Children with Special Needs and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Developmental Pathways
Dynamic Systems Model

- All symptoms among children with special needs come from the same basic core – but with different variations
- Co-morbidity brings the illusion that these are separate and distinct biomedical diseases
- There will not be a specific cause of these patterns
- Epi-genetic phenomena – genes are regulated by the epi-genetic pattern that turns genes on and off
  - Environment, stress, relationships also control this epi-genetic phenomena
Review of early affects

○ Early affects create the infant’s sense of consciousness
  ● This consciousness is not a property of the brain alone

○ Through relationships and sensations...affects are created

○ Affects allow for a sense of self

○ Must take individual differences into consideration
Individual Differences and Relationships

- To understand how the infant experiences their own affect we need to understand their individual differences.

- Form affective relationships by tuning into the individual differences...progress through the functional developmental stages... leads to relationships.
DIR®/Floortime™ Framework: A Developmental, Biopsychosocial Model

Functional Emotional Developmental Levels
1. Regulation and interest in the world
2. Engaging and relating
3. Intentionality
4. Problem solving, mood regulation and a sense of self
5. Creating symbols and using words and ideas
6. Emotional thinking, logic, and a sense of “reality”
7. Multiple-cause and triangular thinking
8. Gray area, emotionally differentiated thinking
9. A growing sense of self and an internal standard

Biology
- Anxiety
- OCD
- Depression
- Behavioral Problems
- Attentional Problems
- etc.

Experience

Healthy Emotional and Social Functioning.

www.stanleygreenspan.com S.I. Greenspan, M.D.
Developmental Pathway to Anxiety

- The biological tendency is towards hypersensitivity (more reactive towards the environment) → leads to more anxiety

- When a toddler has anxiety and fear over a sensory experience...
  - Caregiver can get alarmed and anxious as well → child feels more anxious
    - Can lead to chronically anxious child
  - Caregiver can counter balance the anxiety, soothe the child → child becomes calm

- Often children have difficulties in multiple processing areas, which leads to more anxiety (for example in children with ASD)
Developmental Pathway to Depression

- The biological tendency is over reactive to various sensations – sensory hyperreactivity

- When a child over reacts...
  - Caregiver can freeze – become panicked by the child’s intensity → no pattern recognition → child feels isolated and alone
    - May fuel depression
  - Caregiver can empathize with regular affect and counter balance reactions → pattern recognition → child is filled with different, nurturing affects
    - Child can rely on the security blanket when feeling empty or lonely

- Can escalate up through the functional developmental stages
Developmental Pathway to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

- The biological tendency is hypersensitivity
- Usually has better visual spatial capacity
  - want to control their world
- When a child has a desire for control...
  - Caregiver can have power struggles → stubborn behaviors and negativism → inflexible
    - More likelihood of OCD patterns
  - Caregiver can counter balance the response by negotiating → more flexible → child is more in charge of their own body
Developmental Pathway to Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

- The biological tendency of craving sensation (may or may not be sensory under reactive)
- Co-morbidity of motor planning and sequencing challenges is common
- When the child becomes very active and sensory craving...
  - Caregiver can become frazzled or ignores the child → child continues to be over active
  - Caregiver can play regulating games with the child’s activity level → slows down the child’s activity → teaches the child how to regulate and control their activity → increase motor planning and sequencing
- Must engage in long chains of interactions
- Unpredictable caregiving pattern will produce high level of activity and distractibility
- Under reactive children need to be energized and engaged in long chains of communication because they are in their fantasy world and not into real relationships
Developmental Pathways to Bipolar Patterns

- The biological tendency of over reactive to sensation, which normally leads to anxiety... but in this case switch to sensory craving patterns
- These tendencies coupled with caregivers that do not counter balance sufficiently → leads to hyperactivity and mood swings or bipolar patterns
- Selective use of medication can be excellent
Development Pathway to Aggression

- The biological tendency of
  - sensory craving pattern
  - occasionally over reactive to sensation
    - will have aggression due to fear
- child with sensory craving patterns..
  - Punitive caregiving coupled with isolation of the child (as in foster care homes) → no intimacy learned → aggressive behaviors due to no conscious, no compassion
  - Needs long chains of interactions, counter balancing games, limit settings, etc. early in life so that it does not lead to aggression