2021 Autism Special Interest Group Meeting at 2021 AUCD Conference

Tuesday, November 9
2:00 – 3:30 PM ET
Housekeeping

• Ensure your name is displayed correctly in the participant list. You may also include program/org and preferred pronouns.
  • Hover over your name in the “Participants” box and select “More” → “Rename”
• Remain muted unless speaking
• State your name prior to speaking
• Live captioning is available
• Meeting is being recorded and will be archived
• Use chat box to introduce yourself!
Agenda

• Suicide Awareness and Prevention
  • Lisa Morgan, MEd, CAS & Brenna Maddox, PhD – University of North Carolina, School of Medicine

• Psychiatric Comorbidities
  • Jordan Klein, PhD – Medical University of South Carolina

• Mental Health Advocacy
  • Wanda Felty – Center for Learning and Leadership at University of Oklahoma’s UCEDD

• Breakout Rooms

• Report out from breakout room discussions
Suicide Awareness and Prevention

LISA MORGAN, MED, CAS
BRENNA MADDOX, PHD
Note about Content

- https://findahelpline.com/i/iasp
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Text HOME to 741741
Suicide and Autism: What Do We Know?
Autistic Individuals and Suicide

- Suicide is a leading cause of premature death in autistic people

- Autistic individuals are significantly more likely to think about, attempt, and die by suicide than the general population

Cassidy et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2017; Croen et al., 2015; Hedley & Uljarević, 2018; Hirvikoski et al., 2016; Kirby et al., 2019; Kõlves et al., 2021; Zahid & Upthegrove, 2017
Risk Factors

- Factors known to increase the risk of suicide in the general population are more common in autistic individuals
  - Examples: social isolation, abuse, low mood, low self-esteem, alexithymia, rumination

- We should also consider additional factors, that may be more specific to autistic individuals
Risk Factors

- Co-occurring psychiatric conditions
- Lack of social support
- Unmet support needs
- Camouflaging or masking
- Late diagnosis
- Female
- Autistic burnout

Cassidy et al., 2018; Hedley et al., 2017, 2018; Kirby et al., 2019; Kõlves et al., 2021; Raymaker et al., 2020
PSYCHIATRIC COMORBIDITIES IN ASD

Jordan Klein, PhD
Post-Doctoral Fellow
Medical University of South Carolina
Mental health comorbidities are higher in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) than in the general population.

Approximately 70% of individuals with ASD have 1 co-occurring condition.

Approximately 50% of individuals with ASD have 2+ co-occurring conditions.


The problem with averages...

- ADHD: 28%
- Anxiety: 20%
- Depressive: 11%

Factors that Influence the Rates

- Intellectual Functioning
- Language
- Sex
- Age
- Measurement
- Atypical Presentation
Language Ability

• Impacts the ability to self-report
• Forces parents to interpret behavior
• Language can be exclusionary from studies
Atypical Presentations

Traditional Anxiety

- GAD
- Phobia
- Social
- Separation

Differential Diagnosis

ASD

Social Withdrawal

Anxiety

Depression
Differential Diagnosis

Rigid Behavior

- ASD
- Anxiety
- OCD
Differential Diagnosis

- ASD
- Toddler Dysregulation
- Anxiety
- Bipolar
Questions?
Warning Signs

- Indicate a more immediate risk of suicide (vs. risk factors)

- Less research in the autism field on warning signs, compared to risk factors
Warning Signs of Suicide for Autistic People

An autism-specific resource based on research findings and expert consensus

Morgan et al., 2021
Crisis Supports and Resources
Crisis Supports for the Autism Community

Written and developed by Lisa Morgan in collaboration with AAS’s Autism and Suicide Committee & Common Ground
Supporting autistic children and young people through crisis

Thank you!

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Brenna Maddox, PhD  
Brenna_Maddox@med.unc.edu
Breakout Room Tasks

1. Discuss related activities and initiatives at your sites
2. Share resources
3. Recommend speakers or topics for April’s Autism Acceptance Month Series
Self-Select Breakout Instructions

Step 1: Click “Breakout Rooms”

Step 2: Hover to the far right and click “Join”
Join us in January!

• Thursday, January 27 at 3 PM ET
• Discuss Autism Acceptance Month Webinar Series in April
• Register here: https://bit.ly/3oczvsg
• Join the listserv for updates: https://www.aucd.org/template/page.cfm?id=529