

Autism & IEPs: From Identification to Intervention

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Session Description:

Navigating the process from medical diagnosis to educational eligibility and IEP development can be complex, especially when addressing children with Autism. This presentation will guide educators, professionals, and caregivers through the essential steps of the process, starting with understanding the distinction between medical diagnoses and school eligibility. We will explore how to use the 11 IEP considerations to develop an individualized education plan, covering essential aspects like goal setting, determining appropriate placements and services, and selecting interventions. The session will focus on practical tools and strategies, such as breaking down SMART goals, identifying evidence-based interventions, and exploring external supports. By the end of the session, participants will be equipped with the knowledge to navigate the IEP process for students with Autism.

Learning Objectives:

1. Differentiate between a medical diagnosis and educational eligibility
2. Guide participants through the IEP development process using the 11 considerations, determining appropriate settings, and SMART goals.
3. Explore best practices for setting and measuring goals across multiple domains, including social-emotional learning, academics, functional skills, communication, and transitioning.

Maria O. Mendez (She/Her), PhD, MEd, is a nationally certified counselor and school psychologist. She is currently a senior program therapist/coordinator for the University of New Mexico's START Program. Maria earned her doctorate in School Psychology from Loyola University Chicago. She has clinical experience providing therapeutic support and diagnosis to individuals with mental health needs in a variety of settings, including schools, communities, and hospitals. Maria has worked with diverse populations and ages facing emotional and behavioral challenges, including those with diagnoses such as Autism and other Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities.

Tiffany Otero, PhD, is a licensed psychologist and the Clinical Director of the NM START program at the UNM Center for Development and Disability. She specializes in diagnostic assessment and mental health intervention for individuals with known or suspected developmental differences. She began her career as a behavior analyst and special educator, before pursuing her degree in School Psychology with an emphasis in pediatric neuropsychology.

Brandon Rennie, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the department of pediatrics at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center. He is a licensed psychologist in the Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities Division at the Center for Development and Disability where he specializes in the evaluation of children suspected of having autism spectrum disorder. His research interests are in screening and diagnosis of neurodevelopmental differences, rural aspects of disability, and culturally sensitive practices.