

## **The Core Deficits of Autism and *Essential for Living***

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According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, 5th. Edition (DSM 5), the three core deficits of autism spectrum disorder are:

1. impaired communication, for example,
  - a. poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication,
  - b. abnormalities in eye contact and body language,
  - c. deficits in understanding and use of gestures, and
  - d. a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication;
2. impaired reciprocal social interaction, for example,
  - a. difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts,
  - b. difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends,
  - c. a lack of interest in interacting with peers;
3. restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors or interests, for example,
  - a. stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech,
  - b. insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior
  - c. highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus,
  - d. hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

*Essential for Living* (McGreevy, Fry, & Cornwall, 2013) is a comprehensive assessment and curriculum based on B. F. Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior (Skinner, 1957), along with research and conceptual advancement provided by Carbone (2013, 2019), Lowenkron (2006), McGreevy (1986, 2009), Michael (2000), Miguel (2016), Sundberg (2014), Sundberg and Michael (2001), Palmer (1998, 2008), Schlinger (2008), Schlinger and Blakely (1987), and many others.

In recent months, comments and suggestions have circulated that *Essential for Living* may not adequately address the 'core deficits of autism'. Au contraire, *Essential for Living* (McGreevy, Fry, & Cornwall, 2013) is a curriculum-based assessment instrument, which was *specifically designed* to focus on skill deficits that significantly affect the extent to which a child can function effectively without problem behavior in their home, school, day care, and other environments within their community, 'with a special emphasis' on *the core deficits of autism* (CDA). Tables 1, 2, and 3 each depict one of the core deficits of autism (CDA) and the specific skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL) that 'directly address' examples of that deficit.

Table 1  
**The Core Deficits of Autism (CDA)**  
 and  
 Sections and Skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL)  
 which Directly Address those Deficits

<b>Core Deficits of Autism (CDA)</b>	<b>Sections and Skills from <i>Essential for Living</i> (EFL) which Directly Address these Core Deficits</b>	
Impaired Communication		
poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication	<p><b>Chapter 6.</b> Determining if a child can use spoken words effectively or if an alternative, non-verbal method of speaking is necessary [this task is often accomplished by a speech-language pathologist and a behavior analyst using <b>the Vocal Profiles section</b> of <i>Essential for Living</i>]  <b>no other instrument directly addresses this deficit</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter 6.</b> Selecting, confirming, and maintaining an effective verbal or non-verbal method of speaking [this task is often accomplished by a speech-language pathologist and a behavior analyst using <b>the Vocal Profiles Section and the Alternative Methods of Speaking Section</b> of <i>Essential for Living</i>]  <b>no other instrument directly addresses this deficit</b></p>
	<p><b>Skill R7.</b> Makes requests for highly preferred snack foods, drinks, non-food items, or activities that can be made frequently and immediately available [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skills R22, R23, R27, and R30-31.</b> Makes requests in other contexts [without problem behavior]</p>
abnormalities in eye contact and body language	<p><b>Skill R19.</b> Makes a generalized request for an audience, followed by requests for items or activities in R7 and R8 [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skill R24.</b> Faces or looks toward an audience as the learner makes a generalized request for that audience, followed by requests for items or activities in R7-8 and R22-23 [without problem behavior]</p>
	<p><b>Skill R52.</b> Makes a request to notice something or someone [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skill R65.</b> Makes requests for others to respond more or less rapidly [without problem behavior]</p>
deficits in understanding and use of gestures	<p><b>Skill T-BH15.</b> Tolerates touch, physical guidance, or physical prompts [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skills MM1-MM10.</b> Reaches, points, touches, grasps, places, and releases items [without problem behavior]</p>
	<p><b>Skills Im1-Im2.</b> Imitates motor movements with and without items</p>	<p><b>Skills M1-M13.</b> Matches and sorts items in multiple contexts</p>
a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication	<p><b>Skill R21.</b> Politely refuses access to preferred items or activities [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skill R28.</b> Says "thank you" when requests are honored [without problem behavior]</p>
	<p><b>Skill R33.</b> Makes a second and a third generalized request for an audience after the first or second request was ignored [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Skill R76.</b> Makes requests that include 2 items which learners 'need' in order to complete a required activity [without problem behavior]</p>

Table 2  
**The Core Deficits of Autism (CDA)**  
 and  
 Sections and Skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL)  
 which Directly Address those Deficits

**Core Deficits of Autism  
(CDA)**

Impaired reciprocal  
social interaction

**Sections and Skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL)**  
 which Directly Address these Core Deficits

difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts	<b>Skill R9.</b> Waits after making requests for each of the items and activities in R7 & R8 for gradually increasing periods of time [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill R10.</b> Accepts the removal of access to 10 items or activities by a person in authority [without problem behavior]
	<b>Skill R13.</b> Makes transitions from preferred items and activities to required tasks [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill R15.</b> 'Accepts no' after making requests for items and activities that were taught and are often honored (R7, R8, & R14) [without problem behavior]
	<b>Skill LR1.</b> Holds and maintains contact with the hand of an instructor, care provider, or parent when directed to do so [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill LR2.</b> Moves toward and sits next to an instructor, care provider, or parent when directed to do so [without problem behavior]
	<b>Skill R17.</b> Makes very forceful and repeated requests for a stranger, an intruder, a person teasing, threatening, bullying, or instigating a fight, or a person making sexual advances to 'go away'	<b>Skill R18.</b> Makes a generalized request for help in a threatening or dangerous situation, by yelling "help", screaming, or otherwise making contact with an audience, calling '9-1-1', or activating a medical alert device
difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends	<b>Skill R12.</b> Shares or takes turns obtaining access to each of the items and activities in R7 & R8 with an instructor, care provider, parent, or peer [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill R34.</b> Makes a generalized request for affection
a lack of interest in interacting with peers	<b>Skill T-BH11-3.</b> Tolerates the presence of an unfamiliar peer [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill T-BH18-10.</b> Tolerates various interactions toward or with peers [without problem behavior]
	<b>Skill R35.</b> Makes a generalized request for companionship [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill R44.</b> Makes requests for 5 items or activities from R7, R8, R22-23, R27, and R30-31 from each of three peers [without problem behavior]
	<b>Skill R45.</b> Honors requests from peers [without problem behavior]	<b>Skill R46.</b> Responds appropriately to the unauthorized removal of access to 5 preferred items or activities from R7, R8, R22-23, R27, or R30-31 by peers [without problem behavior]

Table 3  
**The Core Deficits of Autism (CDA)**  
 and  
 Sections and Skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL)  
 which Directly Address those Deficits

**Core Deficits of Autism  
(CDA)**

restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviors or interests

**Sections and Skills from *Essential for Living* (EFL)**  
 which Directly Address these Core Deficits

stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech	<p><b>Chapter 11. Teaching Protocol 1 and Skill R7.</b> Transferring echoic [a.k.a., echolalic] spoken words to spontaneous spoken-word requests</p> <p><b>This teaching protocol and skill R7 permit children with echoic spoken words to learn to make spontaneous spoken-word requests.</b></p>	<p><b>Skills LR12-LR16.</b> Follows Directions and Completes Routine Activities [without engaging in repetitive motor movements with or without objects]</p> <p><b>These skills and accompanying teaching procedures are used to control the occurrence of repetitive, stereotyped patterns of behavior with or without objects.</b></p>
insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior	<p><b>T-SIT8.</b> Tolerates variations in verbal instructions and steps in task completion [without problem behavior]</p>	<p><b>Events LRND1-13.</b> Recognizing, Retrieving, Relocating, Naming, Describing, and Following Directions to Complete Activities with variations in verbal directions and steps to task completion</p>
highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus	<p><b>Skills LR12-LR16.</b> Follows Directions and Completes Routine Activities [without engaging in restricted and fixated interests]</p> <p><b>These skills and teaching procedures are used to control the occurrence of repetitive, stereotyped patterns of behavior that result in access to restricted and fixated interests.</b></p>	<p><b>Skill R8.</b> Requests the opportunity to entertain themselves or to reduce anxiety by making stereotypic movements with highly preferred items or engaging in highly preferred stereotypic activities [provided after following directions and completing routine activities without engaging in restricted and fixated interests]</p>
hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment	<p><b>Skills LR12-LR16.</b> Follows Directions and Completes Routine Activities [without interacting with unusual sensory aspects of the environment]</p> <p><b>These skills and teaching procedures are used to control the occurrence of repetitive, stereotyped patterns of behavior that result in access to unusual sensory aspects of the environment.</b></p>	<p><b>Skill R8.</b> Requests the opportunity to entertain themselves or to reduce anxiety by making stereotypic movements with highly preferred items or engaging in highly preferred stereotypic activities [provided after following directions and completing routine activities without interacting with unusual sensory aspects of the environment]</p>

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