

ASD Unplugged:

Managing Internet Use with Safety and
Understanding Across the Lifespan

Madeline Barger, MS LMFT

Internet and ASD

- Common Treatment Patterns
- Technology Concepts for Parents
- Internet Rules
- Internet Psychology
- Systemic Concepts from Family Therapy
- Behavior Analysis and Technology Use
- Digital Age and Our Brains

Common Treatment Patterns

Positives	Challenges
Healthy patterns can be developed from a young age	Internet is an unregulated society
The same individual child's strategies for "walking-talking" world supervision and safety can apply to the virtual world	Children often freely navigate this virtual world without the proper tools or supervision
Children can improve communication through the use of technology	When concerns arise, often treatment protocols don't account for ASD
Teens and young adults with ASD report meaningful online relationships	Providers and parents struggle to compete with the power of internet and technology

Bottom Line

- Understanding of a young person's internet experience leads to:
 - Informed interventions that work!
 - Internet management using knowledge of:
 - autism
 - behavioral science
 - iGeneration
 - Internet psychology
 - Promotion of overall safety and happiness

Technology Concepts for Parents

- Challenging behaviors relating to internet use are maintained by a behavioral function
- Consider executive functioning and impact of screens
- Addiction Vs. Perseveration (know the difference for treatment)
 - CBT
 - Brief Family Therapy
 - ABA **
 - Social Skills **
- Internet Natives Vs. Immigrants – iGeneration concept

Internet Rules

Think About	Be Specific
Independent or Supervised Use	Which websites are supervised or independent? How much time is supervised or independent? What does supervision look like?
Filters	Always have a plan for when your child escapes a filter, finds a password, or breaks a rule – not all plans should be punitive
Start small with time limits and expand	This can go in either direction – start with how much internet is currently used and work up or down based on what a functional schedule dictates
Don't underestimate physiological needs	Body parts that need breaks from technology: Hands Eyes Lower Back Neck Brain!

Internet Psychology:

Our Brains Online

continued

- Multi-tasking: Is it really possible?
 - Bowman's article found:
 - Slows down information retention
 - Your brain will learn what you practice!
 - Are you practicing multi-tasking or easy distractibility?

Internet Psychology: Our Brains Online

- The Disinhibition Effect- John Suler, PhD
 - Dissociative Anonymity
 - Invisibility
 - Asynchronicity
 - Solipsistic Introjection
 - Dissociative Imagination
 - Minimizing Authority
 - Altering self, boundaries, safety

Internet and Neurological Differences (ASD)

Brain Online	Impact with ASD
Dissociative Anonymity and Invisibility	Appearance (e.g. hygiene, age, physical traits) Non verbal cues (e.g. seeing or expressing feelings or reactions)
Asynchronicity	Processing concerns Communicative timing
Solipsistic Introjection	Theory of mind Perspective-taking
Dissociative Imagination, Minimizing Authority, and Altering Self	Social learning, awareness, and safety

Family Systems

“[teens or children]...they are the first generation to be born into a technological world where nearly everything is computerized...” Larry Rosen, PhD

Family Systems and Generational Values

- Values change with generations:

Generation Labels	Simplified (stereotyped) Value
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	Hard work and family
Generation X (1965-1979)	Finding oneself
Generation Y (1980s-90s)	Exploration
Net Generation	Instant Gratification
iGeneration	Personalized Instant Gratification

Values Related to ASD Shared by Parents

Is technology/internet interfering or helping:

- Trust (building relationships)
- Education
- Communication (non-verbal cues, relationship maintenance)
- Boundaries

Systemic Intervention

- Intervening on challenging online behaviors often takes a village:
 - Parents
 - School
 - Peers
 - Family
 - Cyberbullying Example: LGBTQ community and autism community are often most targeted group

Self-Esteem and Identity

- Examples
 - World of Warcraft (WOW) – fan fiction
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s81ob56LR7o>
 - Video games –fan videos and art
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkiNqEMDXqw>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ellqzoEMGwk>
 - Case Example: MLP – My Little Pony
 - MLP accumulated cultural meaning and prominence in asd community
 - Messages of friendship and inclusion
 - Bronies/Pegasisters
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Est3UNs-Llk>
- Everything that is connected to self-esteem, brings with it both positive and negative consequences in these online spaces

Behavioral Functions of Gaming or Internet-use

- Serve behavioral functions (four functions of behavior)
- Automatic (self), Escape, Attention, Tangible
- Online world:
 - is more appealing than non-electronic regulation strategies (self-maintained behaviors)
 - can boost self-esteem and offer relationship safety (escape-maintained behaviors)
 - can offer as a social medium for those who struggle in the social world (attention-maintained behaviors)
 - visually pleasing and personalized items are attained (tangible items)

Concrete Ideas

- Ideas from parents about managing technology world
 - 15 min non-tech per hour of tech
 - 3-4 non-tech family dinners/week (30-45 min long)
 - Weekly 10-15 min tech chats without actual tech present, between parent/child
 - 5-7.5 min. for parent, 5-7.5 min. for child
 - Talk about what's going on in the individuals' tech world
 - Non-judgmental

Managing Internet Use

- Authoritarian Style
- Permissive Style
- Consistency

Parent Involvement

- Talk to child about online danger
- Assess your child's functioning – use real world information
 - Can they be safe online?
 - Can they recognize when something is unsafe?
- Discuss access to child's online activity
- Spend time with them online
 - Go to their favorite websites
 - Discuss safety per site

For More Information...

Questions?

Madeline Barger

madeline.barger@uwmf.wisc.edu

608-263-6469

General References

Contact me for specific sources

- Larry Rosen Phd: IGeneration, Multi-Tasking Madness
- Dr. Kimberly S. Young –The Center for Internet Addiction Recovery
- John Suler PhD: The Disinhibition Effect
- Marc Prensky: Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants