

## **Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges for those with ASD/ID and Co-Occurring Disruptive and Mood Disorders**

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### **Session Description:**

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disability (ID) frequently present with severe externalizing behaviors alongside mood dysregulation, yet clinical presentations and etiologies differ from neurotypical populations. This presentation will (1) clarify diagnostic distinctions and overlap among common diagnoses and behavioral descriptions used for those with ASD/ID highlighting communication, sensory, and cognitive factors that confound standard diagnostic criteria; (2) summarize medical and behavioral etiologies relevant to ASD/ID, including neurodevelopmental and genetic contributors, sensory processing differences, pain and medical comorbidities, sleep and medication effects, learned contingencies, attachment/relational patterns, and trauma; (3) examine barriers to accurate assessment and treatment—such as atypical symptom expression, diagnostic overshadowing, limited adapted assessment tools, service fragmentation, clinician training gaps, family stressors, and systemic access inequities; and (4) present novel, practical intervention approaches informed by behavioral and positive psychology and trauma-informed care tailored for ASD/ID populations: function-based behavioral supports adapted for cognitive and communicative level, strengths-based skill-building (social, emotion regulation, adaptive communication), sensory-informed strategies, caregiver coaching and coaching-on-the-job, restorative and relational practices, and collaborative medical review protocols. Attendees will gain targeted assessment heuristics, decision points for differential diagnosis, and evidence-informed, person-centered intervention frameworks to improve outcomes for people with ASD/ID and co-occurring disruptive and mood disorders.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- 1) Describe the differences between common diagnoses given to those with severe and challenging externalizing behaviors and mood regulation differences
- 2) Describe known medical and behavioral etiologies of these differences.
- 3) Discuss various barriers to assessment and treatment for those with these co-occurring conditions
- 4) Identify novel intervention approaches, informed by positive and behavioral psychology, and trauma-informed care.

**Tiffany Otero** is a licensed psychologist and the Clinical Director of the NM START program at the UNM Center for Development and Disability. She specializes in diagnostics, mental health, crisis planning and 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.