

# TEACCH Autism Program: Learning Style of Autism and Program Overview

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THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA  
**TEACCH**  
Autism Program  
Services Across the Lifespan

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## Objectives - Day One



- Describe the learning styles of autistic individuals
- Recognize the core components of the TEACCH philosophy and program
- Explain the three principles of Structured TEACCHing



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## Objectives - Day Two



- Recognize how informal assessment leads to individualized intervention strategies
- Explain how the application of Structured TEACCHing principles leads to improvements in flexibility and the generalization of skills across settings
- Learn about the TEACCH programs designed to help youth transition to adulthood

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## Objectives - Day Three

- Describe strategies for improving the social communication skills of individuals with autism
- Explain the Structured TEACCHing approach to behavior management
- Share intervention strategies for improving emotional regulation skills

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## University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program

### TEACCH Program Overview

Autism Independent UK, Kettering  
January 2024




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### Mission

Creating and disseminating exemplary community-based services, training programs, and research to enhance the quality of life of individuals with Autism and their families.

### Established in 1972

- Administration and research center (based at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine)
- 7 community-based regional outpatient clinics
- Supported employment program in Chapel Hill & Greensboro, NC
- Residential facility for adults located in Pittsboro, NC.
- National & international training program

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## UNC TEACCH Autism Program

- Established in 1965 in the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, in recognition of the unique needs of individuals with autism

### Leadership

*Eric Schopler*



*Gary Mesibov*



*Current: Laura Klinger*



- Part of the UNC Health Care System and the North Carolina AHEC Program.

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## Clinical Services Across the Lifespan

- Diagnostic Evaluations
- Intervention Services:
  - Early Intervention (TEACCH for Toddlers)
  - Parent Teaching/Coaching
  - School-Aged Intervention Groups
    - Growing Living & Learning with Autism
    - Facing Your Fears
  - Transition Services (T-STEP)
  - Adult Counseling & Intervention Groups
- Community Workshops
- School Consultation Program
- Employment & Residential Consultation



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## TEACCH Student & Professional Development Training Programs

- Student Clinical Practicum & Internships
  - Psychology
  - Social Work
  - Occupational Therapy
  - Speech Language Pathology
- Annual Conference
  - October 24-25, 2024
- Virtual Trainings
- 5 Day Classroom and Adult Training Model
- Professional Certification Program

Visit the TEACCH website: <https://teacch.com/trainings/> for additional information

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## TEACCH Professional Certification Program

- A comprehensive Professional Certification Program for educators, psychologists, social workers, speech therapists and other service providers in the field of autism.
- Two levels of certification
  - TEACCH Certified Practitioner
  - TEACCH Advanced Consultant

Visit the TEACCH website: <https://teacch.com/trainings/teacch-professional-certification-program/> for additional information

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## Research at TEACCH


### Children

- TEACCH for Toddlers
- Facing Your Fears
- Growing Living & Learning with Autism (Group emotion regulation)
- DBT-ST group feasibility for autistic adults
- Primary Care and Mental Health Best Practices (Project ECHO)

### Adolescents & Adults

- TEACCH School Transition to Employment & Post-Secondary Education Program (T-STEP) - Klinger
- HEELS 2 Participation: Improving community participation for young adults with I/DD - Tomaszewski
- Advancing the System of Care for Autistic Older Adults” designed to study health and mental health outcomes in autistic older adults. Klinger & Maddox
- Suicide Prevention for autistic adolescents and adults - Maddox

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## University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program

### TEACCH Intervention and Philosophy

Autism Independent UK, Kettering 2024





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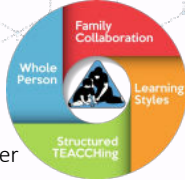
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## TEACCH Intervention Philosophy

- Family collaboration
- Culture of Autism:
  - learning styles and differences
- Strengths based approach:
  - visual supports
- Whole person view/life-long learner



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## Parent Professional Collaboration

- Parents/caregivers know their child the best
  - Strengths, interests, and challenges
- As professionals, we know about autism in general and intervention strategies
- Together, mutually support one another
- Parent is likely to be the advocate in the long run



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## Structured TEACCHing

- Goals: Beginning steps
  1. Engagement
  2. Learn new skills
  3. Decrease behavior problems

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## Goals: Lifelong Learner.....

1. Independence
2. Flexibility
3. Generalization
4. Self Advocacy
5. Well-Being
  - Happy, healthy, self-efficacy, competence

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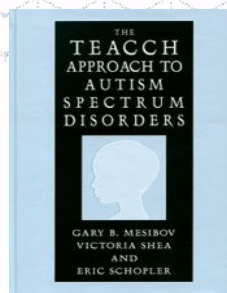
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## TEACCH.....

- Generalist training
- Evidence-based practice



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## Curriculum.....

- Knowledge of autism
- Working with families
- Structured teaching
- Communication
- Social and leisure skills
- Self-help and domestic skills
- Academic skills
- Vocational skills and behaviors

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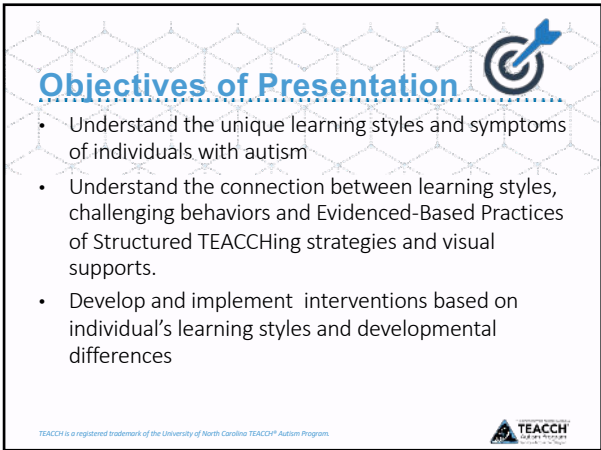
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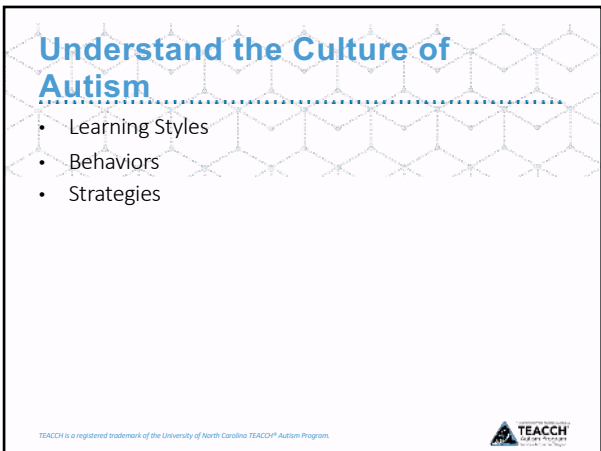
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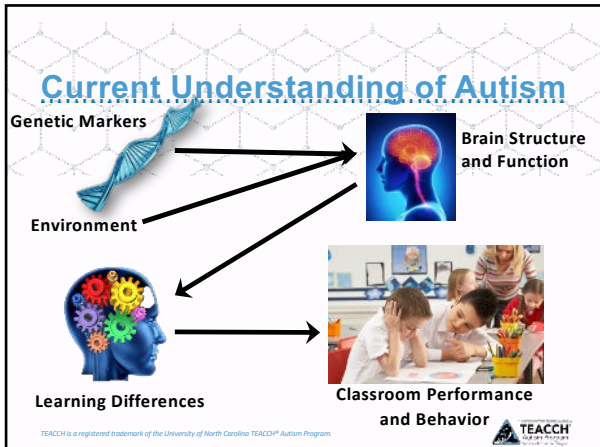
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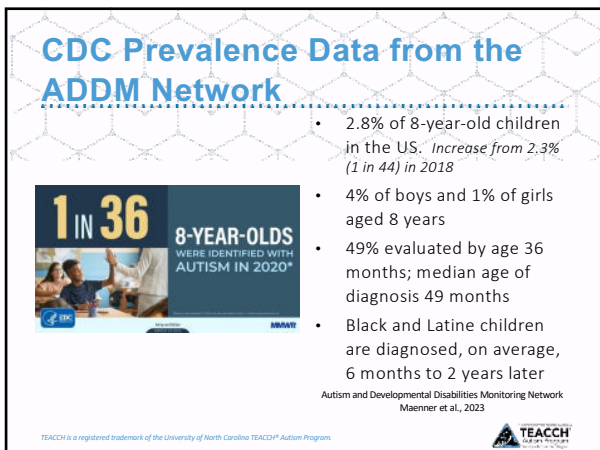
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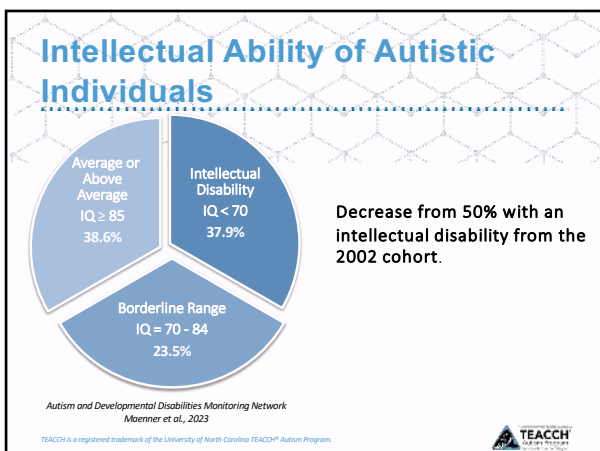
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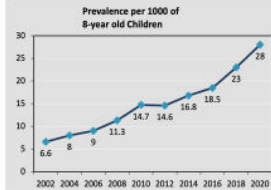
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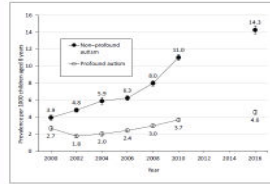


## CDC Prevalence of Autism

- Rate of autism increased from 1 in 150 to 1 in 36.
- The 2002 cohort are now 29 years old.



ADDM Network estimates for overall autism prevalence in US over time. CDC website



Huges et al (2023).

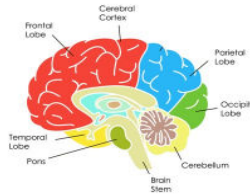
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## Autism Spectrum Disorder

- **Neurodevelopmental** disorder – brain organized and functions differently
- Starts early in life but presentation of symptoms may be delayed



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## My Autism By George

### Discussion Question

- What are some of George's strengths?
- What are some of George's symptoms of autism?



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## DSM-5: Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Social Communication
  - Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
  - Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors
  - Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships
- Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior, Interests, or Activities
  - Stereotyped or repetitive speech, movements, or objects
  - Excessive adherence to routines, ritualized verbal or nonverbal behavior
  - Highly restricted, fixated interests (intensity or focus)
  - Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory aspects of environment

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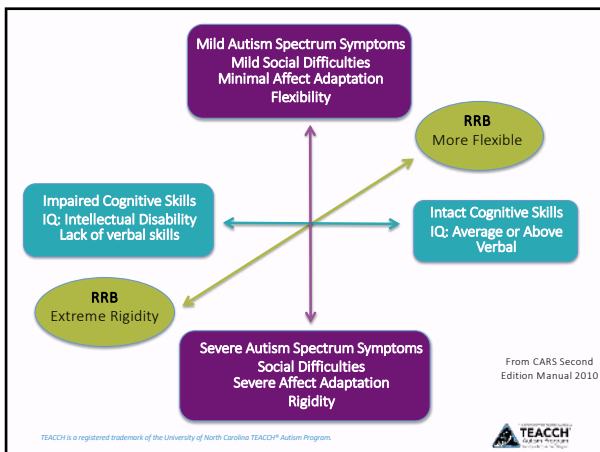
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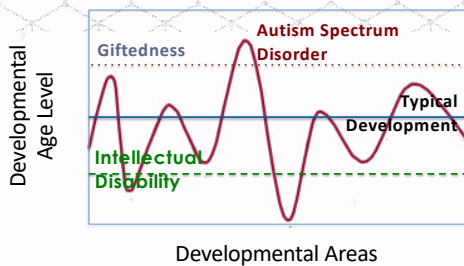
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## Uneven Patterns of Development



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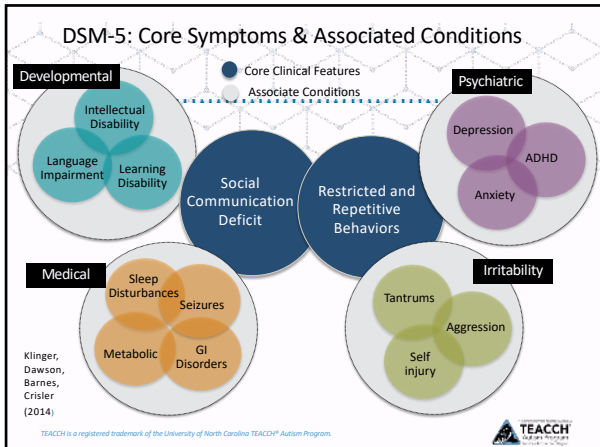
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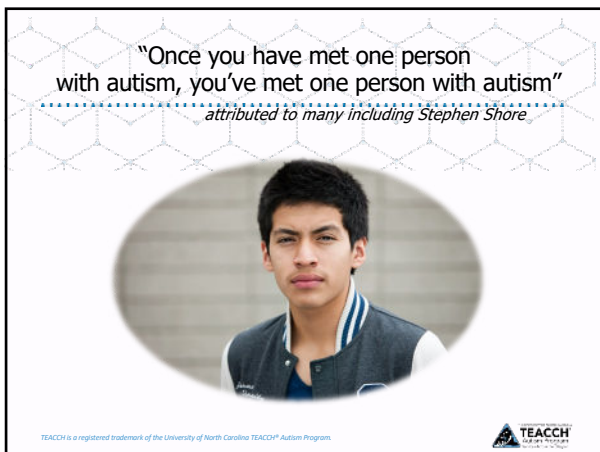
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### Implications for Understanding Autism

- Individuals with autism learn differently
- Their learning differences can create unique strengths and challenges.
- Neurodiversity view that focuses on valuing strengths and supporting challenges

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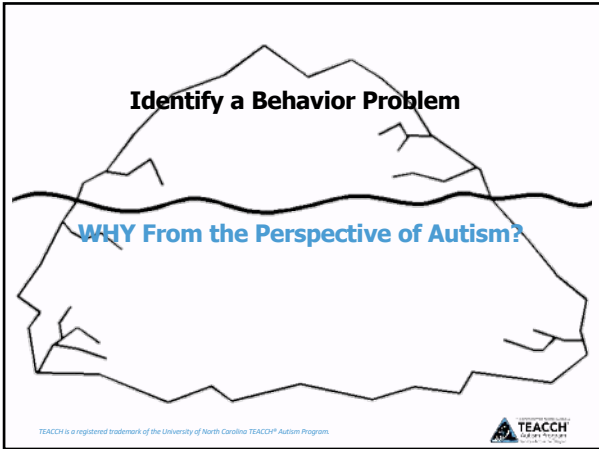
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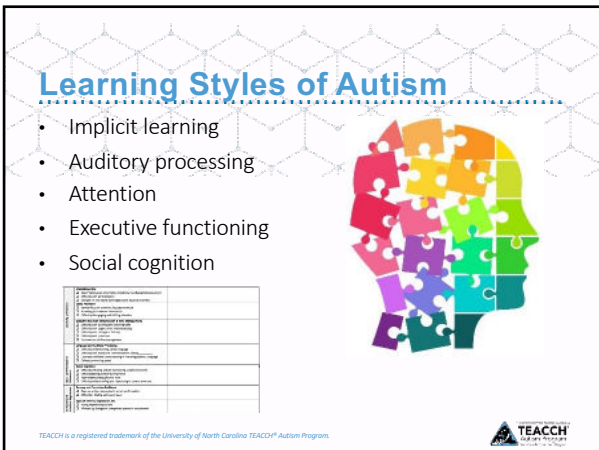
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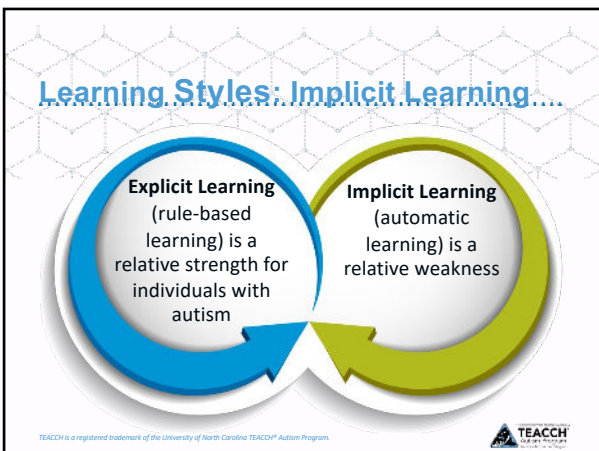
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## Learning Styles: Difficulty Learning Things Automatically

"Temple [Grandin] had longed for friends at school ...while they admired her intelligence, they never accepted her as part of their community. "I could never figure out what I was doing wrong. I had an odd lack of awareness that I was different. I could never figure out why I didn't fit in."

Something was going on between the other kids, something swift, subtle, constantly changing-an exchange of meanings, a negotiation, a swiftness of understanding so remarkable that sometimes she wondered if they were all telepathic. "

-Oliver Sacks writing about Temple Grandin

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## Learning Styles: Implicit Learning

### Difficulty with Generalization

- Trouble exhibiting the same skill across people, places and materials
- Knowing what to do based on prior learning or experiences

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## Learning Style: Implicit Learning.

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Use **direct (explicit) instruction** to teach skills and to clarify what "to do"
  - Use **specific language**
  - Use **visual supports** to teach new skills
- Teach the use of visual strategies that **support generalization**
  - Use visual reminders to implement routine strategies
- Create narratives to **explain the "hidden" rules of social expectations.**

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## Learning Styles: Auditory Processing

- Strength in visual processing
- Difficulty with abstract language (concrete or literal thinking)
- Delayed processing of language



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## Auditory Processing: Temple Grandin



"I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound which run like a VCR tape in my head. When someone speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures."

*Thinking in Pictures*

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## Concrete or Literal Thinking.....

- "Behave" – one word, many meanings



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## Learning Styles: Auditory Processing

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Use **gestures**, meaningful **concrete examples**, and **visual instructions/supports**
- **Allow time to process** information and formulate a response



If you cannot draw it, it might be too abstract

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## Learning Styles: Attention

- Sticky Attention (Central Coherence)
  - Strong attention for high-interest
  - Difficulty disengaging and shifting
  - Problems seeing big picture
- Narrow Beam
  - Strength in focusing on details and facts
  - Difficulty determining relevant vs. irrelevant details



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## Learning Styles: Attention

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Organize and segment the environment to **engage and maintain attention**
- Use visual structure to **direct attention** to important and relevant information
- Use visual supports to **enhance meaning** and understanding of abstract concepts
- Use a variety of visual cues to help **disengage and shift attention**
- Incorporate **special interests** to engage attention

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## Learning Styles: Executive Functioning

- Weak organizational skills
- Sequencing / planning
- Trouble with initiation
- Understanding “finished”
- Set shifting / flexibility
- Difficulty with transitions



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## Implications of These Learning Differences?



Need predictability  
Routines are predictable

But, routines can encourage rigidity  
So.... **TEACH FLEXIBILITY**

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## Learning Styles: Executive Functioning

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Provide **visual sequences** of activities
- Develop and teach **organizational strategies**
- Teach routine strategies for **self-monitoring**

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## Learning Styles: Social Cognition

- Joint attention
- Responding to other's emotions
- Theory of mind
  - Inability to understand that others have perspectives that are different from one's own.
- Double empathy problem (Milton, 2012)
  - Mutual misunderstandings in the autistic/non-autistic interaction



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## Learning Styles: Social Cognition

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Use visual cues to **support social understanding** and promote social interaction
  - Use social narratives to teach social understanding and clarify expectations
- Incorporate interests to **promote social engagement** and joint attention
- Directly teach about **emotion in self and others**

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## Sensory Processing Impacts Learning

- Problems filtering and modulating input
  - Hyper-reactivity (over-stimulated)
    - aversion, avoidance, over-aroused
  - Hypo-reactivity (under-stimulated)
    - Sensory seeking
    - May not notice sensory input
- Difficulty dealing with open space



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## Sensory Processing

### IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING AND INTERVENTION

- Organize and segment the environment to decrease stimulation
- Provide calm and quiet spaces
- Schedule breaks throughout the day

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## Summary: Learning Styles in Autism

### Strengths

- Explicit learning
  - rules and routines
- Visual information
- Focus on details
- Restricted interests
  - increased motivation

### Weaknesses

- Intuitive (Implicit) learning
- Sticky attention
- Theory of mind
- Executive functioning
  - planning, organization, & time management



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## Learning Styles in Autism Checklist

**LEARNING STYLES IN AUTISM CHECKLIST: Learning Differences and Executive Regulation Challenges in Autism**  
 (Subscales: Social Interaction, Sensory, and Executive Function) are shown in the table below. Note: Items with a checkmark indicate a strength or challenge in a specific area.)

| Category                           | Item  | Checkmark |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Learning Differences               | Explicit Learning   |           |
|                                    | • Uses (read) and/or understands instructions (e.g., read instructions)                         |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with generalization  |           |
|                                    | • Strengths in detail learning (e.g., to develop routines)                                      |           |
|                                    | Sticky Visual Information   |           |
|                                    | • Narrow focus of attention   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty learning to use things (e.g., attention) without referring to external information |           |
|                                    | • Strength in focus on details  |           |
|                                    | • Narrow focus (e.g., attention) in social interaction  |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with planning, organizing, and responding to tasks                                 |           |
| Social Interaction                 | • Difficulty with concept of shared   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with the visual  |           |
|                                    | • Focus on detail in social interaction   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with nonverbal and/or social communication   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and/or language   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with explicit communication (e.g., specific)                                       |           |
|                                    | • Concrete and literal understanding of meaning in social language                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with meaning (e.g., sarcasm)   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with perspective   |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
| Sensory and Executive Function     | • Difficulty with understanding of sensory input  |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
| Signs of Anxiety, Depression, etc. | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |
|                                    | • Difficulty with understanding and responding to others' emotions                              |           |

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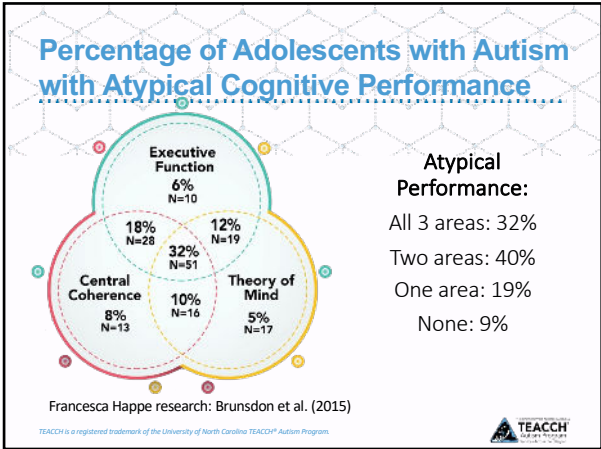
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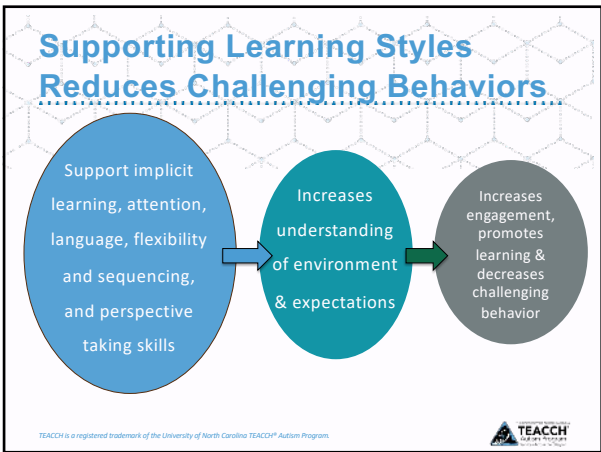
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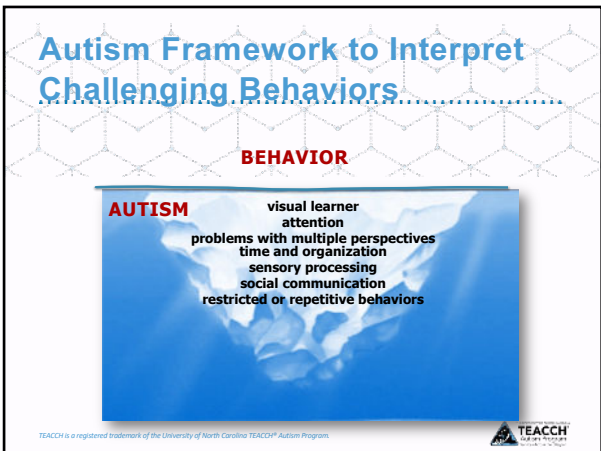
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## Behavior

When it is time to go into the library, James is upset when he has to stop playing with his cars, cries, and drops to the ground.

## Autism

**visual learner:** cannot understand verbal explanation of what is happening next


**attention:** difficulty disengaging and shifting attention

**time and organization:** does not know when he can play with cars again

**multiple perspectives:** problems with perspective taking

**sensory processing:** sensory sensitivities

**restricted or repetitive behaviors:** strong interest in cars

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## Identify a Behavior Problem for Your Client/Student

### WHY From the Perspective of Autism?

- visual learner
- attention
- problems with multiple perspectives
- time and organization
- sensory processing
- social communication
- restricted or repetitive behaviors

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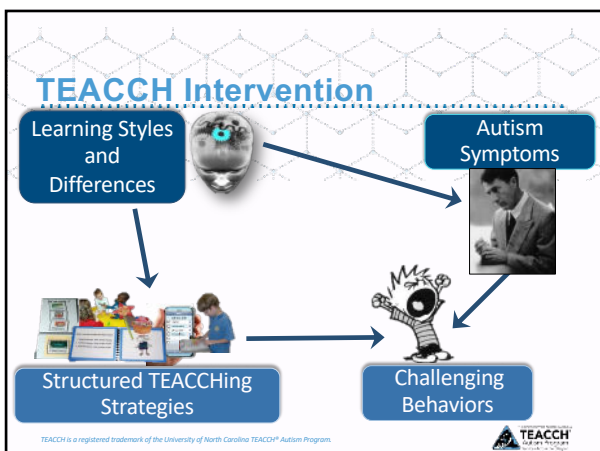
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## Structured TEACCHING is.....

- An evidenced-based practice approach.
- Based on the understanding of the symptoms and learning styles of individuals with autism and capitalizes on the individual's strengths.
- Uses strategies and visual supports to provide meaning and promote independence.



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## Elements of Structured TEACCHing.....

- Individualized daily schedule
- Work/activity systems
- Material structure and visual supports
- Physical organization



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## Structured TEACCHing as Intervention.....

Antecedent-based Approach  
Supports the Learning Styles and Behaviors



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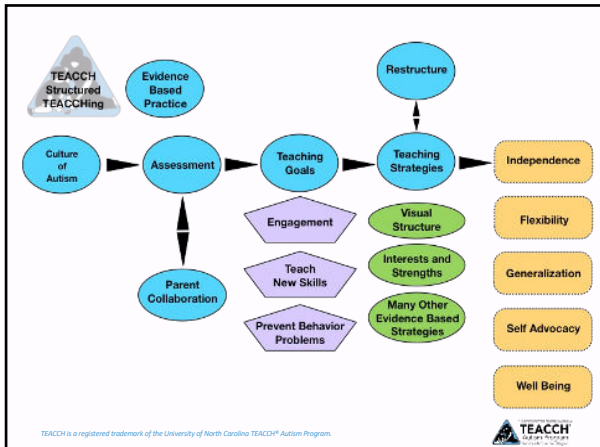
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## Structured TEACCHing

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- Mesibov, G.B., Shea, V. (2010). The TEACCH Program in the Era of Evidence-Based Practices. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 40: 570-579
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<http://autismprdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices>

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## Group Discussion

- Name one learning style strength or challenge that you will take away from today's presentation

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# University of North Carolina

## TEACCH Autism Program

**TEACCH Research:** Understanding Autism, Integrating Structured TEACCHing with other Evidence Based Interventions and Focusing on Community Based

Autism Independent UK, Kettering 2023

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL

TEACCH Autism Program  
Services Across the Triangle

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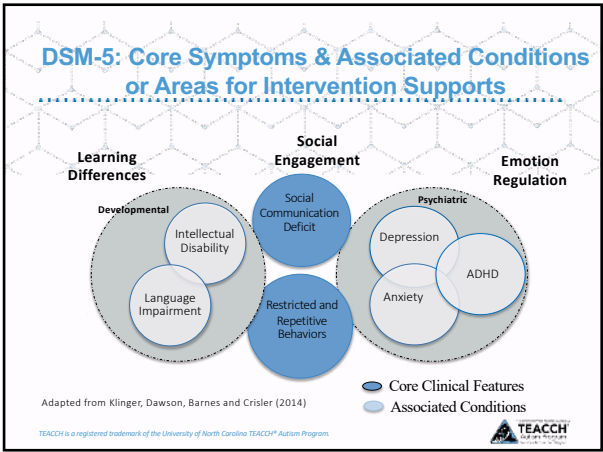
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### Intervention Targets of Structured TEACCHing

- Learning Styles:**
  - Focus attention on relevant information
  - Teach organization skills (time management)
  - Teach explicit routines (play, school, work)
- Social Engagement Skills:**
  - Teach developmentally appropriate social skills (turn taking for toddlers, professional social skills for adults)
  - Teach ways to ask for help
- Comorbid Anxiety/Depression:**
  - Teach emotion regulation (coping) skills that can be used at school, work, or home.

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# Structured TEACCHing Across the Lifespan

## Early Childhood

## School-Age

## Adolescent

## Adult

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# Early Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (Child Directed ABA)

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# FITT: Structured TEACCHing for Toddlers

**Goal is not independence but instead is to support and promote social engagement (attention)**

- Schedules
  - Using objects to help children transition to new activity (e.g., giving a cup when it is time to go to highchair)
- Activity Systems
  - Embedding social goals (imitation, gesture) into structured activities at the table.
- Online Resources
  - Early Learning Activity Library (<http://fitt.fpg.unc.edu/early-learning-activities>)
  - Online professional training program

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# Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers Online Course

Menu

Closed Captioning

Introduction

Parent Coaching

Introduction

Conversation and Application 1

Conversation and Application 2

Conversation and Application 3

Conversation and Application 4

Conversation and Application 5

Written Assessment

What is an Informal Assessment?

Try Application

Observed and Applied cases 1

Observed and Applied cases 2

Observed and Applied cases 3

Behavioral Learning

Application

Application

Summary

5 Getting started

4 Physical Organization

3 Schedule


2 Activity System

1 Other Receptive Language Strategies

Finished

[modules.fpg.unc.edu/fitt/getting\\_started/](https://modules.fpg.unc.edu/fitt/getting_started/)

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# School-Aged Interventions

- Predictable Routines to Provide Increased Organization and Support Emotion Regulation to Increase Learning



Growing, Learning, and Living with Autism

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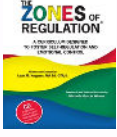

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# Growing, Learning and Living with Autism (GoriLLA Group)

- Group psychotherapy
  - Organization/Routines (Structured TEACCHing)
  - Social Engagement (Social Thinking)
  - Self regulation (Zones of Regulation)



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### Structured TEACCHing: Provides Organization in the Environment

Where am I going?

What am I going to do?  
How many steps?  
When will I be finished?

1 2 3

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### Social Engagement: Social Thinking™ Concepts

- Social Explorers Curriculum
  1. Thinking Thoughts and Feeling
  2. The Group Plan
  3. Thinking with our Eyes
  4. Body In the Group
  5. Whole Body Listening

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### Identifying Emotions

The ZONES of Regulation®

| BLUE ZONE                                      | GREEN ZONE   | YELLOW ZONE  | RED ZONE   |
|--|--|--|--|
| Sad<br>Sick<br>Tired<br>Bored<br>Moving Slowly | Happy<br>Calm<br>Feeling Okay<br>Focused<br>Ready to Learn | Frustrated<br>Worried<br>Silly/Wiggly<br>Excited<br>Loss of Some Control | Mad/Angry<br>Terrified<br>Yelling/Hitting<br>Eaten<br>Out of Control |

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(Leah Kuypers)

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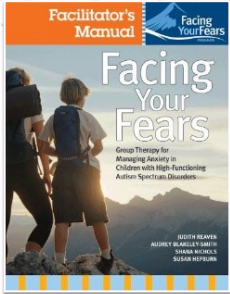
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## Emotion Regulation/Anxiety Interventions for School Aged Youth.



Cognitive behavioral intervention to treat comorbid anxiety in 8-14 year-old youth with autism.

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## Transition Interventions

*(Bridging the Gap Between High School and Adult Life)*

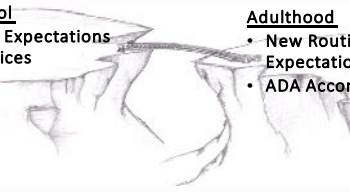
- Routine Strategies
- Professional Social Skills
- Emotional Regulation & Coping (CBT)

**High School**

- Familiar Expectations
- IEP Services

**Adulthood**

- New Routines & Expectations
- ADA Accommodations



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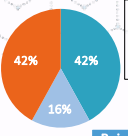
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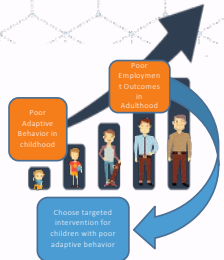
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## Improving Adult Quality of Life



**Being Employed Is Associated with:**

- Higher quality of life
- Increased contact with friends
- Fewer symptoms of anxiety
- Fewer symptoms of depression



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TEACCH SCHOOL TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT  
AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Laura Klinger

Brianne Tomaszewski

Glenna Osborne

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Strategies to Support Positive  
Adult Outcomes

- Goal Setting & Attainment
- Learning Styles (Executive Function & Attention):
  - Teach executive function (organization; time management)
  - Teach explicit routines (study skills, work routines)
- Social-Communication/Perspective Taking:
  - Teach professional social skills
  - Teach ways to ask for help
- Emotion Regulation:
  - Teach coping skills skills for school, work, & home.

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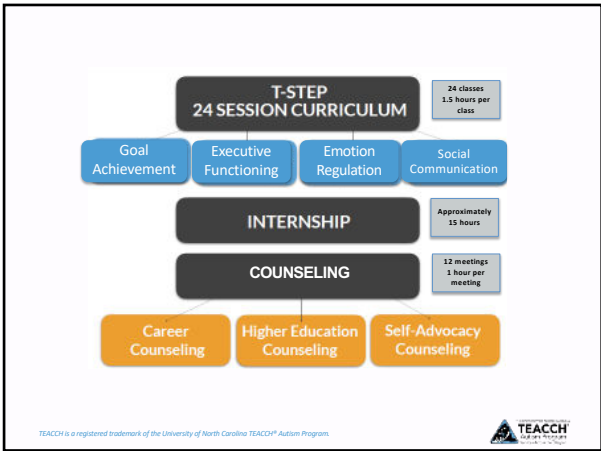
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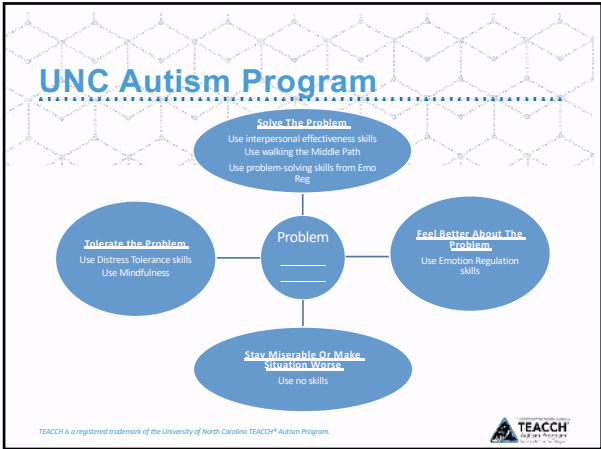
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**Project ECHO: Supporting Rural Providers in North Carolina: Teleconsultation**

 Nicole Dreiling



 **TEACCH** Autism Program  
Services Across the Lifespan

 **NORTH CAROLINA AHEC**

 **UNC** CAROLINA INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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**Summary**

- Understanding autism, the learning style and comorbidities informs intervention.
- Targeted interventions focused on organization skills (executive function), social engagement skills, and emotion regulation skills are used across the lifespan.
- A growing number of evidence-based interventions incorporate components of each of these targeted intervention areas from toddlers through adulthood.
- Training future professionals and community providers to increase access to evidence-based interventions.

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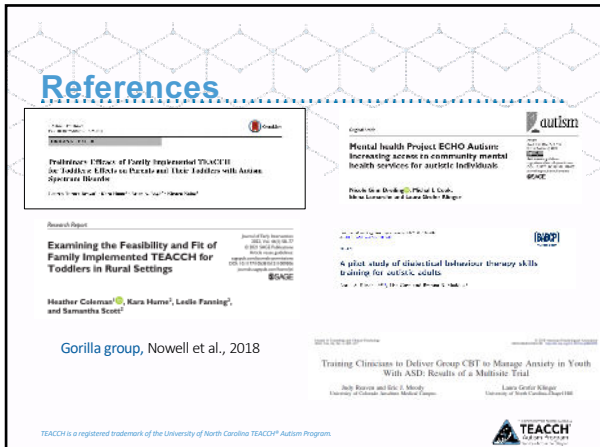
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