

Introducing Positive Development:

A Developmental Approach to Autism

July 18, 2023



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Introductions: Who am I?

 **Dr. Jennie**

- A bit about me....
- Education
- Experience
- Passions




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And you?



- *Knowledge about autism?*
 - Nearly an expert; A little; Nothing
- *Experience with autism?*
 - Nearly an expert; A little; Nothing
- *Heard of developmental approaches?*
- *Experience with developmental approaches?*
- Questions you want answered?


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Objectives

- Review what science/research tells us about autism and the brain
- Explore development & what it means to use a developmental approach
- Discuss individual differences and how to support
- The Power of Relationships
- Practical ways to improve interactions across settings
- Introducing Positive Development!
- Q&A

Ultimately My Goal:
Share an overview and Inspire!




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Autism: What we know

- Neurodevelopmental Disorder
- Often SO much smarter than we even know!
 - Disorder of Integration
 - Mind/Body connection
- Difficulty in relating and communicating



- Differences processing environments
 - sensory continuum

What does this mean?


Equation for Autism:
Anxiety x 24 x 365

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Autism Spectrum

The Autism Spectrum is not linear.



Less Autistic More Autistic

The Autism Spectrum looks more like:



- Social differences
- Interests
- Repetitions
- Sensory sensitivities
- Emotional regulation
- Perception
- Executive functioning
- Other

Terms like "high-functioning" and "low-functioning" can be harmful and outdated.

gautism_sketches

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Parts of the brain affected by autism

Corpus Callosum
This consists of closely packed bundles of fibers that connect the right and left hemispheres of the brain and allow them to communicate with one another.

Cerebral Cortex
A thin layer of gray matter on the surface of the cerebral hemispheres. Two-thirds of this area is deep in the fissure and folds. This area of the brain is responsible for higher mental functions, general movement, perception and behavioral reactions.

Basal Ganglia
This is gray masses deep within the cerebral hemisphere that connects the cerebrum and the cerebellum. It helps regulate automatic movement.

Hippocampus
This makes it possible to remember past information and recent events.

Amygdala
This is responsible for all emotional responses including aggressive behavior.

Cerebellum
This is located at the back of the brain. It fine tunes motor activity, regulates balance, body movements, coordination and the muscles used for speaking.

Brain Stem
The brain stem is in front of the cerebellum and serves as a busy station, passing messages between various parts of the body and cerebral cortex. It controls the primitive functions of the body essential to survival including breathing and heart rate.

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Saving Grace: Neuroplasticity!

- Majority of autistics can make significant developmental improvements
- Changing brain from the outside in
- Based on **experiences**

#1 way to increase neuroplasticity: PLAY!

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Typical Development

How does a child:

- Develop the miraculous ability to attend, to be calm and interested in the world?
- Begin to interact and engage with others?
- Learn to read others' gestures and indicate their own wants and needs?
- Develop the ability to think, plan, and solve physical problems?
- Develop the ability to become social and have compassion for others?

Let's think about "typical" development

(Stanley Greenspan, MD – Building Healthy Minds)

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Smell my feet!

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Smell my feet!

What did you notice?

Did the boy seem to feel safe?

Was he being validated/treated as intentional?

What kept the interaction going?

Video Review

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Development occurs within the context of a trusting relationship that is:

- Connected
- Meaningful/experience-based
- Responsive
- Movement-based
- Developmentally appropriate
- Affect-based
- Playful
- Fun! (Mostly Fun!)

What drives development?

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13 Why a developmental approach?

Neurodevelopmental disorder: Makes sense!

- Puts into practice what we know about autism, the brain, and development


Goes to the source for a lasting change

Focus on building strong developmental foundations

Sets the stage for higher levels of development

- Vs. isolated skills and behaviors
- Behaviors give us clues about what's going on, but not our goal

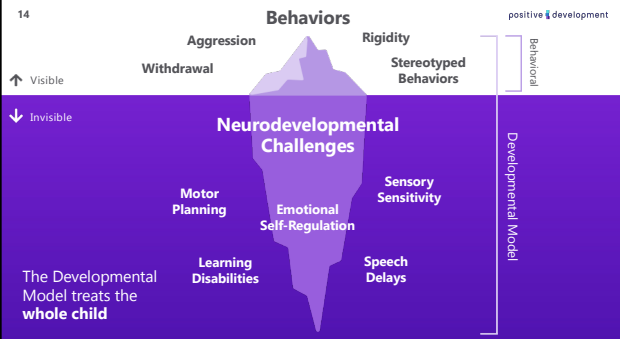
Why use a developmental approach?



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Behaviors

Aggression, Withdrawal, Rigidity, Stereotyped Behaviors

Neurodevelopmental Challenges

Motor Planning, Learning Disabilities, Emotional Self-Regulation, Sensory Sensitivity, Speech Delays

The Developmental Model treats the whole child

↑ Visible
↓ Invisible

Behavioral
Developmental Model

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GOALS of a Developmental Approach

Be well-regulated

Have healthy relationships

Have good self-esteem and positive experience

Have a strong sense of self and are able to function independently

Are in touch with their emotions

Are **independent thinkers** and **problem-solvers**

Are prepared emotionally, socially, behaviorally, and academically for less restrictive environments

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Key Components: Developmental Approach

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Developmental | We meet the client wherever they are developmentally and interact with them in fun and meaningful ways. Builds strong foundations! |
| Individual | We learn how the client processes the world around them. What are they experiencing and feeling? What are their strengths? Challenges? |
| Relationship-Based | We build meaningful relationships, based on safety and trust. We ALL learn best through relationships! |
| Transdisciplinary | Entire team works together, including the parents! Everyone's on the same page and working on similar goals in similar ways = higher generalization! |

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17 Building a Strong Foundation

Developmental Approach

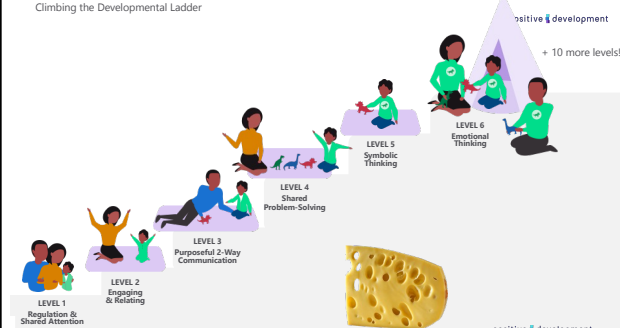
- Intervention is based on typical development.
- Basic capacities that all humans gradually master
- 6 core Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities
- Goal is to build strong developmental foundations for relating, communicating, and thinking
- Start where the child is – in this moment.
- Support each child to build strong foundations so we can build!



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Climbing the Developmental Ladder



LEVEL 1 Regulation & Shared Attention

LEVEL 2 Engaging & Relating

LEVEL 3 Purposeful 2-Way Communication

LEVEL 4 Shared Problem-Solving

LEVEL 5 Symbolic Thinking

LEVEL 6 Emotional Thinking

+ 10 more levels!

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Hallway Video positive & development

Think:
Where is this child Developmentally?
What strategies are being used?

Profectum

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What capacities did you see? positive & development

6. Building Bridges between Ideas & emotions
5. Creating Symbols
4. Shared Social Problem Solving
3. Back & Forth Communication
2. Social Engagement
1. Regulation & Attention

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I = Individual Differences positive & development

Our Education System
Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

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"If you've met one child on the autism spectrum, you've met ONE child on the autism spectrum."

Brian

- Doesn't participate in sports, he is laughed at during PE
- Has difficulty verbalizing his thoughts, so he gets frustrated and throws things
- Has trouble following instructions

Kayla

- Has strong opinions and only wants to talk about them
- Has difficulty following instructions when she is upset
- Wants to talk for long periods of time

Calvin

- Has a strong interest in cars and trucks
- Has trouble following instructions
- Has trouble following instructions

There is **nothing** "cookie cutter" about autism, and the same should be true for the intervention.

Intervention should be **tailored** to your child's Individual Profile.

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Individual Profile

How does each child take in and process information?

- Looks at:
 - Sensory system
 - Motor system
 - Visual-spatial processing
 - Language & auditory systems
 - Personality
 - Passions
 - Learning styles

The more we understand the child's profile and tailor our interactions to the child, the more effective intervention will be.

Proven by brain scans!
(Nature Neuroscience, 2014)

This profile determines how we experience the world, interact with others and learn.

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Understanding Behaviors

- The key to understanding behaviors is...
- Put yourself in their shoes. There might just be more to the story than you realize!

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Carly's Cafe


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Relationships




- Relationships drive development and all learning endeavors
- To feel safe
 - To allow them to think
 - To allow them to want to express their ideas
- To feel smart
- Positive sense of self
- Trust
- Motivation
- If we want them to think, they have to want to be there, to be comfortable, and to feel good about themselves!

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Believe/Presuming Competence

"The greatest gift you can give to a child is to believe in them. If you sincerely believe that all children can succeed, regardless of any challenges they may face, you can be of great service to them in their development. If your words, tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture all consistently reflect this belief, children will believe that you really mean it. This will help them to believe in themselves."



Star Power for Preschoolers

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My teacher thought I was smarter than I was – so I was.

Six-year-old


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How do I target development in intervention?

How does it all tie together?

- Meet the child where they are developmentally
- Consider individual profile
- Build upon interests
- Keep the relationship central!



- R+I= Developmental progress
- Q: How do we work on this??
 - A: Fun, playful, therapeutic interactions at the appropriate level
 - Prep, Wait, Join, Build, Reflect

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The Positive Way


Prep- yourself, child, & environment

Wait – watch and wonder

Join- the child's world

Build- your worlds together

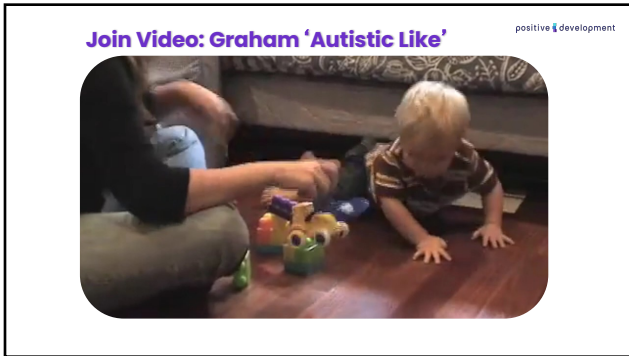
Reflect- how did it go?



Improving Every Interaction

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Graham...Did you notice?

Dad began by **waiting**, observing what his child was interested in...

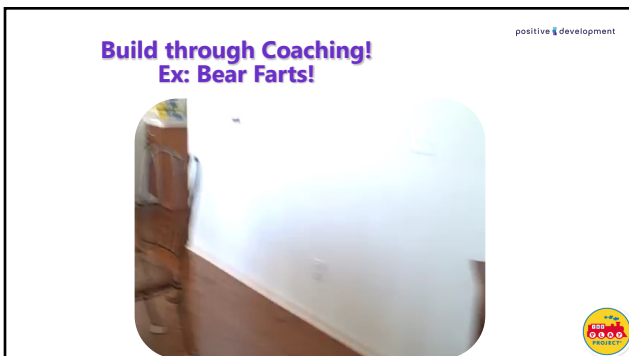
Dad went into the crib JUST wanting to **join/ connect**. Had no plans of his own...

The novelty made it fun!

Was dad able to **build** on the interaction?

We got to see his **reflect!**

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Take Home Tips

Be PRESENT

Prepare to tape your interactions

- Review your tapes, perhaps including family/team members

Prep, Wait, Join, Build, Reflect

Follow the child's lead- meet them where they are in THIS moment

Experimenting is OK!

Micro-moments can be powerful!

No 'right' or 'wrong'

- Sometimes you can learn more when things don't go as planned.

Practice, practice, practice!

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Resources!

•DIR & Autism Resources:

- oPositivedevelopment.com
- oProfectum.org
- oPLAYProject.org
- oICDL.com

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Some Book Recommendations

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INTRODUCING
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A New **Groundbreaking Choice** In Autism Therapy



WELCOME

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Training to appear 'normal' (masking)

Traditional Therapies

VS.



Supporting living authentic lives


Developmental Approach

Finally, Families Have a CHOICE!

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New Choice, but Not New Approach:
The Developmental Model

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Stanley Greenspan, M.D. Serena Wieder, Ph.D.

Established in the 1970s



Rooted in 50+ years of research




Relies on everyday activities, like play

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Multi-Disciplinary Approach: Developmental Autism Specialists are Key!

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Parents don't just get a therapist.

The family gets a team.

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41 The Positive Development Multi-Disciplinary Approach

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We all **work together and collaborate** to ensure every child's needs are met in the most effective ways.

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The More Involved Parents Are, the More Effective Intervention Becomes

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Parents keep progress going outside the therapeutic setting through everyday interactions


Parent/Family

Increased

- Parent self-efficacy, empowerment, and optimism
- Quality time together as a family
- Engagement within the community

Decreased

- Parent stress and depression



Child

Increased

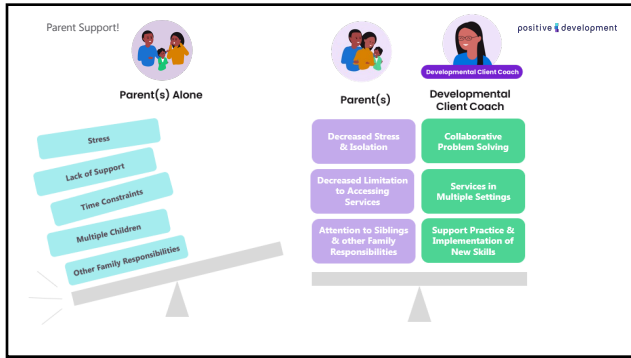
- Generalization and maintenance of skills
- Social communication skills
- Independence
- Developmental capacities

Decreased

- Challenging core symptoms and behaviors

DECREASED Dependence on 1:1 Services

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Southern, CA

- Los Angeles
- San Diego
- Pasadena

Florida

- Plantation

DMV Area

- Bethesda, MD
- Washington DC
- Northern VA

Illinois

- Deerfield
- North Shore of Chicago
- Southside of Chicago
- Metro East Area

New Jersey

- Parsippany
- Lakewood
- Cherry Hill

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Join our community & learn more about developmental play therapy

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- @positivedevelopmenttherapy
- @positivedevelopmenttherapy
- Positive Development, Inc.
- @positivedev

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Thank you for having us!

Questions??

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Community Development Manager

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