ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AS A HIDDEN FORM OF AGGRESSION

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ABRASCT
This article is about different form of behavior of children with ASD, associated with child’s daily life. The major point of discussion is evaluation of addictive behaviour as a hidden form of aggressive behavior and aggression with its various forms, including self-aggression.

Key words: addictive behavior, autism, aggression

Autistic children in their ontogenetic development go through different stages related to change in the three main aspects of the disorders associated with social interaction, language and behavior. The characteristics of autism in most cases draw the attention to manifestation of self-isolation, stereotyped movements, ritual movements, experiencing difficulties with visual communication, self-aggression and aggression.

The analysis of the behavioral sphere in autistic children focuses on the behavioral reactions associated with the child’s daily life and displayed in different settings and in the contact with different people. In this aspect, the opinion of various authors can be considered. They are united by the idea about the manifestation of aggressive behavior in autistic children. Aggressive behavior can be observed in its various forms, e.g. aggression towards others or child-directed aggression (self-aggression).

The interest in this type of behavior in autistic children is justified since it helps decipher different behavioral reactions and tries to find the origin of their display. It seems that in autistic children aggression is accepted as an intrinsic feature and is used to explain the peculiarity in the behavior of this group of children. In this case, we believe that aggression and aggressive behavior in autistic children incorporate deeply coded internal impulses which generate the aggressive behavior and often are decoded wrongly by the parents and the professionals working with those children.

One aspect of this code is the addiction of the autistic child to a specific object, item, people, events and changes that may eventually occur in their explicitness. The relation between the child’s strong attachment expanding to an addiction to certain collectively called "objects" that have been chosen by the child, is also a process of "self-rewarding", "self-stimulation."

Such form of affection is extremely strong for the child and its termination results in negative emotions represented by the sudden changes which the child does not want to accept and rejects. In this case the child demonstrates the so-called addictive behavior. Its manifestation is an effort to compensate (unconsciously in most cases) for the emotional dissatisfaction.

When unable to do so, the autistic child combines in way that the other find interesting, the emotional dissatisfaction with an aggressive reaction and this amalgam is so well bonded that the adults are unable to understand what is going on and how they could possibly help the child overcome this state.

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A more detailed analysis of the aggression in children on the autism spectrum outlines different factors which determine one or another type of “bad behavior”. In the opinion of John Clements (2015, pages 10-11), bad behavior “causes significant damages”. The author believes that these damages have their own price, e.g. “physical, social, worldly, financial, emotional”. Payment of this price involves all the people related to the child somehow.

Our observations on the behavioral sphere of autistic children support the judgments J. Clements about the difficulties and the price that everyone "pays" because working with an autistic child or is a family member. In most cases, child’s closest people adopt two completely opposite roles-complete self-devotion or acquiescence, anticipating the problems to be solved as the child grows older. Understanding the behavioral reaction and adopting a strategy for preventing aggression, are key points associated with a positive change in managing the situation but also helping the child facing such a problem. In order to give an answer to the question what the root cause for the "bad behavior" is, it is natural to focus on two of the main problems for the autistic child - social indifference and the loss of the child’s good wellbeing, both of them directly related to the child’s aversion to external stimuli.

Working with children on the autistic spectrum reveals that overcoming of these two major problems significantly reduces aggressive displays and demonstration of aggressive behavior in general. The explanation for this is referred to the child’s own feeling of discomfort resulting from the process of eliminating these two problems.

Assuming that the loss of social engagement is a form of unconscious "comfort" for the child which deepens child’s social isolation, the desire of the parents and the professionals to change this status quo, is undoubtedly resulting in opposition of the child, and as a result the display of rude and aggressive behavior in an attempt to preserve the "comfort" which the child prefers. In this case, the child’s desire is to preserve child’s own privacy. This desire is in total disagreement with the desire of the parent or the professional to include the child in the child’s social surroundings. We tend to observe aggressive reaction in the child as a form of defense reaction in response to any change related to the child’s subjective understanding.

In our opinion, the two above-mentioned factors, i.e. social indifference and the loss of good wellbeing, are closely intertwined. Destroying the "status quo" chosen by the child, disturbs the child’s inner peace and unlocks processes that affect child’s general emotional state. As a natural reaction on side of the child, comes the violent disagreement which unfolds in the form of physical aggression towards others or the child itself.

One might think that those working with the child or the specific situation itself in which the child is caught, are provocative factors that catalyze the process of aggressive behavior manifestation. It is natural to look for approaches to:
1. Avoid problem situations and
2. Choose and approach for gradual adaptation of the child to the new settings

It is reasonable to assume that a situation cannot always be successfully eliminated. Also, there is also the question if this elimination is a good enough strategy. In this regard, the better approach is working for adaptation of the autistic child to the changing environment and situations.

In this aspect, the studies of many authors (O. Nikolskaya, V. M. Basina, K. S. Lebedinskaya, J. Clements, etc.) reveal the positive sides of the strategy focused on adaptation and also its possibilities for overcoming the aggressive behaviour in autistic children.

For example, the development of skills for adaptation of the child to the negative settings and situations in the opinion of these authors includes: use of communication skills, motor control, self-soothing strategies, sensory blocking.

The above strategies (regardless of the fact that they are differently formulated by the researchers working in this field) put together the understanding related to the need of developing skills in the autistic child which will help the child cope with aggression, negative emotions that provoke it, and abilities to deal with their own aggressive behavior in general.

Some of these approaches the child intuitively applies in a number of cases, when the settings and their fast and dramatic change cause discomfort to the child and disturb child’s overall psychosomatic condition. These can include: stereotypical movements, self-stimulation by rhythmical sway, chaotic (for us, but not for the child) waving of the hands.
in front of the eyes, manipulating a specific object chosen by the child, etc.

Their inclusion as a component for relaxing and adaptation to the environment and settings in which the child is placed, have been "developed" by the autistic child itself and are designed to self-soothing. When an adult family member or a professional working with the child wants to discontinue those approaches, a serious question comes out, i.e. whether putting an end to those will not deepen the manifestation of the negative emotional experience, which as a final result will unfold in aggression.

As J. Clements underlines, professionals usually patologize those displays in children. In our opinion, by doing so, they make the problem more serious and forcibly are trying to fit in a process which the child has chosen itself in an effort to cope with an unacceptable the situation and which at the same time is unable to eliminate.

The important point here is how to incorporate these strategies that have naturally been developed in the child in an effort to cope with aggression and aggressive behaviour into the strategies of parents and professionals allowing to prevent aggression and aggressive behavior in autistic children. We believe that the efforts of professionals and parents should focus not so much on eliminating those strategies adopted by the child but instead not allowing those to reach their peak points where the child loses control over the relevant strategy. This is usually associated with increased dynamics of the sways, preoccupation with handling items, escape from the situation itself.

CONCLUSIONS
Our reflections on this issue lead to the following conclusions:
1. The autistic child demonstrates various models of addiction which can be a hidden form of aggression which unfolds as obvious when the object of addiction is taken away.
2. In order to overcome aggression and aggressive behavior in autistic children, strategies can be successfully applied for adaptation of the child to the changing environment and settings instead of eliminating those.
3. The self-stimulations, sensory blocking and communicative reactions used by an autistic child, can be successfully used as models to avoid or prevent aggression and which have been "suggested" by the child itself, however realized in a more meaningful way and at a higher level. This means preventing these specific displays and restricting them only to those which are soothing for the child, without allowing their escalation, which over-excites the child and the child sinks in a state of unconscious bliss unexplainable also for the child itself.