

Autism and Adaptive Behavior Fact Sheet

- Skills that promote independence in current and future environments (i.e., adaptive behavior skills) have been linked to more positive outcomes for adults on the autism spectrum, so these adaptive behavior skills should be prioritized.
(Bolte & Poustka, 2002; Dell'Armo & Tassé, 2019; Paul et al., 2004)
- Adaptive behavior skills have been shown to contribute to outcomes in a number of areas, including:
 - Quality of life
 - Social inclusion
 - Post-secondary education
 - Employment
 - Independent living
 (Baker et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2018; Farley et al., 2009; Klin et al., 2007; Ozboke et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2015)
- Adaptive behavior skill deficits...
 - are substantially present in individuals with ASD, regardless of intellectual level
 - often become more apparent with age
 - impact outcomes more so than cognitive level and autism symptom severity.
(Farley et al., 2009; Klin et al., 2007; Lee & Park, 2007; Mazefsky et al., 2008)
- Targeting adaptive skills as early as possible (and with sufficient intensity) can help to positively affect the long-term necessity (and cost) of services into adulthood.
(Farley et al., 2009; Klin et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2018; Zerbo et al., 2019)
- In an examination of the adaptive behavior skills of adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum, research has demonstrated a substantial need for lifelong intervention in this area. (Matthews et al., 2015)
- Potentially 70% or more of individuals on the autism spectrum have an intellectual disability, the diagnostic criteria of which includes deficits in adaptive functioning.
(American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Fombonne, 2003; La Malfa et al., 2004)
- In order to best serve all consumers (including indirect consumers such as family members), a focus on adaptive behavior skills (specifically those most important to the family) should be prioritized, given research that says:
 - QoL for family members of individuals with autism has been shown to be lower than that of parents of neurotypical children or population norms (Vasilopoulou & Nisbet, 2016) and may be improved by a focus on adaptive behavior skills.
 - A growing body of literature (e.g., Cappe et al., 2018; Fong et al., 2020; Lin, 2011) suggests the importance of adolescents and adults achieving functional independence to support parental well-being.
(e.g., the dependence of adult children on their parents for the completion of various daily living skills has been shown to be a statistically significant predictor of caregiver burden; Marsack-Topolewski et al., 2021)
- Given this research, skill-acquisition programs should include interventions in complex areas of human competence such as independence, safety, self-management, communication, time management, self-care, employment, etc., the acquisition of which may be associated with more positive overall outcomes in adulthood.
(Gerhardt et al., 2013)