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Building Positive Social  
Environments and  
Reducing Stigma for  
Children

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My Clinical Work

Tourette Syndrome Program  
Rutgers University, Piscataway, NJ  
(848) 445-6111 ext 40150

Evaluation and Cognitive Behavioral Treatment for  
Tourette Syndrome and Associated Disorders

Training and supervision for doctoral candidates in  
clinical and school psychology

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My Clinical Work

Private Practice  
160 Broadway, Suite 900 East  
Financial District  
New York City, NY 10038

Evaluation and Treatment of various psychological  
disorders with specialties in Tourette Syndrome and  
common comorbid disorders

For more information, see my website at  
[www.drshawnewbank.com](http://www.drshawnewbank.com)

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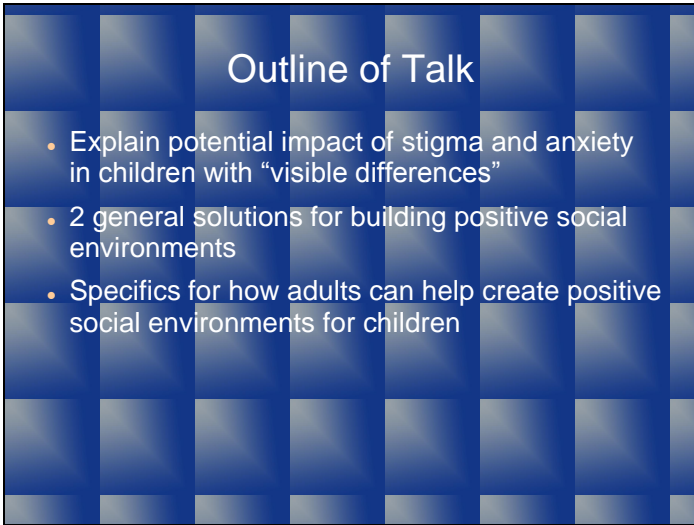
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Outline of Talk

- Explain potential impact of stigma and anxiety in children with “visible differences”
- 2 general solutions for building positive social environments
- Specifics for how adults can help create positive social environments for children

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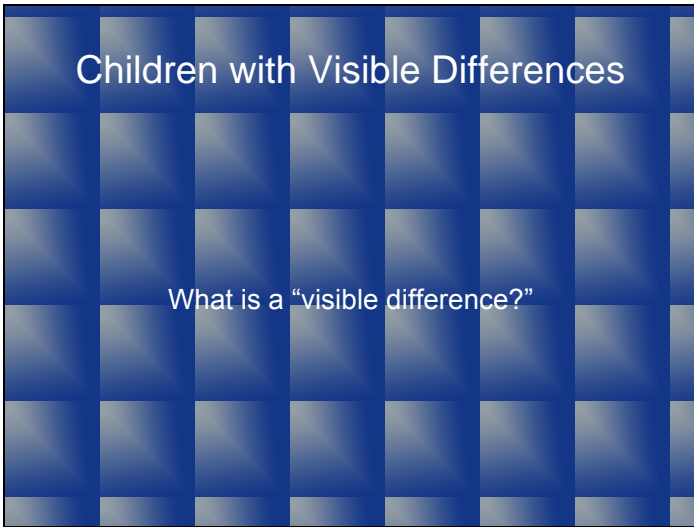
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Children with Visible Differences

What is a “visible difference?”

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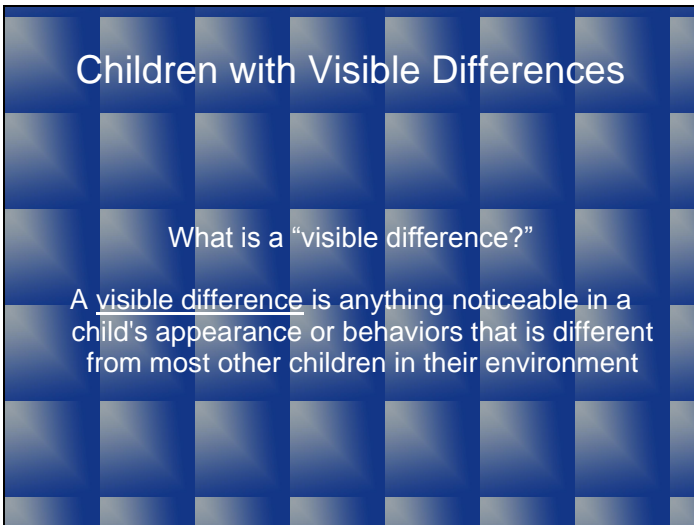
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Children with Visible Differences

What is a “visible difference?”

A visible difference is anything noticeable in a child's appearance or behaviors that is different from most other children in their environment

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## Children with Visible Differences

Potential Negative Consequence of Visible Difference

Visible difference =====> other people noticing  
Other people noticing =====> negative judgment  
Negative judgment =====> stigma  
Stigma =====> ANXIETY

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## Potential Examples of visible differences

- Tics / Tourette Syndrome
- Physical Disability (e.g. wheelchair)
- ADHD behaviors
- Special Education classroom
- Differences in body shape/size
- Member of a minority group
- Corrective devices (e.g. glasses, braces)

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## Research Trends – in brief

Children with visible differences may be at greater risk for the following

- Difficulties with peers
- Declines in social and academic functioning
- Lower quality of life
- Mood and anxiety disorders
- Negative judgments from others

note: These are simply trends. Children with visible differences are capable of high functioning. This talk will give some tools intended to maximize children's potential.

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## General Solutions for Building Positive Social Environments

Two General Components

1. Positive social environments are formed when a child is comfortable talking about their visible differences within the environment.

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## General Solutions for Building Positive Social Environments

Two General Components

1. Positive social environments are formed when a child is comfortable talking about their visible differences within the environment.
2. Positive social environments are formed when the people in the child's social environment are provided with knowledge about the visible difference

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## Implementing the Solution

First step: Make sure you (the adult) is comfortable with the child's difference.

How?

1. Become educated about the difference
2. Have a social support system where you can talk about the difference

Remember. A child who is surrounded by adults who feel comfortable about his or her difference will feel more accepted.

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## Implementing the Solution

Strategies to Increase Child's Comfort in Talking About Their Visible Difference:

- Contact with other children with similar differences
- Children's literature about the difference
- Incorporating discussion of the difference into play activities (e.g. games, puppet shows, etc.)
- Special adult/child time to talk about difference
- Making plans to tell selected other about difference and role-playing conversations

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## Implementing the Solution

Educating Others:

- Make thoughtful choices about who to educate about child's visible difference
- Consider child's age, skill level and personality in forming expectations for their advocacy
- Communication between parents and school about classroom in-service talking about difference as a way to educate peers and reduce stigma

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## Classroom In-service Example

Different levels of child involvement:

*Level 1:* Child is aware of in-service, but not in classroom when it happens

*Level 2:* Child is in classroom during in-service, but does not plan to identify their difference

*Level 3:* Child plans to identify their difference during in-service

*Level 4:* Child plans to talk about their experience of having a visible difference during in-service.

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## Implementing the Solution

Reminder About Self Advocacy:  
Self advocacy is a process not an event.  
Consider where the child is at in the process  
and try to move them further along over time.

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## Summary

- Visible differences ==> stigma ==> anxiety
- Children with differences are at risk for difficulties in functioning
- Anxiety and shame can be decreased by encouraging a child to communicate
- Many strategies help encourage communication over time
- Stigma can be decreased by increasing the knowledge of others in the environment

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