SENSE Theatre℠ is an intervention research program designed to improve the social and emotional functioning of children with autism spectrum disorder. Participants will learn about verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction and movement through the process of putting together a play. The SENSE Theatre intervention model rests solidly on a theoretical foundation from the behavioral, social and psychological sciences. Additionally, the approach is steeped in the rich history and craft of the theatre providing a creative and enjoyable environment in which to learn.

While the SENSE Model is theoretically structured, it is fundamentally experimental, practical and individualized. The inclusion of improvisational activities, exercises and play allows for a flowing spontaneous and natural building of knowledge and experience for SENSE participants.

Participants will rehearse the play over a course of 10 sessions using theatrical techniques such as script reading, role playing and improvisation. Counselors and families will assist participants’ understanding of the process using scientifically proven methods such as behavior therapy, peer mediation, and video modeling.

Study Information: Background

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Research Design

The SENSE Lab and Theatre Program is designed to improve the social functioning of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to reduce their stress. Participants with ASD are paired with typically developing peers who serve as expert models. Definitive measures are taken before and after the program to assess improvement. Research thus far on similar programs has shown promise in improving the socioemotional functioning of ASD participants.

Date of Approval: 9/24/2013
Enrollment

Number of Visits

Participants are required to attend a majority of the 10 theatre sessions and two performances. Participants are expected to attend at least two visits before the intervention and two visits after the intervention (for a total of four visits). These visits are for data collecting purposes in the form of neuropsychological assessments, playground interaction and event related potential (ERP) tasks. The data that we collect from the assessment will be compiled into a comprehensive research letter.

Assessments

These are conducted at the first visit; participants will complete this component in question-and-answer format with a clinician. Parents will be asked to complete questionnaires in written form during this visit. Similar forms will be sent home to be passed along to one teacher, therapist, or other professional that meets with the participant to fill out. At the end of the approximately 2-3 hour visit, participants and parents will be trained to collect saliva samples for assessment of stress levels.

Playground Session

Participants will interact with two other similar aged children or adolescents for 20 minutes on a playground. The participants will be recorded during this time. The recordings will be used for behavioral coding purposes and destroyed upon completion of the study. Participants will also provide saliva samples; one at arrival, and three after the 20 minute playground session.

ERP Tasks

ERP stands for “Event Related Potential”. Testing involves recording participants’ brain waves while they look at pictures on a computer screen. Brain waves are recorded using soft sensors that are arranged like a shower cap. This cap will be soaked in warm water then placed on participants’ heads. Participants will be asked to remove any large pieces of jewelry, hair accessories, and glasses before the cap is placed on their heads. They may put their glasses back on after the cap is in place. We are unable to provide any diagnostic information with the results of this testing, but if we see something unusual we will advise you to consult your doctor.

Date of Approval: 9/24/2013
Study Groups
Your child may be randomly assigned to either the initial study group or a waitlist group for this study. If your child is assigned to the waitlist group, you will still complete the study procedures, but not initially participate in the intervention. After the first study group completes the intervention, then your child will get a form of the intervention comparable to the version in the initial treatment.

Intervention/Rehearsal
Participants will participate in therapy sessions and theatre rehearsals. These sessions will include learning how to better understand and express emotions, imitate peers, and practice scenes from a play. We will also be engaging in various theatre games that teach communication with words, actions, or singing. Participants will be part of the show, and will perform the play with music up to 2 times for their families and the public.

Home Protocols

Video Modeling
Videos are available on a password protected website featuring peers modeling behavior for participants. Parents are asked to watch each video with their child at least once per day, and to then spend 15 minutes practicing the skills demonstrated in the video.

Home Saliva Sampling
Home saliva samples are taken four times per day for two consecutive week days. The schedule is as follows:

- When the participant wakes up
- 30 minutes after waking up
- Between 1pm and 4pm
- Before bedtime

The sample in the afternoon should be taken at the same time on both days. Participants may not eat or drink for an hour before the samples are taken. This process is completed twice - once before the treatment and again within two weeks after the treatment.

Parent Rating Forms
Parent Packets are given out before and after SENSE theatre intervention. We ask that parents fill out the forms containing questions regarding to participants' social ability, personal stress, and behavioral adaptability. The first set of forms must be completed and turned in before the intervention begins, and the second set of form must be completed and turned in no later than two weeks after the intervention finishes.
Participants need to clearly understand their roles in the study as well as the objective of SENSE Lab. It is crucial that participants understand the importance of their contribution to our research, and the level of cooperation necessary for the intervention to run smoothly. We encourage all participants to have fun with the process and enjoy themselves, and to be mindful that there is a level of responsibility that is expected.

**Commitment**

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**Expectations for Families and Peers**

The success of the program requires a cooperative effort between Dr. Corbett’s team and participants’ families. An extensive amount of planning and detail goes into every visit to the Center and every theatre session that is scheduled. It is very important for all parties to respect that and strive to adhere to appointments made. It would be greatly appreciated if you could contact us as early on as possible if you are unable to make it. We will always try our best to accommodate you when unexpected emergencies arise. We are grateful for your willingness to consider being a part of our study, and look forward to working with you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions at any point of the process.

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**Date of Approval:** 9/24/2013