

## Spectrum SKILLZ

### Intellectual Development for Children on the Spectrum

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a brain-based syndrome that is characterized by impairment in communication and social interactions. However, the implications of ASD on the development of a child includes all areas. Since ASD affects communication, the cognitive development is affected and difficulty with learning can result.

To be clear, though, ASD is not a learning disorder. In fact, children with ASD usually have average to above-average intelligence. The problem is that the communication difficulties that they have impact learning directly because their language skills are underdeveloped. Because they have difficulty when listening and speaking, learning things in the same manner as others can be problematic. With this in mind, it is important to understand the different ways that learning is affected for them.

Children with ASD can struggle with focus and attention. One of the reasons is because they may either over or under react to sensory stimuli. At times, they may appear to not be listening to people speaking to them but other times they may be very bothered by even the quietest of noises. Children with ASD also tend to have a very narrow range of interests, which makes it difficult for them to focus on learning new and different things.

Another area that they struggle with is in relation to executive functioning. Children with ASD have a hard time with organization and problem solving. This is due to them often getting lost in the details of things and not being able to see the big picture. This makes it hard for them to summarize ideas such as giving the main idea of a story.

The Spectrum SKILLZ program was developed to work exclusively with children on the spectrum. The biggest benefit of this program is that it helps develop the child as a whole... a place where many other programs fall short. SKILLZ uses game-based learning as a tool to

help develop skills that are lacking. This essentially aids in developing language and focus. Because the program is geared towards children with ASD, great care was taken to make sure there were motivating opportunities to develop language skills and attention.

For example, in the drill "I Like" students practice having good listening by demonstrating their ability to listen to their friends by going around in a circle and sharing things that they like from the topic chosen by the instructor. This will challenge them mentally by requiring them to listen to their peers and be able to repeat what their friend said as well as add something about their self. This drill assists with focus, attention, and language development.

With the Spectrum SKILLZ program, children with ASD now have a resource that can help them develop in areas that are more difficult for them and areas that are underdeveloped in comparison to their non-ASD peers. By using game-based learning techniques by highly trained instructors, children with ASD can simultaneously improve in all areas of development.