

Spectrum SKILLZ

Emotional Development for Children on the Spectrum

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is most characterized by the emotional and social difficulties that people with this disorder possess. And while these two areas have much cross-over in relation to the development of an individual, it is important to understand the emotional challenges as a separate entity.

The emotional development of a child with ASD can be very difficult. They have a hard time expressing their emotions which can lead to a lot of anxiety for them. Because of this, they may have emotional outbursts which can be intense and generally do not match the situation they are in. Although self-calming is challenging for them, the attempts they make at this are often by doing things repetitively such as flapping their hands or walking on their tip toes.

In addition to the difficulty of expressing their own emotions, children with ASD also have a hard time identifying the emotions of others. They struggle with understanding and interpreting this because recognizing the facial expressions of others is challenging. They also have trouble understanding someone's tone of voice. These things together make them appear to lack empathy and show less concern for others. This struggle is mainly due to the fact that they scan people's faces in a different way than other children. They spend more time looking at someone's mouth than they do at their eyes, which typically does not give as many clues to someone's emotions as their eyes do.

In order to help children with ASD develop their emotional skills, opportunities for them to work on this are very important. They first need a schedule that is consistent so they can anticipate things better and have emotional regulation tools to help deal with changes that may come their way. They also need people who work with them to help them by encouraging eye contact with others and assist them in labeling emotions that others exhibit when they happen. It is also helpful for them to get assistance in labeling their own emotions as they

occur. In order to do this, it is vital that teachers, coaches, and parents are very responsive to their emotional needs.

In order to help with this development, the Spectrum SKILLZ program was created so that the emotional growth of children with ASD is nurtured in a way that is the most beneficial to address their needs. For example, in the drill "Happy or Sad?" students face the instructor and the instructor says 3 phrases that use emotion. The student must decide whether the instructor was happy or sad in each phrase. In this drill, the student must listen for changes in the instructor's voice and watch their face to gather clues. This training sets them up for growth in their emotional development.

In any program that is geared towards children with ASD, it is important to address the emotional needs that they have along with their physical, intellectual, and social development. This gives them a program that is well-rounded in its approach to development because it is specifically designed for them.