of the ECP study is to learn if a brief course of CBT focused on helping participants practice the skills necessary for a job interview also improves their social skills**



# ECP Study: Methods

- **A convenience sample of 20 consecutive adult patients seeking psychological treatment for job-related issues through Penn's SLDP will be invited to participate in the treatment program.**
- **Participants will undergo a standard clinical interview to confirm the diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder.**
- **Each of the eight sessions of the ECP will focus on different aspects of social skills required in a job interview. The treatment also involves job interview role plays that are videotaped and reviewed in session.**
- **Pre- and post-treatment clinical data will be analyzed to assess the clinical outcomes achieved by ECP participants.**



# ECP Study: Enrollment

- **Prospective participants can enroll for the study by:**
  - **Contacting the Penn SLDP directly.**
  - **Referral to the ECP from Penn Social Skills Seminars.**
- **There is no compensation for participation in the study. Participants will be required to pay for therapy sessions at the standard rate charged by the Department of Psychiatry.**



# Session 1

- Introduction
- Setting realistic goals
- Potential barriers (“motivational interviewing”)
- Past job experiences, future job hopes
- Discuss role play of job interview
- Homework – Prepare for job interview, i.e., treat as “real”



# Session 2

- **Role play of job interview (videotaped)**
- **Debrief role play, identify relevant reactions**
- **Review video and discuss observations**
- **Homework – review video and return it**



# Session 3

- **Debrief video review**
- **Discuss typical expectations in a job interview**
- **Introduce “automatic thoughts” (AT)**
- **Identify ATs that influence job search and interview**
- **Introduce thought monitoring form**
- **Homework – monitor thoughts**



# Session 4

- Review AT forms
- Introduce cognitive distortions and modification strategies
- Discuss opportunities to identify and modify distortions in daily life
- Address cognitive rigidity and encourage perspective taking
- Homework – identify cognitive distortions



# Session 5

- Review distortions
- Identify behavior patterns affecting job search, interview
- Identify avoidant patterns
- Review specific social behaviors affecting interview
- Review personal strengths and good coping skills
- Homework – Identify and modify behavior patterns



# Session 6

- **Discuss behavior patterns**
- **Review important themes of ECP**
- **Discuss potential barriers to implementing skills**
- **Discuss current job search status**
- **Homework – Take additional step in job search**



# Session 7

- **Discuss job search behavior**
- **Discuss issues related to keeping a job**
- **Review ways to handle job interview**
- **Identify and discuss problem areas, reinforce strengths, skills**
- **Homework – Prepare for final role play job interview**



# Session 8

- **Role play of job interview (videotaped)**
- **Debrief role play, identify relevant reactions**
- **Review video and discuss observations**
- **Compare and contrast two role played job interviews**
- **Summary discussion**
- **Complete post-ECP questionnaires**



# Summary and Discussion



**Contact us!!**

**ebrodkin@mail.med.upenn.edu**

**ramsay@mail.med.upenn.edu**

**Penn SLDP 215-573-1159, ext. 2**

