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

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Commercial Financial Disclosure

- Dr. Brodkin
- Former consultant to Gerson Lehrman Group, now resigned

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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 > 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 Brodkin, 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, Brodkin 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!!

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