

PLENARY SESSION – CULTURE, VALUES AND PROJECTS IN CLINICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS – 28TH JUNE 2014

Cognitive Behavior Therapy for adult Asperger Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

With the recent growth in awareness of autism spectrum disorders, there are increasing numbers of adults with Asperger syndrome (AS) seeking diagnosis and help for their problems in daily living.

Adult patients typically come to a therapist for help with social problems that they are attributing to AS/HFA, and/or for help with secondary psychiatric disorders, most commonly anxiety or mood symptoms. Chronic stress comes with a dramatically uneven profile of strengths and deficits. Generally bright and often successful with academic pursuits, they struggle in the interpersonal domain of functioning.

People with AS/HFA have an idiosyncratic way of processing both social and non-social information that has been present since birth or early childhood. Their unique perception has in some ways adversely affected their development and social experiences, resulting in negative consequences. It causes them to exhibit behavior that is can cause them to look different or to be unappealing to others and also leads to impairment in non-social areas of functioning, such as organization and self-direction, which increases the level of stress in daily living.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is becoming more widely perceived as a viable treatment modality for individuals with AS/HFA, and some authors have recommended the use of it.

These adults can learn to re-conceptualize social interactions and become more able to more accurately “read” the behavior of others.

For adults with AS/HFA, this means to:

- teach new cognitive and behavioral skills that were never learned
- teach compensatory strategies for deficits that cannot be changed
- facilitate self-acceptance
- teach strategies to decrease or prevent symptoms of co-morbid mental health problems, such as anxiety disorders and depression .

Keywords: Asperger Syndrome, Adult, HFA, CBT

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