

# Transition to Adulthood for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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# Outcomes in Adulthood

- Living independently: 10-40%
- College: 0-25%
- Employed: 15-35%
- Have friends: 15-20%
- Married: 0-25%
- Overall adjustment:
  - Good 20-30%
  - Fair 20-30%
  - Poor 40-75%

(Adapted from Howlin, 2005)

# Connecticut Pilot Program Study Sample (2008)

- n=28
- 14% completed college; 50% had some college
- 64% living at home with parents
- 39% working
  - Averaging 19 hours/week
  - Of those working, 45% earning < \$10/hour; 55% earning between \$10 and \$20/hour

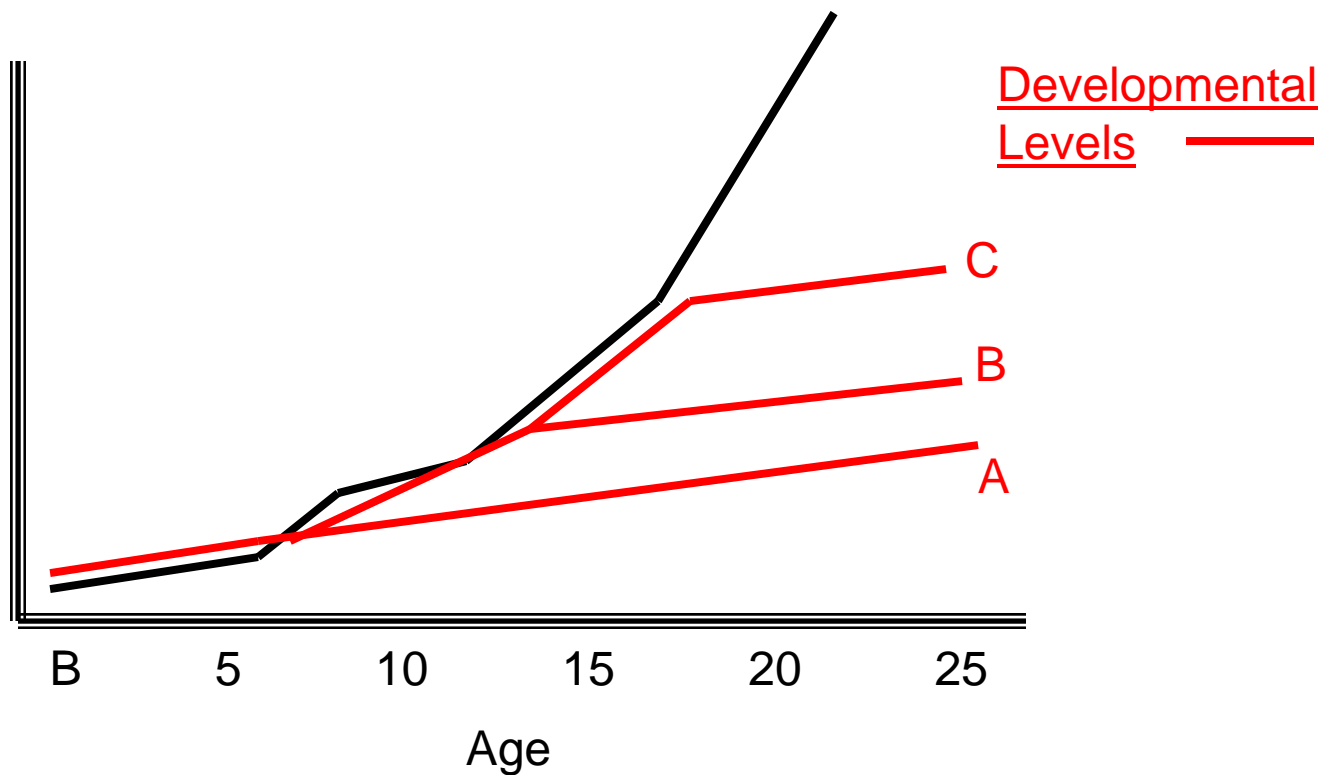
# Connecticut Pilot Program Study Sample (2008)

- Average number of relatives seen at least once per month = 1.18
- Average number of close friends seen at least once per month = 1.04
- Average total screen hours\*/day = 7.81

\* Video games + computer + television

# Course of Development

Level of Demands:  
Academic,  
Social, &  
Adaptive



# The Challenges of Adulthood for Individuals with ASDs

## 1. Self care

Sensory/motor difficulties

Self-observation and monitoring

Understanding social expectations/rules

## 2. Managing an independent residence

Maintenance/upkeep issues

Financial management

Judgment/safety decisions

Functional social interactions with service people

# Challenges of Adulthood

## 3. Functioning in the community

Getting around (driving, mass transit)

Functional social interactions with  
merchants, community members

Judgment/safety decisions, interacting  
with first responders

Vulnerability

# Challenges of Adulthood

## 4. Functioning on the job

Work demands- processing challenges

Social and communication demands

Appearance

Initiative and problem solving

# Challenges of Adulthood

## 5. Social interactions

Finding appropriate peers

Making invitations

Moving from acquaintance to friend

Dating relationships

Internet based interactions

# Common Challenging Scenarios for Adults

- Withdrawn: Adult spends most or all of the time with soothing activities (e.g. video-games, internet, watching TV, eating).....*make them uncomfortable*
- Frustrated: Highest functioning individuals that are fairly independent, yet are socially aware enough to aspire to having high level jobs or dating relationships.....*continue to build skills and connect them with resources*

# Common Challenging Scenarios for Adults

- Disruptive: Adult struggles with self-regulation and anger management, leading to job losses and problems with the legal authorities.....*treat the self-regulation problems, reduce stress, go slowly*

# Common Challenging Scenarios

- Lack of support network: Without functional family, financial support, or community resources.....*use case management approach, build support network*
- “Too much” family support: Families struggling to launch the adult because of concerns regarding the disability or other family issues.....*family based consultation, respect the family’s need to hold on*

# Common Challenging Scenarios

- Poor preparation for adulthood: Young adults (sometimes with a range of good splinter skills), with limited independence and functional competencies....*take a step back and build the basic competencies*
- Dual diagnosis: Complications beyond the ASD/developmental disability related to depression, substance abuse, psychosis, or other mental health issues.....*treat the co-morbid condition while coordinating efforts among all providers*

# Transition Strategies: School Years

- Start early (In middle school)
- Teach to the next environment
- Use the Transition Plan process
- Emphasize social, communication, vocational, and adaptive objectives within the program (sacrifice academic objectives when necessary )
- Include community based learning experiences
- Hold off graduation until the age of 21

# Six Essential Challenges to Address

1. Motivation (vocational, social, adaptive)
2. Self-regulation
3. Initiation
4. Reciprocal communication
5. Social skills
6. Executive functioning/higher order judgment and reasoning

# Transitional Strategies: Vocational

- Start with interest inventories and job shadowing (watching)
- Job sampling, internships, on the job evaluations (doing)
- After-school and summer employment, volunteer and paid
- Formal training programs
- Working interviews, on the job training

# Transition Strategies: Vocational

- Use job coach
- Apply instructional techniques known to be effective with individuals with ASDs (e.g. visuals, chunking, repetition)
- Include training about foundational skills: hygiene/appearance, social skills, how/when to ask for help, hidden curriculum

# Transitional Strategies: After High School

- Form a team including caseworkers, state agency staff, providers, family, community contacts and friends
- Network with regard to jobs, housing, and social contacts
- Advocate for resources provided by the State

# State Resources

- **State Department of Education**: IDEA – providing an appropriate education for individuals with disabilities
- **Bureau of Rehabilitation Services** (Dept. of Social Services): Helping individuals with disabilities find competitive employment
- **Connecticut Pilot Program for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders** (Dept. of Developmental Services): Community based services to support independent living, social participation, and employment
- **Department of Developmental Services**: Residential, recreational, behavioral, and vocational programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities

# Connecticut Pilot Program: Services Provided

- Community based coaching (life skills, education, job skills)
- Community mentoring
- Social skills groups
- Case management
- Job development
- Behavioral services
- Respite services
- Driver training
- Consultation

# Transition Programs

- High school/Community College based day programs
- College/university based programs (UCONN, Mitchell College, Leslie College)
- Residential programs which provide work/college experiences, social skills development, and independent living skills
  - Challenges include high price tag and poor generalization

# Selected Readings

- Baker, Jed (2005), Preparing for Life. Future Horizons.
- Hawkins, Gail (2004), How to Find Work That Works for People with Asperger Syndrome. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Connecticut's Transition Training Manual and Resource Directory (2004). Connecticut Interagency Transition Task Force (on line from CT Dept. of Educ.)