

The Role of Audiologists in Autism Spectrum Disorder

Position Statement

It is the position of Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) that audiologists play an essential role in autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A comprehensive audiological assessment is a fundamental and necessary step in moving forward with proper diagnosis and intervention for this complex disorder.

Rationale

ASD is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioural challenges (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Some indicators of ASD can be similar to those of auditory disorders such as hearing loss or auditory processing disorder. These indicators may include delayed or atypical speech, deficits in social communication and social interaction as well as difficulty focusing and inattentiveness (Whitelaw, 2003). ASD assessments must include a comprehensive audiological evaluation to assist in proper diagnosis, and/or differential diagnosis, as it is possible for an individual to have both ASD and hearing impairment (Easterbrooks & Handley, 2005; Szymanski & Brice, 2008). Evidence has shown that best practice in ASD is collaborative, customized to the individual's needs and informed by developmental and behavioural principles (National Research Council, 2011; National Standards Project, 2009, 2015; Ospina et al., 2008; Parsons et al., 2017; Rubin, 2017; Schreibman et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2014; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015). This position statement aims to raise awareness about the important role of audiologists in ASD.

Role of audiologists in Autism Spectrum Disorder

Audiologists are hearing health professionals who identify, diagnose and treat individuals with peripheral or central hearing loss, tinnitus, hyperacusis, misophonia, vestibular and balance disorders, auditory processing disorders and other auditory disorders across the lifespan. The role of audiologists is vital whenever suspicions of ASD exist.

Some individuals with ASD may exhibit behaviours that make it challenging to conduct an audiological assessment (e.g. hypersensitivity to sounds) (Lane et al., 2010). Therefore, audiologists must modify their strategies, as needed, in order to obtain valid test results. Objective assessment measures should be used to confirm behavioural testing when necessary, in order to ensure

accuracy of audiological test results. Addressing auditory function will contribute to the success of other interprofessional assessments and interventions, which strive to improve outcomes and quality of life for people with ASD.

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