Age Related Change in Social Behaviour in Children with Angelman Syndrome

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Background
♦ Previous estimates suggest that over 80% of children with Angelman syndrome (AS) show high levels of laughing and smiling behaviours.
♦ Previous research has indicated that these behaviours are higher in the presence of adult attention, suggesting that the behaviour is related to environmental events.
♦ It is not yet known how these social behaviours change with age.
♦ Knowing more about age related changes in social behaviour might help us understand more about children’s development.

Aims of the project
♦ To further explore the influence of adult attention on the levels laughing and smiling behaviours in children with AS.
♦ To describe the relationship between age and laughing and smiling behaviours.
♦ To establish whether any age related changes in behaviour are related to an increase in adaptive skills.

Methods
♦ Experimental observations were conducted with 24 children aged 4-15.9 years with a genetic confirmation of Angelman syndrome.
♦ The experimental observations were conducted in a quiet room with a researcher either at home or school.
♦ The researcher changed the levels of attention given to the child in three alternating conditions:
  ♦ Proximity only: the researcher remained close but did not interact with the child.
  ♦ Restricted social interaction: the researcher interacted with the child but gave no eye contact or facial expressions.
  ♦ Social interaction: the researcher interacted fully with the child.
♦ The levels of seven child behaviours were recorded including laughing and smiling behaviours, approach behaviours and eye contact.

Results
♦ Laughing and smiling behaviours were found to vary with the level of adult interaction given.
♦ Levels of laughing and smiling were highest in the presence of full adult interaction and lowest when no interaction was given.
♦ The duration of laughing and smiling behaviours in the presence of adult contact was found to decrease with age.
♦ Levels of laughing and smiling were not affected by the level of children’s adaptive skills.

Conclusions and future directions
♦ Children’s laughing and smiling behaviours are related to adult interaction, suggesting that some children with AS may find adult interaction enjoyable and rewarding.
♦ This suggests that using social attention may be an effective way to teach children new or adaptive behaviours.