

Behavioral Strategies in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Mary Beth DeWitt, Ph.D.

Dayton Childrens Medical Center

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Autism

- Deficits in communication
- Deficits in socialization
- Repetitive interests and activities
- Spectrum: Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, NOS, Asperger's Syndrome

More background

- Prevalence: 6 or 7 out of 1000
- 1:150 (1:96 boys)
- Highly heritable, exact cause unknown

Language is critical diagnostic feature

- Joint attention deficit reliable “red flag”
- Many kids on spectrum don’t appear to seek connectedness
- Content to be alone
- Ignore attempts for attention
- Make limited eye contact
- Few attempts to seek contact with gestures or vocalizations
- All represent challenges to therapy!!

SLP principles (ASHA Ad Hoc Committee on Autism spectrum disorders 12/05)

- Play an important role in promoting social communication skills that further independence and self advocacy
- Given pervasive nature of language delays, most kids with ASDS eligible for intervention
- Critical role in screening and diagnosis (early intervention and language are associated with long term outcomes)

Principles, contd

- Intervention should focus on improved social competence, I.e. ability to form relationships, function effectively and participate in natural routines and settings
- Form partnerships with families
- Collaborate with other team members/professionals

Behavior Analysis

- Behavioral strategies are shown consistently to be the most effective treatment intervention for children with autism
- Determine the function the behavior serves for the child and modify consequences
- Utilizes rewards and environmental structure

Functional analysis

- An analysis of the circumstances responsible for behavioral problems.
- Done prior to intervention to ensure appropriate consequences provided
- Behavior is multiply determined (could be attention seeking, avoidance, etc)

Learn the ABC's!!



- Antecedents (what is going on before the behavior)
- Behavior (what is the behavior of concern)
- Consequences (what happened after the behavior)

Strategies that may help

- VISUALS- many children with autism are visual learners. By providing visual cues we support their understanding and monitoring
- REWARDS- to increase compliance and likelihood of behavior
- STRUCTURE- alternate preferred with less preferred, take the child's lead; direct teaching and activity based teaching
- ENLIST PARENT SUPPORT- parents know better than we do what might interest their children, what they like what they don't etc.

More strategies

- FLEXIBILITY- you should always have a plan for your sessions, but be prepared to have a “plan B” as needed
- ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM
- KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AUTISM
- KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Shaping and Prompting

- Shaping successive approximations toward terminal behavior (final goal); differentially reward each approximation
- Prompting- helps them out, physical, verbal, gestural, use less intrusive

Joseph, Age 5

- Never been in services, initial assessment, Joseph is a large child for his age. He is extremely hyperactive and unable to be still for more than a few seconds. He is demanding and often used to getting his way. Tore father's shirt during intake.

Audrey, age 3

- Repetitive behavior, stares out window, shakes hands and feet and ignores most requests
- Nonverbal, some vowel sounds
- Lacks awareness or interest in making requests

Eileen, age 4

- Screams with approach or attempts at interaction
- Hits when in close proximity
- Cries the entire session

Mikey, age 4

- Greets you in the waiting room with a huge tantrum
- Screams, falls to the floor
- Then..... tries to leave the room, refuses any interaction

Goals will vary for each child (obviously) but....

To initiate interaction, try...

To identify objects, try....

To follow directions, try....

To build expression, try

Goals in Asperger's

- Pragmatic deficits
- Need help with how to choose a topic of conversation
- How to produce appropriate tempo, facial expression, body language
- Turn taking
- Recognizing cues of language partner
- How to start sustain and end conversation

Resources

- Gray, C. (1994). *Comic strip Conversations*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons
- Gray, C. (2000). *The New Social Story Book, illustrated edition*. Arlington TX: Future Horizons
- Hodgdon, P. (1999). *Visual strategies for improving communication*, Troy, MI: QuirkRoberts Publishing. (248)879-2598
- Quill, K. (Ed.) (1995). *Teaching children with autism: strategies to enhance communication and socialization*. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.
- Quill, K. (2000). *Do-watch-listen-say: Social and communication intervention for children with autism*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.