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The Role of Medication in the Treatment
of Emotional and Behavioral Concerns for
Children on the Spectrum

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‘Uncomplicated’ Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

- Social
 - Development of social skills
- Communication
 - Functional language
- Restricted interests/repetitive behaviors
 - Increased flexibility over time
- Absence of significant co-occurring conditions
 - Attention, level of activity, impulsivity
 - Impulse control



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Review of Concepts

- ‘Complicated’ ASDs
 - Medical
 - Gastrointestinal Disorders
 - Seizure Disorders
 - Emotional and Behavioral
 - Psychiatric Disorders



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Psychiatric Disorders in Children with Autism

- 70% percent of children had at least one co-morbid disorder and
- 41% had two or more.
- The most common diagnoses
 - social anxiety disorder (29%)
 - attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (28%)
- Of those with ADHD, 84% received a second co-morbid diagnosis

Simonoff et al. 2008



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Development Over Time

- Autism
 - Stable emotional and behavioral features
- Autism + emotional and behavioral dysregulation
 - Very early presentation of emotional and behavioral dysregulation
 - Inattention/hyperactivity
 - Aggression directed at self and others
 - Irritability
- Autism and new onset co-morbidity
- Autism + emotional and behavioral dysregulation +new onset co-morbidity



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Emotional and Behavioral Presentation

- When is treatment indicated
 - Level of distress
 - Presentation of symptoms and behaviors in multiple settings
 - School
 - Home
 - Social settings
 - Overall impairment of functioning



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Timing of Emotional/Behavioral Presentations

- Early childhood
 - ‘Disruptive’
 - Increased activity
 - ‘Oppositional’
 - Impulsivity
 - Aggression
 - Often seen in interactions with younger siblings
 - Irritability
 - Emotional lability
- Range in severity
- Mixture of all to varying degrees



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Co-occurrence in ASD

- Mood Disorders
 - Depression
 - Bipolar spectrum disorders
- Anxiety
 - Phobias
 - Social anxiety disorder
 - Obsessive-compulsive disorder
 - Post traumatic stress disorder
- Disruptive Behavioral Disorders
 - ADHD



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Co-occurrence in ASD

- Impulse Control Disorders
 - Aggression
 - Eating disorder
 - Self injury
- Other
 - Tourette Disorder
 - Sleep disorders
 - Catatonia
 - Psychotic Disorders



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Autism and OCD

- Can children with autism have OCD?



Repetition in Autism

- Repetitive stereotypic
 - ‘stims’
- Compulsivity
 - OCD
- Impulsivity
 - ADHD
- Impulse control
 - Aggression, eating patterns
 - Self Injury
- Tics
- Side-effect of medication



OCD

- Separate from repetitive ‘stim’ behaviors
- Presentation
 - Sudden onset
 - Increased social difficulty
 - Many rituals
 - Severe distress if interrupted or obsessions not calmed by sufficient compulsive behavior
- Some resistance to compulsions



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Latasha

- Age 14
- Sudden onset
- Rituals involving movement
- Repetitive
- Very distressing if interrupted
- Debilitating
- Limited response to behavioral treatment
- Medication approach



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Treatment Approaches

- Behavioral
 - Starting point
 - Particular focus on disruptive behaviors and impulse control issues
- Cognitive-behavioral
 - Includes exposure and response prevention
 - Focus on anxiety spectrum disorders
- Family therapy



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Treatment Approaches

- Social Interventions
 - Exercise programs
 - Recreational programs



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Medication Treatment Approaches

- Targeting:
 - Co-occurring conditions



Medication Treatment: Classes of Psychotropic medications

- Antidepressants
 - Selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors
 - Example: Prozac, Zoloft, Lexapro
 - Serotonin and norepinephrine re-uptake inhibitors
 - Example: Effexor
- Neuroleptics
 - Typical
 - Example: Thorazine
 - Atypical
 - Example: Risperdal and Abilify



Medication Treatment: Classes of Medications

- **Psychostimulants**
 - Example: Ritalin, Adderall, Vyvanse
- **Non stimulant treatments ADHD**
 - Example: Strattera



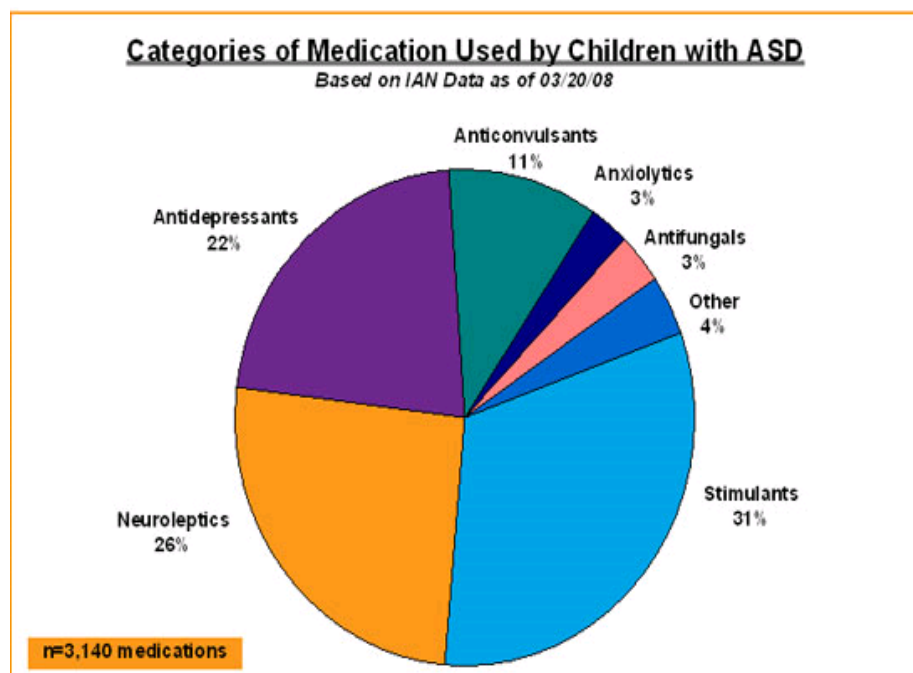
Medication Treatment: Classes of Medications

- **Alpha Agonists**
 - Example: Catapres, Kapvay, Tenex, Intuniv
- **Mood stabilizers**
 - Examples:
 - Depakote
 - Lithium
 - Lamictal
 - Tegretol



Pharmacological Treatment: Classes of Psychotropic medications

- Anti-anxiety medications
 - Benzodiazepines
 - Example: Ativan and Klonopin
- Other
 - Example: Buspar



Thank you

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