

# Youth with Different Abilities

JUTTA DOTTERWEICH


ACT FOR YOUTH CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

<https://vimeo.com/392044905/97e26bc585>



# Complementary to...

New training manual:



2020

*Creating  
Inclusive Program  
Environments  
for Youth with  
Different Abilities*

A CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH WORK PROFESSIONALS

# Presenter

Jutta Dotterweich  
Director of Training  
ACT for Youth Center for  
Community Action  
Cornell University  
[www.actforyouth.net](http://www.actforyouth.net)



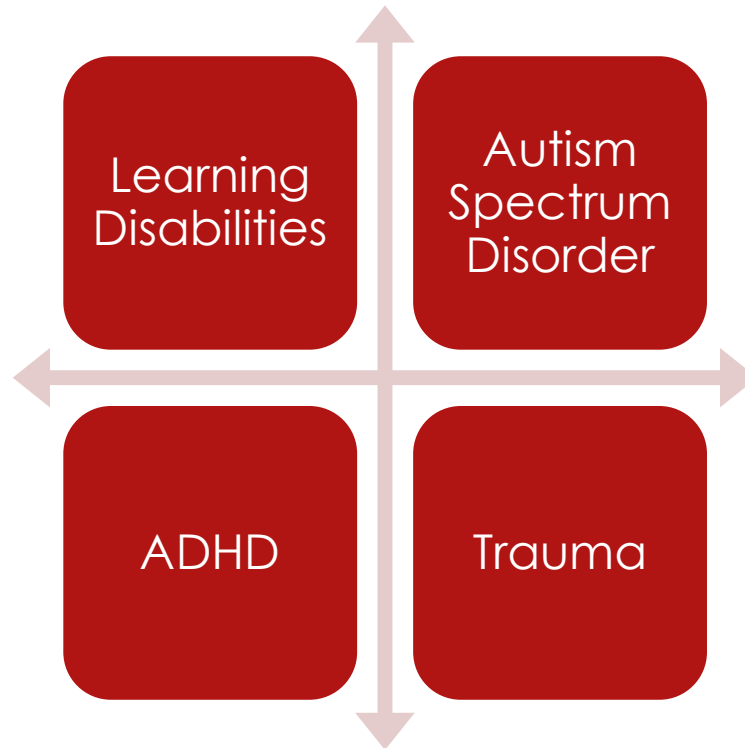
Contact:  
[jd81@cornell.edu](mailto:jd81@cornell.edu)

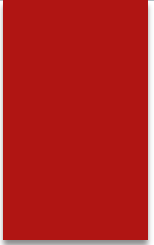



# Objectives

- ▶ Scope of this presentation
- ▶ Disability versus neurodiversity
- ▶ Increase understanding of “invisible” disabilities
  - ▶ Manifestations, etiology, prevalence and treatment
- ▶ Resources

# Focus on “Invisible” Disabilities





# Disability versus Neurodiversity

## Implications of terminology

**Disorder** – symptoms causing dysfunction, cause unknown

**Disease** – medical term, causal mechanism known

**Disability** – below average functioning (on standardized measure), impacts functioning in a particular environment (education)

Simon Baron-Cohen Blog Post, 2019:

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-concept-of-neurodiversity-is-dividing-the-autism-community/>



# Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is a neurological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to store, process, or produce information.

Common types of learning disabilities:

- Dyslexia (reading)
- Dyscalculia (math)
- Dysgraphia (writing)
- Dyspraxia (Fine motor skills)
- Dysphasia (spoken language)



# Impact

Learning disabilities, when not recognized and addressed early, will have lasting impact on school performance and adult functioning.

- ▶ Less likely to graduate from high school
  - ▶ More likely to be suspended
- ▶ More likely to be involved with juvenile justice
- ▶ Less likely to succeed in college
- ▶ More likely to be unemployed

NCLD: The State of Learning Disabilities.

<https://www.nclid.org/research/state-of-learning-disabilities/>





# Prevalence & Intervention

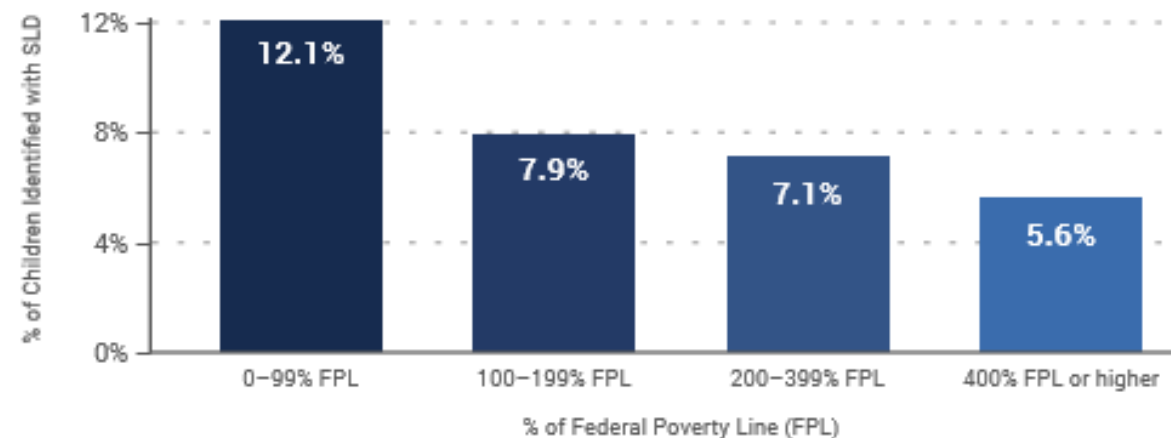
- ▶ 1 in 5 children have learning and attention issues (NCLD)
  - ▶ 5-15% of school age children struggle with learning disabilities (APA)
  - ▶ 80% of youth with learning disabilities have dyslexia (APA)
  - ▶ 1/3 of people with learning disabilities are also estimated to have attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (APA)
- 
- ▶ Early intervention and screening
  - ▶ Supportive and inclusive classrooms
  - ▶ Focus on social and emotional learning

# Disparities

## DISPARITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION

Learning and attention issues affect children from all income levels and across all races and ethnicities. Yet low-income children, students of color and English language learners are more likely to be identified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD). Bias plays a key role in over- and underrepresentation.

### SLD Identification by Income Level



<https://www.nclld.org/research/state-of-learning-disabilities/>

# Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity

- ▶ Get distracted easily and forget things
- ▶ Switch too quickly from one activity to next
- ▶ Have trouble with directions
- ▶ Have trouble finishing tasks
- ▶ Lose things
- ▶ Fidget and run around a lot
- ▶ Touch and play with everything they see
- ▶ Blurt out inappropriate comments
- ▶ Have trouble controlling their emotions



# Impact

- ▶ Usually diagnosed by the time the child enters elementary school
- ▶ Impacts quality of functioning in school, socially, and at work
- ▶ Children may require special education classes
- ▶ Many adolescents may struggle with relationships and antisocial behavior
- ▶ Often associated with learning disabilities, anxiety disorders and depression



# Prevalence

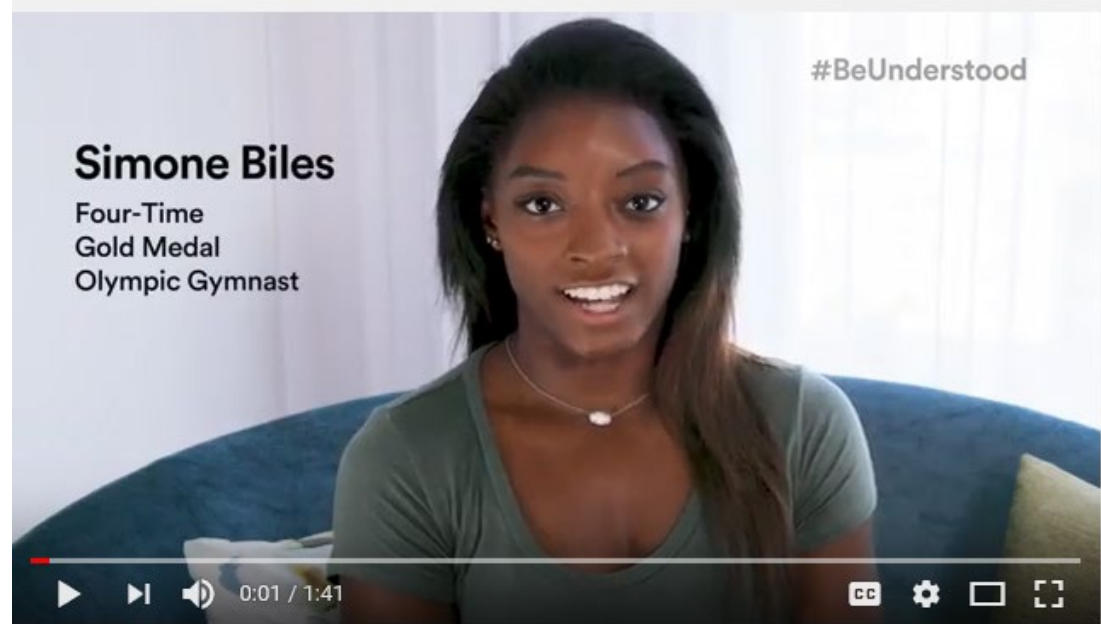
- ▶ 8.4% of children; 2.5% of adults (APA)
- ▶ More common with boys; females more likely to present inattentive features
- ▶ Less frequent in African American and Latino populations
- ▶ Risk factors: genes, cigarettes, drug or alcohol abuse during pregnancy, exposure to environmental toxins during pregnancy, exposure to lead or similar toxins at early age, low birth weight, brain injuries



# Treatment

- ▶ Medication
- ▶ In school: alternative classroom set up and behavior management
- ▶ Parenting skills training
- ▶ Psychotherapy and psychosocial interventions

# Building on Strengths



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbYSNww979g>



# Autism Spectrum Disorder

A developmental disorder: Symptoms usually appear in the first two years of life

- ▶ Impaired social interaction
- ▶ Difficulty in communication
- ▶ Tendency to have a restricted range of interest and engage in repetitive behavior



### MEASURED INTELLIGENCE

Intellectual disability —●— Gifted

### SOCIAL INTERACTION

(Making eye contact, enjoying interaction with others, etc.)

Not interested in others —●— A variety of friendships

### COMMUNICATION

(Using words correctly to communicate)

Nonverbal —●— Verbal

### BEHAVIORS

(Repetitive behaviors, unusual behaviors such as hand flapping, etc.)

Intense —●— Mild

### SENSORY

(Response to touch, smell, sound, taste, and feel)

Not very sensitive —●— Very sensitive

Pain                      Sounds

### MOTOR

(Gross motor, such as walking)

(Fine motor, such as using fingers to grasp a small item)

Uncoordinated —●— Coordinated

Fine                      Gross

Roughly 1/3 children with ASD are identified with impaired intellectual functioning

Etiology:

- Unknown
- Risk factors: siblings with ASD, older parents, certain genetic conditions, very low birth weight

Prevalence:

- 1 in 59 children in 2014  
(1 in 150 children in 2000)
- 4 times more boys

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/signs.html>



# Treatment Strategies

Early screening and intervention are critical

- ▶ Behavior and communication therapies
- ▶ Educational programs
- ▶ Family therapies
- ▶ Other therapies
- ▶ Medications

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20352934>



# Living with Trauma

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

SAMHSA 2014



# Stress Response: Flight, Fight or Freeze

## Increased:

- Hypervigilance, arousal, paranoia
- Perceptual and information processing distortions
- Pain tolerance
- Emotional blunting
- Aggression and irritability

## Decreased:

- Memory processing and retrieval
- Reality testing
- Body and emotional awareness
- Immune response



# Re-Traumatization

A situation, attitude, interaction, or environment that **replicates the events or dynamics of the original trauma** and **triggers** the overwhelming feelings and reactions associated with them



# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Symptoms last longer than a month after event

- ◉ Intrusive re-experiencing of the trauma, avoiding trauma reminders (triggers), and persistent state of alert
- ◉ Related emotional and behavioral problems
- ◉ Co-occurs with other disorders (anxiety, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder)
- ◉ Treatment approaches: Cognitive behavior therapy, neurofeedback, EMDR, yoga

Estimated prevalence in children and youth: 15-43% experience trauma  
◉ 3-15% of girls and 1-6% of boys develop PTSD

National Center for PTSD: [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common\\_children\\_teeasp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_children_teeasp)

# Impact of Trauma

Behavioral Effects	Cognitive Effects	Social Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Risk taking</li><li>- Acting out</li><li>- Rule breaking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Attention</li><li>- Memory</li><li>- Executive functions</li><li>- Verbal abilities</li><li>- Skills development</li><li>- Language</li><li>- Group work</li><li>- Problem solve</li><li>- Transition</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Impulsivity</li><li>- Aggression</li><li>- Deviance</li><li>- Withdrawal</li><li>- Challenged relationships</li></ul>



# Trauma-Informed Approach: Guiding Principles

- 
- 1 Create Safe & Inclusive Environment
  - 2 Transparency/Predictability
  - 3 Choice/Empowerment
  - 4 Participation/Collaboration





# Resources & References

American Psychiatric Association (APA): Specific Learning Disorder

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/specific-learning-disorder/what-is-specific-learning-disorder>

Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/>

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) <https://www.nclid.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>

American Psychiatric Association (APA): ADHD <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/adhd/what-is-adhd>

Interacting with Autism <http://www.interactingwithautism.com/>

National Institute of Mental Health: Autism Spectrum Disorder

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>



# Resources

APA: What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder? <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. 2014. <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network <http://www.nctsn.org/>

ACT for Youth: Trauma Informed Approach  
[http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual\\_health/community/capp/trauma.cfm](http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/capp/trauma.cfm)