
Spring 2024 Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium

OTD Capstone Symposia

Spring 4-17-2024

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Recommended Citation

Stovall,, B., Greer,, M., & McBride,, E. (2024, April 17). A Program to Address ADL Independence for Young Adults with Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder and Their Caregivers. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonesspring2024/69>

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A Program to Address ADL Independence for Young Adults with Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder and Their Caregivers

Benjamin Stovall, OTS; Dr. Mary Jan Greer, PhD, OTR; Elizabeth McBride, OTR

BACKGROUND

Young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and sensory processing disorder (SPD) often have difficulty understanding the steps to perform ADLs and may become overstimulated when performing their ADLs. Difficulties performing their ADLs cause dependence on their caregivers, which in turn causes both the client and caregiver to have increased stress and avoidance of these ADLs. Occupational therapists (OT) work with individuals with ASD and SPD, but there is little literature to support OT intervention with young adults or to reduce caregiver stress (Engel-Yeger and Dunn, 2011; Gonther et al., 2016; Kern et al., 2008; Ricon et al., 2017).

PROBLEM

Young adults with ASD and SPD continue to be dependent on their caregivers in their ADLs. These young adults and their caregivers often do not have the support or information needed to prioritize efforts and continue to move the young adults toward independence with their ADLs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this capstone was to develop a program for caregivers and young adults with ASD and SPD to increase independence and performance in ADLs and decrease the stress related to engaging in ADLs at this older age.

Acknowledgment: Special thanks to Doctoral Coordinator Dr. May Jan Greer and my Mentor and Site Supervisor Betty McBride

METHODS

Setting

- North Texas Therapy Innovations (NTTI) in Dallas, Texas

Participants

- 8 clients and their caregivers agreed to participate in the study.
- 8 clients and caregivers performed the needs assessment (pre-program functional independence measure [FIM] and caregiver questionnaire.
- 7 completed the post-program FIM and caregiver post-program questionnaire.
- **Needs Assessment:** Participants performed the FIM in the ADLs of eating, grooming, bathing, dressing upper-body, dressing lower-body, toileting, functional mobility, communication, and social cognition.
- Caregivers completed the caregiver questionnaire, which had twenty-one questions regarding their stress level during specific ADLs and what their primary concerns were regarding their young adult being able to complete these ADLs.

Topics covered:

1. Analyzing needs assessment
2. Communication with caregivers regarding specific ADL concerns and their stress levels
3. ADL training with participants
4. Self-regulation techniques when performing these ADLs
5. Caregiver education regarding ADL adaptations and stress management techniques
6. Provided deliverables
7. Post-program survey's

PROGRAM

Outcome Objectives:

1. Conduct a needs assessment for clients with ASD and SPD and their caregivers.
2. Create modules that include caregiver education, client sensory processing integration techniques, and strategies for increased ADL independence and performance.
3. Implement a program to address caregiver stress and burnout while supporting young adults toward independence with their ADLs.
4. Perform a post-program survey to staff and caregivers regarding the effectiveness and potential changes needed.
5. Providing deliverables to staff; education and materials to caregivers; and finalized program deliverables to the site.

Resources and Techniques

1. ADL Training
2. Sensory and self-regulation techniques
3. Cognitive, communication, and social techniques
4. Education with caregivers on sensory food progression, stress management techniques, ASD, and SPD
5. Deliverables regarding food progressions, toileting routine, stress management techniques for caregivers, education regarding ASD and SPD, and a young adult brochure

Theoretical Frameworks:

1. The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)

Conclusions / Future Directions

The program facilitated improvement in independence with multiple ADLs for most participants. Data also shows the need and benefits of ADL training, education, and strategies with this population to improve ADL independence and decrease caregiver stress. Within the field of OT, more OTs need to work with this population to focus on ADL participation and independence within their environment, and more education needs to be given to caregivers to ensure their decreased stress and the level of support their young adults need to grow in their independence within these ADLs.

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