

ACHIEVE PARENT TRAINING CURRICULUM

Effective ABA Training
through Partnership

Second Edition



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ACHIEVE PARENT TRAINING CURRICULUM: EFFECTIVE ABA TRAINING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

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WHY WE CREATED THIS CURRICULUM

Six months after receiving my BCBA® certification, I accepted my dream job working for a large nonprofit organization as the director of 2 clinics in NH. Although it was exactly what I wanted to do, I actually had no idea how to succeed in the role. I was the only active BCBA® and we had 26 clients and 16 staff. The to-do list once I started the position never ended and to make matters worse, I struggled with getting our treatment plans approved through one of the Medicaid managed care companies. More than 80% of our clients had this insurance so it was critical that I figure out how to get these plans approved more effectively.

The reviewer for the insurance company, let's call her Beth, fundamentally disagreed with our program model. We provided clinic-based services and this reviewer believed that we should provide services in the home. Each plan I submitted resulted in a call from Beth asking the same question, "when would all services be transitioned to the home?" Beth argued that home-based services were the only way to ensure that skills generalized to the natural environment. She stated repeatedly that teaching skills in a clinic setting offered little to no value for our clients.

As a new BCBA®, I questioned our model while at the same time arguing that our families sought clinic-based services intentionally because home-based services weren't a good fit for them. Nearly all of our families had received home-based early intervention services and found them ineffective for various reasons. Despite this explanation, Beth, from her office in California as far away from our families in NH as she could be, kept telling me she would not approve the treatment plans if they did not include a plan to transition services to the home.

Knowing that home-based services not only didn't work for our families, but also didn't work for our business model, I couldn't write a plan I didn't intend to follow. I dug into the research on clinic-based services and generalization strategies. Any "extra" time I had during the day I spent brainstorming ways to demonstrate the generality of skills learned in the clinic.

The research all pointed to parent training as the answer. Even with home-based services, skills won't generalize to the natural environment unless the parents have some basic skills. Although before my research I knew parent training was important, after my research I saw it as essential and it became my passion.

Rather than creating a plan to transition services to the home, I developed a more comprehensive generalization plan with parent training as my focus. Each plan I submitted continued to trigger a phone call with Beth. Although I dreaded each call, these calls helped hone my parent training plan into a concrete framework that I still use today.

ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

You already know the importance of parent training to the success of an ABA program and that it's usually required by the insurance company. Showing up to parent training isn't enough to help your client succeed. Parents must engage in training and change their own behavior outside of sessions. The question is: how do you get parents to not only show up but to actually engage in parent training?

Based on research and 30+ years of experience working with families, I have finally discovered the answer to this question and it lies in these 3 secrets:

- ✓ Construct an Alliance
- ✓ Goal Getter
- ✓ Cultivate Confidence

Your master's degree program failed to teach you these critical pieces that transform parent training forever.

WHY PARENTS AVOID PARENT TRAINING

Before we dive into the 3 secrets, you first must understand why parents avoid parent training. Most parents sought ABA services because they want help so it's easy to assume that they should want to participate in training. Parent training should improve the family's quality of life by helping parents recognize how their behavior impacts their child's behavior. The overall goals of parent training include the following 3 components:

- ✓ Educating parents
- ✓ Generalizing skills
- ✓ Supporting parents

Even though parent training is meant to benefit them, it's often difficult to engage parents. Why?

- ✓ Parents already feel overwhelmed
- ✓ The reinforcer for changing their behavior (i.e. the benefits for their child) are not immediate enough or certain enough
- ✓ They don't understand what you're saying
- ✓ The recommended interventions don't align with the parents' beliefs, values, or goals
- ✓ They believe someone else will be better at helping their child

Each parent is unique so their specific reasons might be different, but the examples above account for the vast majority of the barriers parents face when asked to participate in parent training. Once you understand why parents don't engage, you can see how applying the 3 secrets helps to overcome these objections.

THE 3 SECRETS OF ABA PARENT TRAINING

The secrets below are not magical new interventions, but few of us have been taught to use them in parent training. Once you implement these strategies, you will shatter the walls between you and your clients' parents.

CONSTRUCT AN ALLIANCE

How to expertly build a collaborative relationship with parents for successful parent training.

The first secret is to construct an alliance with parents. Your goal here is to form a collaborative relationship rather than one of the expert and student.

We all know how to build rapport with our clients, but do you know how to create an alliance with parents? Most parent training curriculums are filled with basic ABA terminology and education. The research and my experience agree that this doesn't work. Parents need to feel like an integral part of the process or they won't engage with you.

Early on in my career, I shared a lot of facts about ABA. I started ABA parent training by teaching the functions of behavior and how in the field we viewed behavior according to the context. I thought it made me sound smart so parents would listen to me.

But what it did was build a wall between me and the parents.

The Story of How I Learned to Use Stories

I had a particularly difficult time connecting with one family that I worked with. The mother was pleasant and met with me each week. She would routinely tell me everything was "fine" and I would talk about the ABA strategies I used during sessions, encouraging her to use them at home.

Each week, we started the meeting by reviewing the previous week's recommendations and I'd ask if she tried any of the strategies. The answer was always the same. No.

She didn't give me excuses. In fact, she often said she knew she should try them, but just never actually did.

After months of wasting our time and the insurance funds, I decided to just start over at the beginning. This time, I would do things just a bit differently.

I knew I needed to continue providing parent training with her, but it didn't seem like she would ever follow my recommendations. Giving her the facts about behavior and making recommendations clearly wasn't working.

One day, out of the blue, she apologized to me. She said, "I'm so sorry that you see me wearing this same sweatshirt every day. I don't want you to think that I don't have other clothes or don't want to wear them, but J, gets really upset when I don't wear this specific sweatshirt."

J was her son, my client.

I wasn't sure how to respond but didn't want to embarrass her so I simply asked her to tell me more and left the details up to her. When she finished, I asked her if I could tell her a story about another family I worked with.

She said yes and I proceeded to tell her about another family whose child tried to control everything that went on at home. I shared how, over time, the parents were able to help their child accept that she couldn't control everything.

This simple act changed everything.

Why Building an Alliance Works

Although we had a lot of work ahead of us, I realized that I had missed a crucial step when I jumped in trying to teach her about ABA. I needed to take time to create an alliance with her so we could become a team working together.

Building an alliance with parents involves letting them see you as human. You become their partner rather than the expert. Do this by:

- ✓ Eliminating jargon
- ✓ Understanding the parent's perspective
- ✓ Sharing stories

By building an alliance with the mother in the story above, we created a strong relationship that allowed her the opportunity to share her challenges. Best of all, her son started making huge gains once we were working together.

GOAL GETTER

How to engage parents in parent training by choosing goals that are life-changing.

The second secret is goal getter, or, said another way, how to engage parents by choosing goals that are life-changing.

When I first started working with parents, I focused on the wrong things. I thought I needed to get parents to see me as the expert so they would listen to me and follow my advice. I would tell them what goals were meaningful for their child, often the same goals I created for the child during services. The problem is that each time I tried to position myself as an expert, parents shut down and didn't share their real challenges with me.

The Story of How I Learned to Set Goals Meaningful to the Parent

Years ago, I worked with a single mother of 2 autistic kids. These kids were super tough and this was one of the most dedicated mothers I've ever met. She did everything she could to accommodate her children but they continued to engage in severe behavior that put them and her at risk.

Parent training goals involved helping her understand the function of her children's behavior so she could effectively use some of the interventions used during sessions.

After months of ineffective parent training I finally asked her why she wasn't using the interventions we used during sessions. She said that she was used to their behavior and just didn't see how the interventions were going to help. Her vision and mine obviously weren't aligning.

I told her that I really wanted to help make her life a little easier and asked her what she thought would help. I said, "if I had a magic wand and could change just one thing, what would make the biggest difference in your life?"

She said it would be amazing if her kids could get their own lunch. She said she felt like she was constantly making food and would love for them to be able to get something on their own. Now this was something I could help with!

Why Setting the Right Goals Works

As the BCBA, you probably choose parent training goals when writing the initial assessment or treatment plan. These goals are often based on the child's treatment goals. They might include teaching the parents strategies to generalize the skills learned during sessions or to reduce challenging behavior at home.

There's no doubt that you choose parent training goals that are meaningful to your client. The problem is that the parents are probably not invested in or ready for these goals.

Choosing a goal that had real meaning and value for the mother in my story above allowed us to work together toward a shared purpose. We became an effective team and she started seeing her children succeed.

CULTIVATE CONFIDENCE

How to empower and motivate parents to change their parenting strategies.

The third and final secret to ACHIEVE is to cultivate confidence: how to empower and motivate parents to change their parenting strategies.

I don't know about you, but when I started out doing parent training, I assumed parents would jump at the chance for some help. I figured the reason they reinforced challenging behavior was because they didn't understand reinforcement. I thought all I needed to do was educate them and things would magically get better.

If you've paid attention during the other stories I shared, I'm sure you've guessed by now that I was completely wrong.

The Story of How I Learned to Empower Parents

Years ago, I worked with a struggling mother, let's call her Sarah, whose son, T, engaged in seemingly constant challenging behaviors that included some pretty scary acts of aggression. Sarah loved T, but it was safe to say she didn't enjoy her time with him. She was constantly on edge wondering if today was the day he would actually hurt her.

At 10 years old, T had spent years developing behaviors to control those around him. Sarah routinely gave in to his demands, knowing that if she didn't, he was likely to attack. It all developed innocently enough.

He was diagnosed at an early age with Prader-Willi Syndrome. Sarah had done research on the complex disorder and learned that many of these children display significant problem behaviors and T seemed to slide right into that description. She assumed that his behavior was the result of his disability and therefore outside of her control. She felt hopeless and simply tried to get through each day.

When I met her and introduced the concept of the ABCs of behavior, she simply shook her head sadly and said, "But he has Prader-Willi Syndrome," essentially dismissing the entire foundation of ABA.

I explained again how behavior is a result of the conditions that surround it. I went into details describing how her own behaviors have been reinforced. I acknowledged her skepticism and asked her to give my recommendations 21 days. If, after 21 days, she still wanted to give up she could do so, and we would look for an easier solution.

I was a bit shocked to see her stand and walk to the calendar hanging on the wall. She scrawled across the date exactly 3 weeks from that day the words "give up." I knew she was tired and scared and, most of all, afraid to hope that things could get better.

Over the course of the next few days, I met with her regularly just reviewing the ABCs of behavior and helping her shift her view of T's behavior.

Finally, a bit frustrated from my apparent inability to get through to her, I said, "I understand that he has a disability, but his behavior is not his disability. It's the result of the conditions that surround his behavior. If the conditions stay the same, so does the behavior. If you change the conditions, you change the behavior."

At that moment, I saw the figurative lightbulb glow above her head, and she jumped from the couch and ran to the kitchen. I couldn't see what she was doing, but she came back with a piece of paper clutched in her hand. On it she wrote "his behavior is not his disability." She said, "For the first time, I get it. This means that he doesn't have to hurt me."

We proceeded to implement interventions designed to gradually shape and improve his behavior. It required a lot of work and commitment on her part, which she wasn't always able to follow through with. The experience was a roller coaster of progress and then the seemingly inevitable slide back into old habits. Each slide didn't take her back quite as far as the one before and he continued to make gradual improvements.

Why Empowering Parents Works

Many parents don't know what to expect of their autistic child. They aren't sure what he's actually capable of or what's fair to ask of him. Often they need us to help them understand autism and the strengths and weaknesses that come with that diagnosis.

One day, I showed up for a meeting with the parent from the story above and she greeted me at the door with a huge smile on her face. As soon as we sat down, she began to tell me about a recent experience she had where she and her son sat outside at the little table on the porch eating a snack and playing a game. She said, "I finally enjoyed spending time with my son," and broke down in tears.

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

FOR PROFESSIONALS

This curriculum is intended to be used by ABA professionals who provide training for parents and caregivers.

Most of the lessons are written to the parent so that you can use them directly in your training. Make copies of the lessons and assignments to share as part of your training.

There are two lessons specific to you, the professional:

- ✓ Collaboration with Caregivers
- ✓ Incorporating ACT in Parent Coaching

These lessons are provided to help you connect more deeply with your families.

FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

While some foundational knowledge is needed for the more advanced lessons, this curriculum can be taught in the order that makes the most sense for each family.

Each lesson begins with a goal to provide direction, then some background for context.

Space is provided within many of the lessons to answer questions and think about each unique situation or individual.

The purpose of the training is to empower parents and caregivers while helping their child achieve greater independence and reach their full potential.

QUESTIONS, QUIZZES AND ASSIGNMENTS

The curriculum includes many activities for parents including questions, quizzes and assignments. Although you can choose to copy the relevant pages for your families, a companion workbook is also available for purchase: ACHIEVE Parent Training Curriculum: Companion Workbook.

The workbook contains all activities for parents and caregivers and can save you countless hours at the photocopier.

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

GOAL

Create a collaborative working relationship with parents and caregivers to improve the outcome of parent coaching sessions. Learn to build trust and measure the success of training.

BACKGROUND

Collaborative relationships between a BCBA® and parents or caregivers set the stage for successful parent training. After this lesson, you will:

- Understand the 4 As of an effective partnership
- Know elements of communication and action that contribute to a collaborative relationship
- Demonstrate skills associated with being a “behavioral artist”
- Use assessment tools to measure parent stress and progress

GENERALIZATION OF SKILLS WITH CAREGIVERS

Despite an abundance of literature supporting the use of parent training and collaboration to improve outcomes and generalization from ABA programs, little research exists that looks at developing a collaborative relationship with parents involved in ABA programming.

Perhaps this is due, in part, to a belief that BCBAs® should use the same skills they use to build a relationship with staff and clients to build a relationship with parents.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

While many skills you utilize with clients, staff and professionals outside the field of ABA support your ability to develop a collaborative relationship with parents, this relationship is distinctly different and requires a high degree of care.

Taking the time to build this relationship improves parental "buy-in" which in turn leads to:

- Better follow through with implementing interventions
- Open conversations about barriers to following through
- An exchange of information and ideas
- Fewer canceled sessions
- Reduced parental stress
- Better client outcomes

The framework Christenson and Sheridan (2001) developed includes the "4 As" of an effective partnership: Approach, Attitudes, Atmosphere, and Actions.

APPROACH

Adopt an approach of shared responsibilities for outcomes.

ATTITUDES

Foster attitudes of cooperation, respect, and a willingness to learn from each other.

ATMOSPHERE

Create an atmosphere that welcomes families by being comfortable, friendly and approachable.

ACTIONS

Engage in actions that promote partnership by being responsive to the different needs of each family and situation.

COLLABORATION: ONGOING PROCESS

Building a collaborative relationship with parents is an intentional, ongoing process. Carefully consider how your communication and actions either promote or prevent this type of relationship. Throughout each interaction with caregivers:

- ✓ Ensure treatment goals align with the family's values
- ✓ Use language the caregivers understand
- ✓ Demonstrate respect
- ✓ Be sensitive to cultural differences
- ✓ Show your imperfections, be human
- ✓ Recognize parents as the experts on their child

Often it takes a variety of nonbehavioral skills to effectively develop a collaborative relationship with caregivers. Foxx (1998) described therapists who had a specific interpersonal skill set as "behavioral artists." These skills included:

- ✓ Rapport building and a desire to be the catalyst for positive change
- ✓ Feeling a sense of personal challenge when encountering a particularly difficult client and viewing it as an opportunity for the client to experience success
- ✓ Sustaining objectivity and positivity despite encountering negative or challenging behaviors, avoiding taking these behaviors personally
- ✓ Attention to details of client and caregiver behavior that might be subtle
- ✓ Seeing the humor in everyday and extraordinary events
- ✓ Maintaining an optimistic attitude while expecting interventions to succeed
- ✓ Creatively approaching challenges with a "do whatever it takes" attitude

MEASURING PARENT STRESS AND PROGRESS

Your role as parent or caregiver trainer goes beyond teaching parents to implement interventions.

Parent training should alleviate parent stress to the greatest degree possible. The Parental Stress Survey provides a measurement of a parent's perception of their relationship with their child. Conducting this survey with parents at the onset of treatment allows you to understand areas the parent feels are most challenging or most successful. Conducting a repeat survey allows you to determine if progress has been made.

The PSS was developed by Judy Berry and Warren Jones (1995) and has been made available for free online.

ASSESSING SUCCESS OF COACHING

In the same way measuring the success of your interventions with your learner ensures success of your program, evaluating parent and caregiver skills across a variety of ABA strategies can improve the effectiveness of your coaching.

Our Parent Training Assessment provides a method of demonstrating measurable gains in parent behavior and implementation of ABA interventions. The assessment guides training of basic ABA principles and strategies for skill acquisition while measuring fidelity of implementation.

The Parent Training Assessment is available for purchase on the Master ABA Academy website, or you can create your own checklist to track progress.

HOW WILL YOU MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THIS TRAINING?



CAREGIVER PREFERENCE

According to Chadwell, Sikorski, Roberts and Allen (2019), Parents are often willing to trade a degree of treatment effectiveness for a therapist and/or intervention that aligns with their familial practices or beliefs. When developing a rapport with parents and caregivers, you must consider their preference for teaching methods and interventions. Despite ABA's position as a science, there remains a considerable amount of flexibility when choosing teaching methods and interventions.

When working with parents, maintain an open mind and collaborative approach. Consider offering parents a choice between different interventions that might ultimately achieve the same outcome. Ask parents for their feedback on interventions as they implement them. Ask parents if aspects of the intervention align with the family's culture and values. Maintaining this collaborative approach leads to a better relationship with parents and improved parent follow through with appointments and application of chosen interventions.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR APPROACH?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above it.

WHY ADAPTING COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

I was new in the field (just a couple of years' experience with direct work, but thought I knew quite a bit) and was providing services in the community. I routinely picked children up at home or school and went different places in the community like the playground, stores, or the library. One day, I went to a big, beautiful house to pick up my new client, an autistic 4-year-old girl. I met her mother and let her know that the plan was to take her out and just get to know her. We would play for a few hours then I would bring her back and we could talk about goals.

I took her to the local library where she outright refused to do a single thing I asked. Each time I asked her to do a simple task (even after presenting a first/then contingency with something I was told was motivating for her), she either became aggressive, screamed, or threw things. Eventually, I simply stopped asking her to do anything and her behavior diminished somewhat, at least to the point where we were not asked to leave the library.

I was exhausted after spending 3 hours with her when I finally got to take her home. I rang the bell, her mom answered (a tall, smart, intimidating woman). I explained what happened while we were out and proceeded to tell her mother that the first thing, we needed to work on was compliance. Her mother's demeanor instantly changed from friendly to angered mama bear. She instructed me that we would not be working on compliance and that she had worked diligently with her school to have the word compliance removed from her IEP.

I stood in stunned silence, completely out of my element with no idea how to respond. Her mother went on to tell me that she wanted her daughter to process situations and her feelings, and she would not tolerate someone directing her to comply. I nodded understanding and told her that I also wanted her to process what was going on, but I couldn't help her with that if I couldn't get her to first walk safely with me in the community.

Over the course of several months, I worked to build a better relationship with this mother. I asked her to ignore the terminology that I chose at first but to trust me enough to give me 2 weeks to see if my methods might help. She grudgingly agreed. After 2 weeks, we did see some improvements and she was a lot safer while we were out. Her mother allowed me to continue using my methods and we continued to see gains.

Through MANY ups and downs across several years, we came to an understanding. During 1 IEP meeting, her mother laughed and said she was going to have t-shirts made that say, "I'm compliant with compliance." Even when you have the same ultimate goals, using the wrong terminology builds walls instead of bridges.

INCORPORATING ACT IN PARENT COACHING

GOAL

Understand the ACT matrix and how it can be used to provide more effective parent coaching.

BACKGROUND

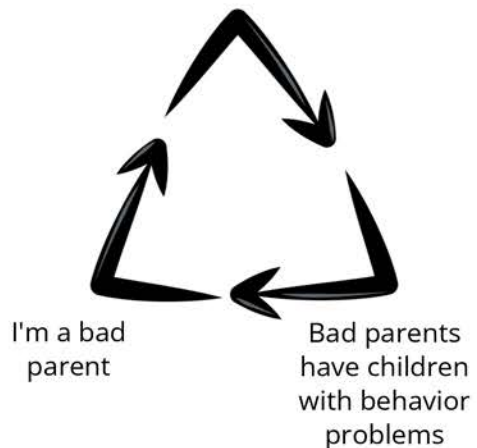
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is rooted in ABA and offers concrete strategies and exercises for defusing thoughts and emotions, especially difficult ones. When working with overwhelmed parents under extremely stressful conditions, use some of these strategies to guide your practice.

ACT is based on Relational Frame Theory (RFT) and works to build more flexible relational frames or build new frames altogether.

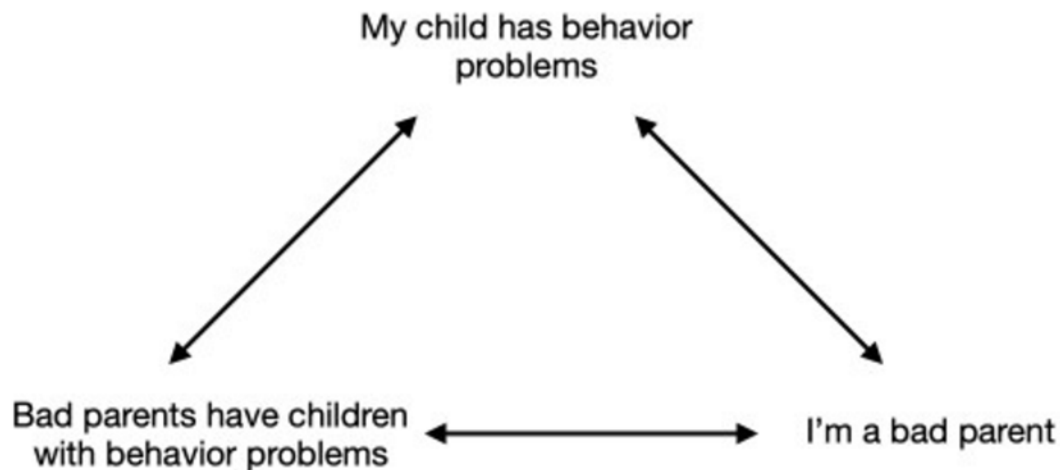
BREAKING THE CYCLE

Many parents of children who have behavior problems believe they are bad parents. This belief often perpetuates itself and may even prevent some parents from effectively utilizing strategies you try to teach.

My child has behavior problems



ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY



BREAKS THE CYCLE

Using ACT provides a concrete way to help parents defuse these thoughts, making them more open to your coaching. You're not trying to be a therapist and help them through all their emotional baggage. You're simply trying to help them step back and see their thoughts and feelings a bit more objectively.

FLUID & FLEXIBLE

ACT is fluid and flexible, designed to increase flexible thinking. There are many different approaches you can take and strategies you can use. There is no one structured way to "do" ACT. With practice and experience, adapt your practice to align with your professional values and each of your families. Watch the video below to learn one way of using ACT during parent coaching.

INCORPORATE ACT FROM THE FIRST MEETING

Acceptance and commitment therapy, or ACT, as it's more commonly known provides a framework for determining how our thoughts and behaviors move us toward our values or away from them.

- ✓ Many parents of autistic children are under tremendous stress. Using the ACT framework may help reduce some of this stress.
- ✓ Increase flexible thinking.
- ✓ Builds trust and understanding.

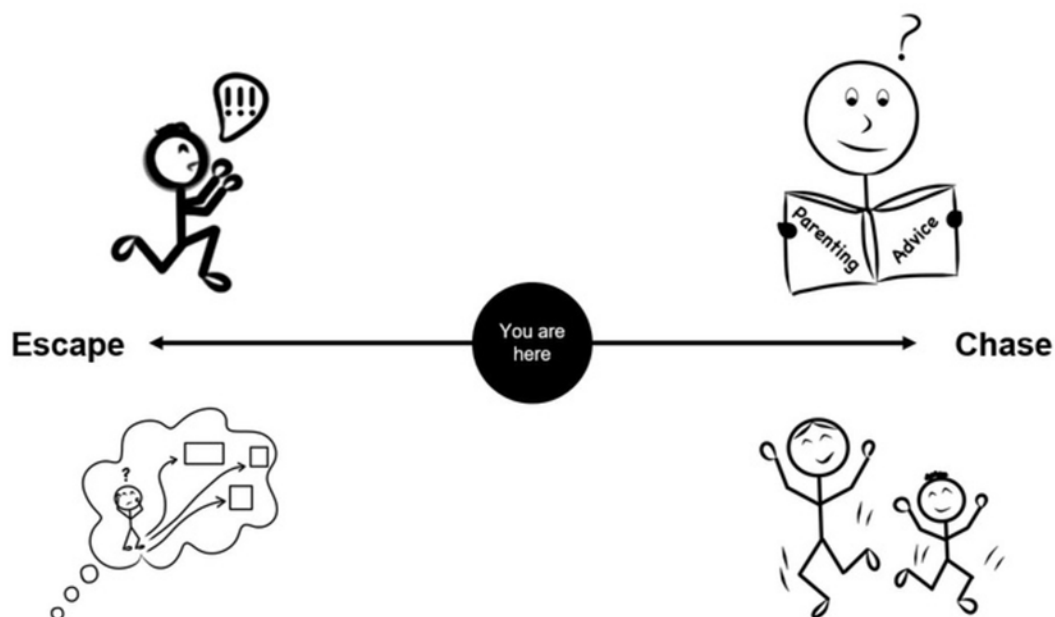
First Meeting

Consider your first interactions with a parent. Do you come on the scene and start talking about the benefits of ABA and all the good things ABA will do for their child? This approach, while well-intentioned can cause some people to shut down or even dislike you. When you start your relationship using the ACT model, the parent feels heard and respected right away.

During your first parent coaching session, do your best to meet with the caregivers without their child present. This will help you all focus on building a collaborative relationship. Tell the caregivers that you want to understand their family to make sure the things you recommend for them align with their values and that you will be using a chart to help you. Let them know that you will be asking them some personal questions, but they only need to share what they are comfortable sharing right now. Remember that many people are uncomfortable just talking to new people. If they say they don't really want to share, tell them that you will go through the process for yourself to give them an example of how this works.

Although this lesson will give you a specific process to follow, this approach is flexible and should be adapted to your unique style. This is meant to just give you an idea of one way of incorporating ACT into parent coaching. Each parent is different and some might not respond as well to doing this on paper as others.

ACT MATRIX



Using ACT

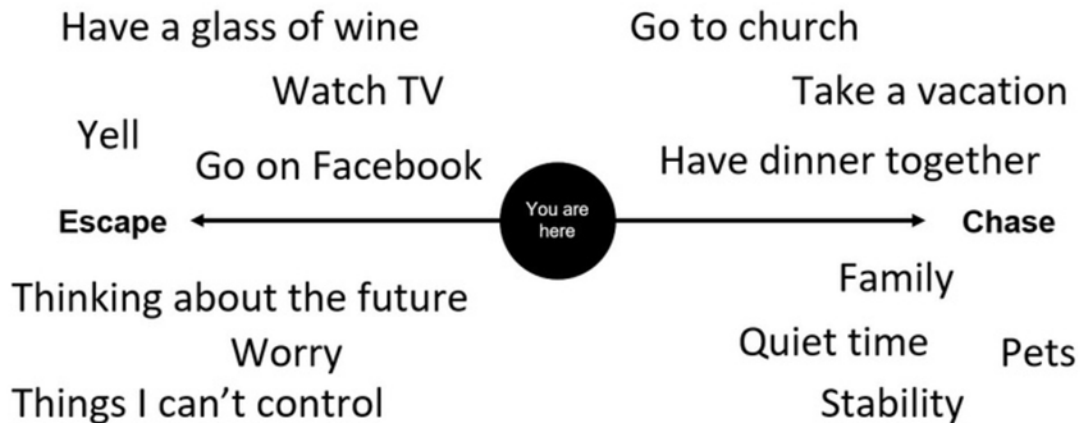
Begin by drawing a horizontal line with arrow heads on either side. Explain to the caregivers that this represents the 2 different directions you can move in your life.

One direction is where you chase who and what is most important to you and the other direction is where you escape the difficult things in life, all the yucky feelings or situations you want to avoid. In the top left area, we will talk about all of the behaviors you engage in that move you away from the yucky stuff that comes up.

Then, in the top right area we will list the behaviors you engage in that move you closer to your values.

Finally, draw a circle in the middle and just tell them that this represents themselves and their own perspective.

THEIR ACT MATRIX



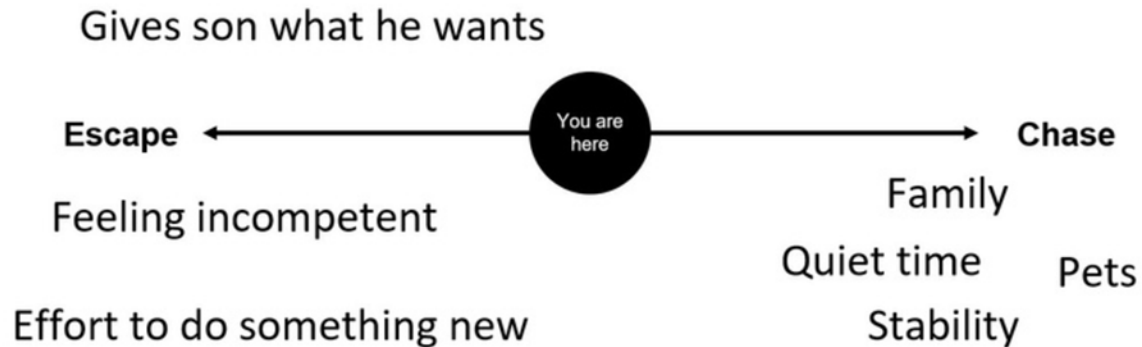
Next, ask them to list some of the things they value, people and things that are important to them. This will be in the bottom right quadrant. They can come back and add to this list at any time so it doesn't need to be exhaustive but you do need it to be enough to start a conversation. Tell them that there is no right or wrong answer and you're not there to judge what they say and do. You're there to guide them toward what they value, nothing more.

Once they are satisfied with that list, have them make a list of things that they try to escape from, the "yucky" things they think and feel. These are things that get in the way of getting the things in the first list but it's ok if they seem unrelated now. Many parents will prefer to tell you and have you write these things in the chart but it's fine if they prefer to write the list themselves. These go in the bottom left quadrant.

Next, ask them to list what they do when the difficult things show up for them. How do they escape the things in their list? This is a good time to remind them that you're not there to judge them. We all do things to help us escape from things that feel bad. Add these to the top left quadrant.

Once there are a few things on this list, ask them what they could do or what they are already doing that helps bring them closer to what they listed in the first list. These belong in the top right quadrant.

EXAMPLE



Let's look at an example.

You show up to parent coaching and check in with them about how things are going. The parents have identified family, quiet time, pets and stability as things they value.

Together you decided to teach their 4 year old son to mand for the things he wants as this will bring them closer to their overall goal of being able to spend pleasant time together as a family. You have asked the parents to practice the mand training procedure 5 times per day during the previous week.

When you check in with them, they report that they haven't done any of the practice. They said they don't feel confident in using the procedure and it's easier to give their son what they already know he wants.

You validate how they feel, telling them that it's ok to make the choice to give their son what they know he wants. By writing this out on the matrix, many families will, on their own, say that avoiding it is not bringing them closer to their goals.

If they don't make this observation on their own, don't point it out. With repeated practice with this process, they will see it.

WHAT IF THEY DON'T GET IT?

If after several sessions they aren't coming to the realization that their actions aren't bringing them closer to their goals, ask some probing questions.

What is it about this intervention that's stopping them?

Is there a way to overcome the challenge they identified?

Do they feel that what they are doing currently is working for their family?

All families are different and respond to different strategies, prompts and cues. I had one mother who wrote "how's that working for you" on a sticky note. She kept the note on her cabinet where she could look at it each time she chose to revert back to her old parenting strategies.

The best part about ACT is that it is about flexible thinking. Use it flexibly. This was just a brief overview. There are many other resources available to help you learn more about ACT and how you can integrate it into your practice.

NOTES:



PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS

GOAL

Ensure trainer and parent agree on expectations for training. Learn why actively participating in sessions and using ABA at home is key to your child's success.

BACKGROUND

Parents and caregivers play a vital role in the success of any ABA program. Parent (or caregiver) training:

- Helps parents and caregivers understand their child and how she learns.
- Builds rapport and trust with the professionals responsible for your child's care and progress.
- Provides validation and recognition from a professional who understands how hard you work at being a great parent.
- Helps you build the skill you need to help your child succeed at home.

IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

The single biggest contributor to the success of any child -autistic or not - is the involvement of parents and caregivers.

Not only are you their advocate, and the person responsible for getting them the support they need, you're also the biggest influence over their learning and behavior.

When you learn the tools that are most effective with your child, you will see growth you never thought possible.

Doing things differently will be hard at first. But with practice it will be as easy as what you're doing now. You can do this!

WHY PARENT TRAINING?

REDUCES NEED FOR SERVICES

When parents learn ABA they can begin using these strategies without the support of a professional in many cases.

In the end, parent training reduces the need for indefinite treatment as parents learn to address their child's needs with less intervention from professionals.

Although ABA is seen as a "medically necessary" treatment for many individuals, making it covered by many insurance companies, the treatment is not intended to extend for the individual's life span.

ABA should target specific, immediate needs while preparing for the inevitable end to treatment. The overall goal is not to "fix" the child but to provide the child and family the tools needed to succeed on their own.

GENERALIZE SKILLS

No amount of work with a professional provides automatic results and improvement when that professional is not present.

While some children demonstrate skills across environments more readily than others, many require help to accomplish this. Parent training can help bridge this gap.

Additionally, parent training will help you view behavior from a different perspective and allow you to alter the way you respond accordingly. To make a difference in your child's behavior, you must also make a change.

HOW WILL THIS TRAINING IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S LIFE?



EXPECTATIONS

Expectations for participation vary depending on the needs of your child and family, any requirements of the payor (i.e. insurance), recommendations from the BCBA® and your preferences. Although many aspects of parent training sessions will likely change over time, have an open conversation about expectations from the beginning.

Consider things such as:

- ✓ Frequency, duration, and location of parent training sessions
- ✓ Documentation requirements
- ✓ Follow up or "homework" assignments

Understand your role and responsibilities, but also ensure you understand the role and responsibilities of the BCBA®. Who is responsible for working with you to:

- ✓ Identify goals
- ✓ Schedule appointments
- ✓ Collect data
- ✓ Determine topics for training

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR TRAINING?

BEHAVIOR

Function of Behavior

All behavior happens because the individual either gets something they want or escapes something they don't want.

We'll cover this more in later lessons. For now, know that there is always a reason for a behavior. Because children with autism experience the world in a way that is different from your experience, your assumptions about why they engage in a behavior might be wrong.

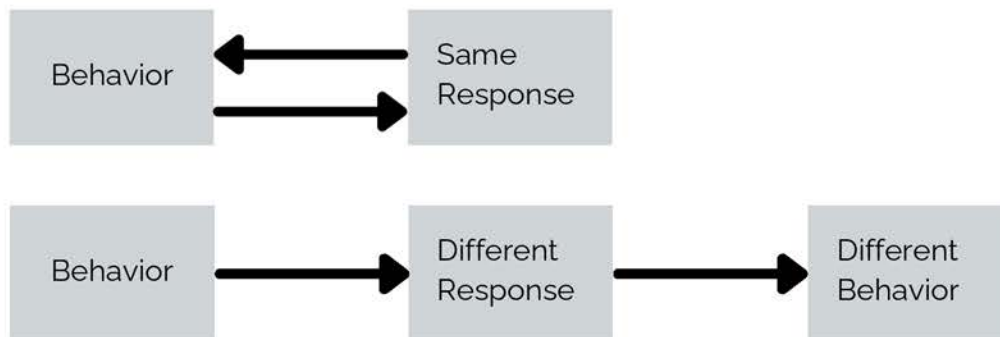
ABA looks at behavior objectively to learn why an individual does what he does.

Changing Your Own Behavior

Often your response to a behavior provides access to what your child wants, or allows them to escape from something they don't want.

If you continue responding in the same way, your child's behavior won't change. Changing your response in a way that teaches your child a better way to get their needs met helps build valuable skills and reduces challenging behavior.

In future lessons you will learn how you can change your behavior to get a more appropriate response from your child.



CAN YOU THINK OF WAYS YOU MIGHT NEED TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR?

SCOPE AND STRUCTURE

GOAL

Understand what is included in your training, and how the training will be structured so you can get the most from each session.

BACKGROUND

ABA is effective because of its individualized approach. While parent training should cover important behavior analytic principles, it should also specifically relate to your child's needs. These lessons provide you with the tools you need to understand your child's behavior, teach important skills, and help him succeed in all areas of his life.

BUT I JUST WANT TO BE A PARENT!

It can be tough to take on the work of learning ABA. It's a brand new way of thinking and is likely different from the way you were raised.

But you might be using ABA strategies already without even knowing it!

The BCBA® won't train you to become a Registered Behavior Technician®, but will teach you many of the basics that RBTs® understand.

You don't need to be trained as a professional, just understand how your response to behavior can make it more or less likely to occur in the future.

TOPICS FOR TRAINING

PRIMARY TOPICS

Training should be tailored to meet the needs of your child and family.

The primary topics that you will cover in parent training will include:

- Goals and progress for treatment
- Basic ABA principles including interventions for both skill acquisition and behavior reduction
- Data review and problem solving
- Homework

PROBLEM OF THE DAY

When should you talk to your BCBA® about problem behavior at home?

You may feel tempted to start every session with a list of concerns or maybe you feel that things are fine at home and don't know what to talk about. Either way, avoid focusing on the COD (crisis of the day) and instead focus on learning the fundamentals and staying on-track with your treatment plan.

Of course you should discuss a true crisis with your BCBA® immediately, but by sticking with the topics listed here, you will continue to expand your understanding of ABA and become more independent in managing crises as they appear.

GOALS

BE INVOLVED

Actively participate in goal development for your child. We will discuss this process in detail in a future lesson, but this is a vital piece of treatment. During each parent training session, discuss current goals, progress toward those goals, relevance of the goals, and any new goals. Cover this information quickly. This part is a simple check-in to make sure treatment progresses as expected.

Don't spend hours analyzing the data from the BCBA®. That's her job, let her handle it. What you need to know is whether progress is on track or not. If it is, great, move on. If not, talk about what obstacles prevent the progress you expected.

As goals become mastered work with the BCBA® to determine how best to help your child generalize (use) the skill at home.

Identify new goals as your child's skills and behavior improve but avoid the temptation to continually add new goals. The number of goals appropriate for your child depends on many factors:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ✓ Amount of direct service hours she receives | ✓ Your fluency with ABA principles |
| ✓ Resources available during sessions (i.e. presence of peers to work on social or group skills, availability of powerful reinforcers, etc.) | ✓ Type of skills being taught (i.e. concrete vs. abstract, simple vs. complex, etc.) |
| ✓ Your child's own rate of skill acquisition | ✓ The degree to which your child's maladaptive behavior interfere with skill acquisition programs |

WHAT GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR CHILD?

TRAINING SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE

Basic ABA Principles

As you will see in future lessons, ABA provides a unique way of looking at behavior. Every parent training session should include ABA strategies and interventions for you to practice at home. Building these skills allows you to expose your child to ABA treatment even when he's not in services. This magnifies the benefits of ABA services and leads to far greater success.

Data Review

No matter who collects the data, set aside some time during each parent training session to review recent data. Look for trends or changes in the direction of the data. Identify which skills your child needs more help with.

Homework

Leave every parent training with at least one thing to practice at home between meetings. Using these interventions and strategies at home exponentially increases your child's exposure to ABA and will lead to far greater results for your child.

There's no doubt that you feel as though you have enough to do at home. Raising children is hard, but raising a child with special needs or behavioral challenges often feels overwhelming. You may be tempted to skip the homework, but this is how you will learn to use these strategies yourself.

ABA Interventions

Take the time to learn the interventions used during ABA therapy. These interventions should address both skill acquisition and behavior reduction needs. It might feel either overwhelming or unnecessary at first, but interventions are the key to success.

Problem Solving

This is a good time to bring up any recent struggles you experience at home. Answer the following questions:

- What have been the biggest challenges at home since the last meeting?
- What has he mastered?
- Which interventions are easiest for you to implement?
- Where have you struggled to follow the plan?

TRAINING IS ABOUT YOU!

Start small

If you feel overwhelmed already, ask for a small, simple assignment. Many of the principles of ABA require a shift in perspective and a slightly different response to behavior than you're used to. These are often simple to implement at home.

Or challenge yourself!

If you're up for the challenge and ready to make a dramatic difference in your child's life, ask for a longer list of assignments. How can you use some of the strategies at home that are successful in ABA therapy?

Allow for changes over time

Your ability to complete assignments between meetings will likely shift over time. As you begin to experience success with interventions, you may want to tackle something a little more challenging. When your family experiences change, you take a trip, or have an important event, you may need to pull back and keep the assignments simple. Communicate this with your BCBA® so he knows what you feel you can handle.

DO YOU WANT TO START SMALL OR CHALLENGE YOURSELF?



Scope and Structure Assignment

Prepare for parent training by filling in the form below with questions you might have or areas you want to understand better. During parent training, use the form to take notes so you remember what the BCBA® said. Highlight any areas or terminology you don't fully understand. Store completed forms either by date or by subject in a binder for future reference.

GOALS AND PROGRESS

ABA PRINCIPLES

DATA REVIEW & PROBLEM SOLVING

HOMEWORK

Meeting Notes

MEETING NOTES

Scope and Structure Quiz

1. Parent coaching includes goal development, ABA principles, data review, problem solving and
 - A. Complex Interventions
 - B. RBT® Training
 - C. Homework
 - D. Discussion of crisis of the day every session

2. ABA services should include either skill acquisition goals or behavior reduction goals, not both.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. The BCBA® will teach you everything that an RBT® knows.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Learning ABA strategies helps you use them at home and leads to greater success for your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. You should implement all the interventions used during ABA therapy at home every day.
 - A. True
 - B. False

GOAL SETTING

GOAL

Goals are critical to the success of your training. Learn the process for setting goals effectively so you know where to focus your attention.

BACKGROUND

Goals are an important part of any successful ABA program. Goals give direction as well as a destination. They allow you to note progress or recognize a need for change. Laurence J. Peters said it best:

If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else.

CHOOSE GOALS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL FOR YOUR CHILD

When choosing goals for your child, consider what your child's needs are and will be as she grows. Start with broad goals and break them down to something more specific that you can teach.

What behaviors prevent her from being independent? What behaviors prevent her from being part of her community? Which behaviors present a risk of harm to herself or others?

What would her life look like if she could self-advocate and communicate effectively?

What skills does she need to be more independent?

GETTING STARTED

Turn your ideas into goals

Setting goals sets your ABA program up for success. You probably already have an idea about things you want to work on or learn about, but take it one step further by turning these ideas into real goals.

At a minimum, develop goals for your child in the areas of:

- Behavior reduction
- Skill acquisition

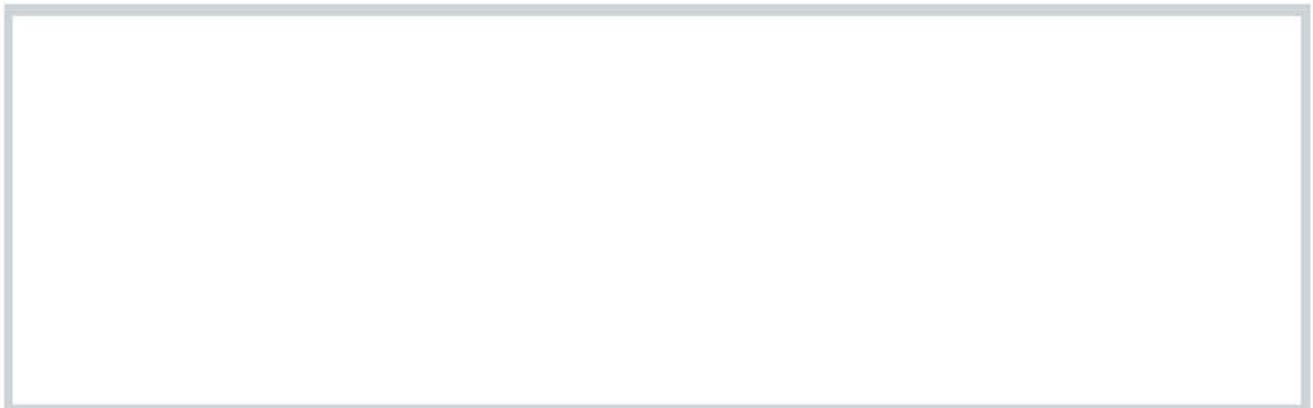
You might also consider setting specific goals for yourself to ensure that you stay on track with tasks you need to accomplish. These might include areas such as:

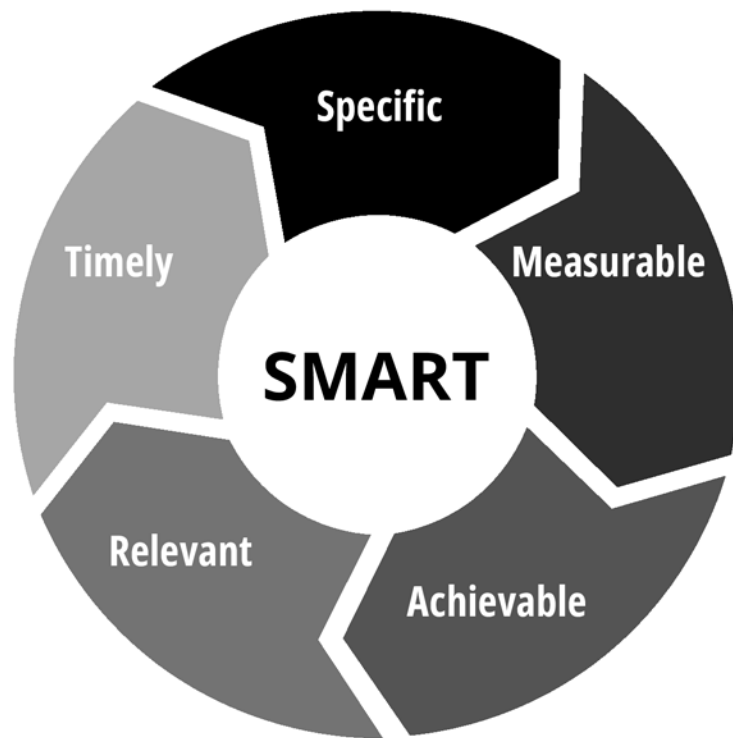
- Follow through
- Attendance or participation
- Data collection
- Implementation
- Skill acquisition

WHAT GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR CHILD?



WHAT GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOURSELF?





MAKE YOUR GOALS SMART

There are many strategies available for defining goals. The SMART technique is a framework that is easy to understand, and incorporates key elements of successful goals. SMART stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timely

SPECIFIC

The goal must be clear and limited in scope. It should answer What, Why and How type questions.

MEASURABLE

It has to be quantifiable. You need to be able to tell without a doubt whether you or your child achieved the goal. Define some quantifiable aspect of the behavior that allows you to count it in some way.

ACHIEVABLE

The goal should stretch your child's ability so that he feels challenged, but should not be so difficult that either you or he becomes frustrated.

RELEVANT

The goal has to be something relevant to your child. Although many ABA programs use standardized assessments such as the VB-MAPP or the ABBLS-R, the goal must impact your child's everyday life experiences.

TIMELY

The goal should have a time frame associated with it. There should be some sense of urgency, but provide a reasonable timeframe. This will allow you to evaluate progress toward your goal, and provides opportunities to make adjustments. The timeframe should be reasonable based on the goal.

SAMPLE GOALS

Goals should be personal and meaningful to you and your child. They allow you to see progress and keep you on track. Write goals around anything you want to accomplish with your child. Make sure that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Your BCBA can help you set goals that align with your child's treatment goals, but here are some examples to get you started.

TO MAKE SURE REINFORCERS STAY EFFECTIVE FOR YOUR CHILD:

I will limit access to my child's primary reinforcer by only giving him access to the item following the completion of 3 simple tasks, setting a timer for 3 minutes, then putting the item away. I will do this each time he asks for the reinforcer for 3 consecutive days.

TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH A TOILET TRAINING PROGRAM:

I will put my child in underwear for at least 2 hours each day and have him sit on the toilet every 30 minutes for 3 consecutive days.

TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S EATING AT MEALTIME:

I will provide a choice between 2 foods when preparing my child's meal for 2 out of 3 meals for 3 consecutive days.

TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S COOPERATION WHEN PRESENTED WITH A DEMAND:

I will present demands in a first/then format at least 5 times per day for 3 consecutive days.

TO MOTIVATE YOUR CHILD TO COMPLETE TASKS AND EASE TRANSITIONS AFTER SCHOOL:

I will present a visual schedule to my child when picking him up at school that shows the next 5 activities in his day and includes at least 2 activities he wants to do for 3 consecutive days.

TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR AND WHY IT CONTINUES:

I will collect ABC data for at least 10 incidents of challenging behavior over a 1 week period.

TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN REDUCING AGGRESSION

I will record the number of times my child engages in aggression for 5 consecutive days.

TO ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT REQUESTING OF PREFERRED ITEMS:

I will require that my child ask for what he wants using 1 word before giving him access to the item at least 10 times over 3 consecutive days.

TO ENCOURAGE JOINT ATTENTION AND LABELING SKILLS:

I will take my child on "I Spy" walks and ask him to label at least 5 items for 3 consecutive days.

TO IMPROVE INDEPENDENT COMPLETION OF PERSONAL CARE TASKS:

I will use visuals to help my child complete the task of hand washing at least 2 times per day for 3 consecutive days.

TO HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE FOR COMPLETING TASKS:

I will complete the homework assignment after each lesson prior to meeting with the BCBA for 3 consecutive sessions.

TO HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE FOR ATTENDING SESSIONS:

I will attend at least 2 parent training sessions with the BCBA each month for 3 consecutive months.

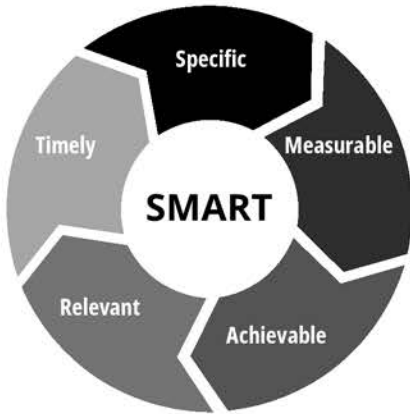


GET INVOLVED

A successful ABA program relies heavily on the parents' and caregivers' ability to learn and utilize the strategies used during session. This helps with generalization and dramatically improves outcomes. No one expects you to become a therapist, and most of the strategies provide just a slightly different way of getting through your day. These small changes lead to massive gains for your child.

Images are of models and do not depict autistic children.

Goal Setting Assignment



Setting goals is an important first step in accomplishing anything. Goals set a direction and destination. They help determine progress. Without them, there's no way to know if you accomplished what you set out for.

When setting goals, consider both long- and short-term goals. Break up complex goals into smaller, more attainable steps.

Long-Term Goals

Short-Term Goals

SMART Goals

Setting Effective Goals Quiz

1. Writing a goal that thoroughly describes the behavior you want to increase or decrease is covered by which component of SMART?
 - A. Specific
 - B. Measurable
 - C. Achievable
 - D. Relevant
 - E. Timely
2. Writing a goal that is meaningful to your child and will lead to a better quality of life is covered by which component of SMART?
 - A. Specific
 - B. Measurable
 - C. Achievable
 - D. Relevant
 - E. Timely
3. Writing a goal that includes a deadline of some sort is covered by which component of SMART?
 - A. Specific
 - B. Measurable
 - C. Achievable
 - D. Relevant
 - E. Timely
4. Writing a goal that is likely to be effective in the given time frame is covered by which component of SMART?
 - A. Specific
 - B. Measurable
 - C. Achievable
 - D. Relevant
 - E. Timely
5. Writing a goal that includes an element that can be counted is covered by which component of SMART?
 - A. Specific
 - B. Measurable
 - C. Achievable
 - D. Relevant
 - E. Timely

ABA STRATEGIES THAT STICK

GOAL

Turn ABA strategies into habits that fit into your everyday routines, making them easier to use consistently and more effective for your child.

BACKGROUND

Habits are things we do without even thinking about them, like brushing our teeth or making coffee in the morning. They save time and effort because they're automatic. What if using ABA strategies could feel just as easy?

When ABA strategies become habits, they're easier to use regularly, even on hectic days. Research shows that consistency is key to helping your child learn new skills and reduce challenging behaviors. By making small changes to your routines, you can build habits that support your child and make daily life smoother for everyone.

CREATE ABA HABITS

Fit ABA into your routines: Look for moments in your day, like snack time or bedtime, where ABA strategies can naturally fit.

- Start small: Focus on just one change at a time so it's easier to get started and stick with it.
- Celebrate your progress: Give yourself credit for small successes. Every step forward matters!
- Plan for challenges: Life can get busy, but reminders like sticky notes or phone alarms can help you stay on track.
- Make it automatic: With practice and consistency, these strategies will become second nature, helping you and your child thrive.

HABITS THAT WORK FOR YOU

ANCHOR ABA STRATEGIES TO DAILY ROUTINES.

Habits are formed through repetition and reinforcement.

Start by looking at the routines you already follow every day. These are perfect places to add ABA strategies. For example:

- Mealtime: Prompt your child to ask for their drink before handing it to them.
- Bedtime: Use reinforcement when your child follows the bedtime routine.
- Transitions: Count down from five before leaving the house to prepare your child for the change.

TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME.

Start small to ensure success.

Focus on just one small change. Once it feels easy, add another. For example:

- Week 1: Practice prompting communication at snack time.
- Week 2: Add reinforcement for following directions during the bedtime routine.
- Week 3: Use countdowns during morning transitions.

CELEBRATE YOUR PROGRESS.

Celebrate every small victory.

Small wins add up! Give yourself credit for using a strategy, even if it's just once a day. Acknowledge that building habits takes time, and every step forward makes a difference.

REINFORCING YOURSELF

PARENTS NEED REINFORCEMENT, TOO!

Just like your child is motivated by positive reinforcement, you can use rewards to help stay consistent with new habits. Reinforcement can keep you motivated, especially on challenging days.

Why Reinforcement Works for Parents

Positive reinforcement helps you feel accomplished and reminds you that your hard work is making a difference. Small rewards for meeting your goals can give you the energy to keep going.

Ways to Reinforce Yourself:

- ✓ **Track Your Progress:** Use a chart or app to record each day you use a strategy. Seeing your progress can be incredibly motivating.
- ✓ **Celebrate Small Wins:** Acknowledge your effort with small rewards like a favorite snack, a quiet moment with a book, or a coffee break.
- ✓ **Reflect on Success:** At the end of the day, think about what went well and how your efforts are helping your child grow.

Examples:

- ✓ **Goal:** Prompt your child to use communication during snack time every day.
Reward: If you meet this goal for three days, treat yourself to a walk in the park or your favorite podcast.
- ✓ **Goal:** Offer choices to make transitions easier.
Reward: If you meet this goal for a week, buy yourself the audio book you've been wanting.

WHAT DO YOU FIND REINFORCING OR MOTIVATING?

COMMON CHALLENGES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Building habits takes time, and you might face some bumps along the way. Here are common challenges and practical solutions:

Challenge 1: Forgetting to Use Strategies

Solution:

- Place visual reminders in areas where routines happen, like a sticky note on the fridge or an alarm on your phone.
- Pair ABA strategies with specific actions in your routine (e.g., "Before I hand my child a snack, I'll pause and prompt communication").

Challenge 2: Feeling Overwhelmed

Solution:

- Start small. Focus on one habit at a time instead of trying to make many changes all at once.
- Let your BCBA ® know if you feel stretched too thin. They can adjust your goals to fit your current needs.

Challenge 3: Not Seeing Results Right Away

Solution:

- Remember that habits take time to build, and behavior change is a gradual process.
- Celebrate small improvements, even if progress feels slow. Progress is still progress!

Challenge 4: Life Gets in the Way

Solution:

- Be flexible. If you miss a day, don't stress-just pick up the habit again tomorrow.
- During busy times, simplify the strategy to something manageable (e.g., practice just once a day instead of at every mealtime).

MAKING ABA A NATURAL PART OF YOUR LIFE

The goal of building habits is to make ABA strategies feel like second nature. When strategies fit seamlessly into your routines, they're easier to use and more effective for your child.

How to Make ABA Strategies Feel Natural

Build on What You Already Do:

Look for moments in your day where ABA strategies fit easily. For example:

- When getting dressed, reinforce your child for completing each step independently.
- Before playtime, prompt your child to ask for their favorite toy.

Practice Makes Perfect:

The more you use a strategy, the easier it becomes. Over time, you'll find yourself using it without thinking.

Involve the Whole Family:

Share ABA strategies with other family members or caregivers so that everyone can support your child consistently.

Reflect and Adjust:

Think about what's working and what's not. If something feels too hard to stick with, adjust it to better fit your day.

Example Routine with ABA Strategies

- Morning: Use a countdown to help your child transition out of bed.
- Afternoon: Prompt communication before giving snacks or toys.
- Evening: Reinforce your child for following their bedtime routine.

Final Thought

Making ABA a part of your everyday life doesn't mean adding more to your plate. It means weaving strategies into what you're already doing. With time, these small changes will make a big difference for your family.

ABA Strategies That Stick

Assignment

Write down three daily routines and think about one ABA strategy you could add to each routine.

Routine	ABA Strategy

Create a plan to reinforce your efforts at integrating ABA into your routines. Identify specific behaviors or ABA strategies you want to encourage for yourself, then identify reinforcers you can provide to yourself! Make this fun and keep it motivating!

Behavior	Reinforcement

Barriers will inevitably come up when you try to integrate ABA strategies into your routine. Develop a plan for how you will overcome common barriers. Plan for the common barriers and identify barriers that might be unique to you and your family.

Barrier	Plan to Overcome
Forgetting to implement	
Feeling overwhelmed	
Strategy not working as expected	
No time	
Big behaviors	
Inconsistency among caregivers	

ABA Strategies That Stick Quiz

1. Why is building habits important when using ABA strategies?
 - A. Habits make strategies automatic, reducing stress and increasing consistency
 - B. Habits guarantee that your child will always follow the rules
 - C. Habits ensure you never forget any ABA strategy ever again
 - D. Habits replace the need for professional ABA services

2. What is the best way to start building new habits?
 - A. Implement multiple strategies all at once
 - B. Focus on just one strategy at a time and tie it to an existing routine
 - C. Wait until you feel ready to commit to all strategies at once
 - D. Start with the hardest strategies to build confidence

3. What is a common solution to forgetting to use an ABA strategy?
 - A. Set reminders like sticky notes or phone alarms
 - B. Practice all strategies at every opportunity throughout the day
 - C. Only use the strategy when your child is calm
 - D. Ask your BCBA to remind you during every session

4. How can parents reinforce themselves for using ABA strategies?
 - A. By ignoring their own progress and focusing only on the child
 - B. By rewarding themselves with small treats or moments of relaxation for meeting goals
 - C. By practicing strategies with their child for several hours at a time
 - D. By making a list of everything they forgot to do

5. Which of the following statements about making ABA strategies a natural part of life is TRUE?
 - A. ABA strategies only work when you completely change your daily routines
 - B. ABA strategies are too complex to fit into normal routines
 - C. ABA strategies should be woven into your existing routines to feel more natural
 - D. ABA strategies will only work if every family member is a trained professional

UNDERSTANDING APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

GOAL

Create a foundational understanding of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and the types of behaviors and skills that can be taught through ABA therapy. Learn about the controversy behind ABA therapy so you can use it in a way that supports your child's best interests.

BACKGROUND

There are a lot of misconceptions and fear about ABA and how it has been traditionally used in the past. ABA is a science and can be used in a variety of ways.

At its core, ABA is a way to understand behavior and should be used to teach individuals what they need to learn to reach their full potential. It should never be used to change who a person is, or to modify behaviors that are necessary for the well-being of the individual.

WHAT'S THE DEBATE ABOUT ABA?

ABA is the study of behavior and these concepts exist whether we engage in them consciously or unconsciously.

Historically ABA was used to eliminate "autistic traits" such as stereotypies so that these individuals appear "normal." Rightfully, the autistic community opposes this use.

But it's not ABA that is a problem, just the way it is sometimes used. Like gravity, it can be used in an appropriate way such as using a paperweight to hold down paper. Or it can be used in an inappropriate way, like pushing someone off a cliff.

This training will focus on the appropriate use of ABA.

THE REAL DEAL ABOUT ABA

ABA is:

- ✓ A scientifically driven method of teaching skills and reducing problem behavior.
- ✓ An understanding and application of the basic universal laws of behavior which apply no matter who you are and are as reliable as the law of gravity.
- ✓ Highly individualized with motivation at its core.
- ✓ Used to understand why behavior continues and identifies the root "cause" of behavior.

ABA is NOT:

- ✗ Only for autistic individuals
- ✗ A tool to help autistics look "normal."
- ✗ A way to manipulate and control.
- ✗ Abuse.

WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT ABA?



THE RIGHT WAY TO USE ABA

Not just for autism

Although commonly associated with children with autism, the principles of ABA apply to everyone.

Not a way to manipulate and control

Learning ABA will help you understand behavior in a new way. With this knowledge comes a responsibility to use it in the best interest of the individual. Can you use ABA to manipulate your spouse into doing the dishes every night? Yes. Should you? Well, maybe. 😊

But you should not use these strategies to teach your child to do things that are of no benefit to him.

Not a tool to help autistics look "normal"

Early on in the field, ABA was used to help individuals with autism appear "normal," and while there are still some therapists who target stereotypies, eye contact and other autistic traits, these behaviors are critical to the well-being of the individual and should not be targeted for change unless they are harmful (such as self-injurious behaviors) or significantly interfere with their daily activities.

Not abuse

If you haven't heard someone refer to ABA as abuse yet, it's important for you to know that this is common. Many adults with autism are speaking out against ABA. It's important that we all listen and respond to their concerns. Many have valid points and can help guide us in using ABA in a way that respects the individual. We aren't trying to change who they are. When used ethically, ABA is the most effective way to teach autistic individuals the important life skills they need to learn.

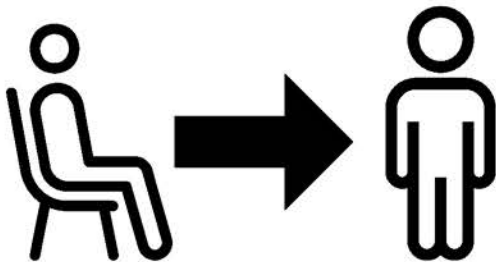
TYPES OF BEHAVIOR

ABA is the science of behavior, and while the science applies to all behaviors, let's get clear on the behaviors we'll focus on with the training.

OVERT

Observable by others.

Going from a sitting to a standing position is an overt behavior.



COVERT

Not observable by others

Thinking about what to make for dinner is a covert behavior.



Typically, the goals of ABA target overt behavior. However there are some exceptions such as sensory issues. The key is that all goals should benefit the individual.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER OVERT BEHAVIORS?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to list other examples of overt behaviors.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER COVERT BEHAVIORS?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to list other examples of covert behaviors.

ABA GOALS

ABA can be used in a variety of ways to help your child. Often parents seek out ABA therapy to reduce challenging behaviors, however its equally important to teach your child new skills. The introduction of important skills, such as functional communication, can ultimately lead to reducing the behaviors that are disruptive.

BEHAVIOR REDUCTION

Reduce challenging behaviors.

ABA can be used to reduce challenging behaviors such as:

- Yelling or screaming at inappropriate times
- Hitting and aggressive behaviors
- Tantrums and
- Jumping on furniture

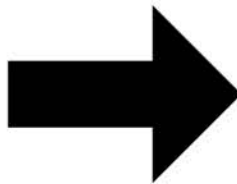
SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Teach replacement behaviors.

But ABA is also used to teach new skills. In fact, the challenging behaviors listed to the left can often be reduced by teaching functional communication. Other skills taught might include:

- Play skills
- Social skills and
- Academic skills

EXAMPLE



Using ABA you can teach your child to use communication (either verbal or non verbal) to get their needs met instead of getting angry, hitting, punching or having a tantrum.

HOW DOES ABA WORK?

Applying these principles does not control the behavior of others. By controlling the conditions surrounding behavior, you make behavior more or less likely to occur. In other words, changing your behavior changes the behavior of others.

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIORS AS GOOD OR BAD

It's best not to identify a behavior as either good or bad, but rather consider the context within which it occurs. A desirable behavior is appropriate to the context of a given situation. An undesirable behavior does not fit the context of a situation.

IN CONTEXT

Appropriate to the context

Behavior that is appropriate for the time and place.

OUT OF CONTEXT

Not appropriate to the context

Behavior that is not appropriate to the time and place.

EXAMPLE



Look at jumping as an example. Jumping on a trampoline is in context. It's good exercise, it expends excess energy and it may be a social experience. Jumping on a chair in the living room is out of context and may be problematic.

For the purposes of this training, when we talk about reducing behaviors we will be focused on reducing behaviors that are out of context.

WHAT BEHAVIORS MIGHT BE OUT OF CONTEXT FOR YOUR CHILD?

MOTIVATION OF BEHAVIOR

So, how can we use ABA to reduce behavior that's out of context? By understanding the motivation behind it.

Just about all behavior continues because the person either gets something good or avoids something bad.



ACCESS

Access to something the child wants such as:

- Attention
- An item or activity
- Sensory experience



ESCAPE

Avoids something the child doesn't want such as:

- Attention
- A task that is too difficult or too long
- Sensory experience

It's critical to learn more about why the behavior is occurring. Before determining how best to respond to a specific behavior, you need more information. You need to know the "function" of the behavior. That is, you ask the question "why is it continuing?" to determine the appropriate intervention.

What they "get" from the behavior may not be obvious. But together we will learn what motivates your child and help him learn better.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOUR CHILD MIGHT WANT TO ACCESS?

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOUR CHILD MIGHT WANT TO ESCAPE?

Understanding ABA Assignment

Think about your own behavior. What are some things that you do regularly? Make a list of 5 behaviors you engage in on a daily basis.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Now use the table below to answer the following questions:

- Which behaviors are beneficial and which would you prefer to change?
- Why do you continue to engage in the behavior?

Behavior	Desirable or Undesirable?	Why Does It Continue?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Understanding Your Child's Behavior

Now think about your child's behavior. What are some things that they do regularly? Make a list of 5 behaviors they engage in on a daily basis.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Now use the table below to answer the following questions:

- Which behaviors are beneficial and which would you prefer to change?
- Why do you think your child continues to engage in the behavior?

Behavior	Desirable or Undesirable?	Why Does It Continue?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Understanding ABA Quiz

1.ABA is primarily used to target covert behaviors.

- A. True
- B. False

2.ABA is a way to manipulate and control your child.

- A. True
- B. False

3.ABA is a scientifically driven treatment that focuses on teaching skills and _____.

- A. Getting rid of stims
- B. Gaining compliance
- C. Reducing problem behavior
- D. Making autistics act like their peers

4.ABA is an individualized approach and the interventions will be customized to your child's unique characteristics.

- A. True
- B. False

5.ABA can help reduce which of the following behaviors:

- A. Aggression
- B. Breathing
- C. Blinking
- D. Thinking

SUSTAINABLE PARENTING

GOAL

To help you reduce stress, build emotional resilience, and feel more supported—so you can continue to show up for your child with energy, compassion, and confidence.

BACKGROUND

Parenting a child with significant support needs can be incredibly demanding—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Many parents feel exhausted, isolated, or overwhelmed. You may find yourself putting your own needs last, simply trying to get through the day.

You're not alone. And your well-being matters. Research shows that when caregivers are supported, outcomes improve for children too. This guide offers practical, realistic ways to care for yourself—even when time and energy are limited.

Self-care doesn't have to mean taking a break or finding extra time. Sometimes, it's about small, intentional shifts that give you space to breathe, reset, and reconnect with what matters most.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When you take care of your own emotional and physical health:

- You're more able to respond calmly during stressful moments
- You model healthy coping strategies for your child
- You're more likely to stay consistent with strategies over time
- You feel more connected, supported, and capable

This guide is here to remind you: taking care of yourself isn't a luxury—it's a key part of helping your child thrive.

FINDING TIME TO BREATHE

It's easy to put your own needs last when you're focused on supporting your child. But the truth is, you can't pour from an empty cup. Prioritizing your well-being—even in small ways—can actually help you show up more fully and patiently for your child. Self-care doesn't have to be fancy or time-consuming. It just needs to be something that helps you recharge.

SMALL MOMENTS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

- **Breathe:** Even 30 seconds of deep breathing can help calm your nervous system.
- **Move:** Stretching, walking to the mailbox, or standing in the sun can lift your energy.
- **Connect:** A quick text to a friend or joining an online parent group can ease isolation.

These small moments add up. You don't need to overhaul your life—just notice what helps you feel a little more grounded and do more of that.

SUPPORTIVE SELF-TALK

Your inner voice matters. Instead of criticism, try offering yourself the same kindness you would give a friend:

- "I'm doing the best I can."
- "It's okay to have a hard day."
- "Small steps still count."

BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

You don't have to do this alone. Think about who can support you:

- Family or friends
- Support groups (online or in person)
- Professionals like your child's BCBA®, counselor, or physician

Asking for help is not weakness—it's strength. When you're supported, your child benefits too.

SELF-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Caring for a child with high support needs often leaves little room for your own well-being—but your needs matter too. These small, practical strategies are designed to fit into the margins of your day, helping you feel more grounded, supported, and capable. You don't have to do it all—just start where you are.

NOTICE YOUR TRIGGERS

Stress doesn't always come from one big moment—it often builds throughout the day. Begin by noticing when you feel your body tense, your thoughts race, or your patience run thin. Was it during transitions, meltdowns, or a moment of quiet when you expected a break?

Learning to recognize these moments helps you pause and respond with intention instead of reacting automatically. Awareness is the first tool in your toolbox.

START SMALL WITH ONE DAILY INTENTION

Self-care isn't about overhauling your life—it's about doing one thing today that makes tomorrow feel a little easier. Think about a value that's important to you—maybe it's calm, patience, connection, or strength. Then choose one small way to act on that value today.

BUILD A MICRO-ROUTINE

Your day is likely full of chaos and unpredictability—but even a tiny bit of routine can help you feel more grounded. Choose one moment in your day you can count on and use it as a cue for a calming routine.

It might be writing a quick journal entry, sitting in silence, stretching, or just staring out the window. This is about creating a pocket of time that's only for you, even if it's just one minute long.

REINFORCE YOUR OWN PROGRESS

You are doing incredibly hard work. Don't wait for others to notice—acknowledge yourself. You can do this by writing down a success, no matter how small, or simply saying aloud, "That was hard, and I did it."

Progress doesn't mean perfection. It means showing up, trying again, and giving yourself the same kindness you'd give your child.

What's one small change you can make this week to support your own well-being?

LET GO OF GUILT, EMBRACE GRACE

It's common for parents to feel guilty when they take time for themselves, respond less patiently than they wanted to, or can't "do it all." But guilt isn't helpful if it stops you from caring for yourself. You're doing your best—and that's enough.



GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

No one can be calm, patient, and consistent 100% of the time. And that's okay. You don't have to be perfect—you just have to keep showing up. Your child doesn't need perfection. They need a parent who cares, repairs, and tries again.



REFRAME THE NARRATIVE

Instead of saying:

- "I messed that up."

Try:

- "That was a hard moment. I can try something different next time."



PRACTICE SELF-KINDNESS

Start noticing your inner dialogue. Are you being harder on yourself than you would be on a friend? If so, pause and ask, "What would I say to someone else in my shoes?" You deserve the same kindness you give to others.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Every parent struggles. You are not failing. You're doing something incredibly hard, and your willingness to keep going—even when it's messy—is a sign of strength, not weakness.

WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

Being a parent of a child with complex needs can be overwhelming, exhausting, and emotionally draining. You don't have to carry it all alone. Recognizing when you need more help is not a weakness-it's a strength. These signs can help you know when it's time to ask for extra support.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BENEFIT FROM MORE HELP

If you're not sure whether it's time to ask for help, here are some common signs that extra support might be helpful.

You feel emotionally exhausted most days, even after rest.

You're frequently overwhelmed by your child's needs or behavior.

You've stopped doing things that used to bring you joy.

You feel alone, even when people are around.

You're snapping at others more easily or feel constantly on edge.

You feel stuck and unsure what else to try.

WHERE TO TURN FOR SUPPORT

Support can come from many places-here are a few to consider when you need encouragement or guidance.



Your BCBA® -Talk openly about how you're doing. They may be able to adjust the plan to better support you and your child.



Your Doctor or Therapist -Professional mental health support can help you process stress and build coping tools.



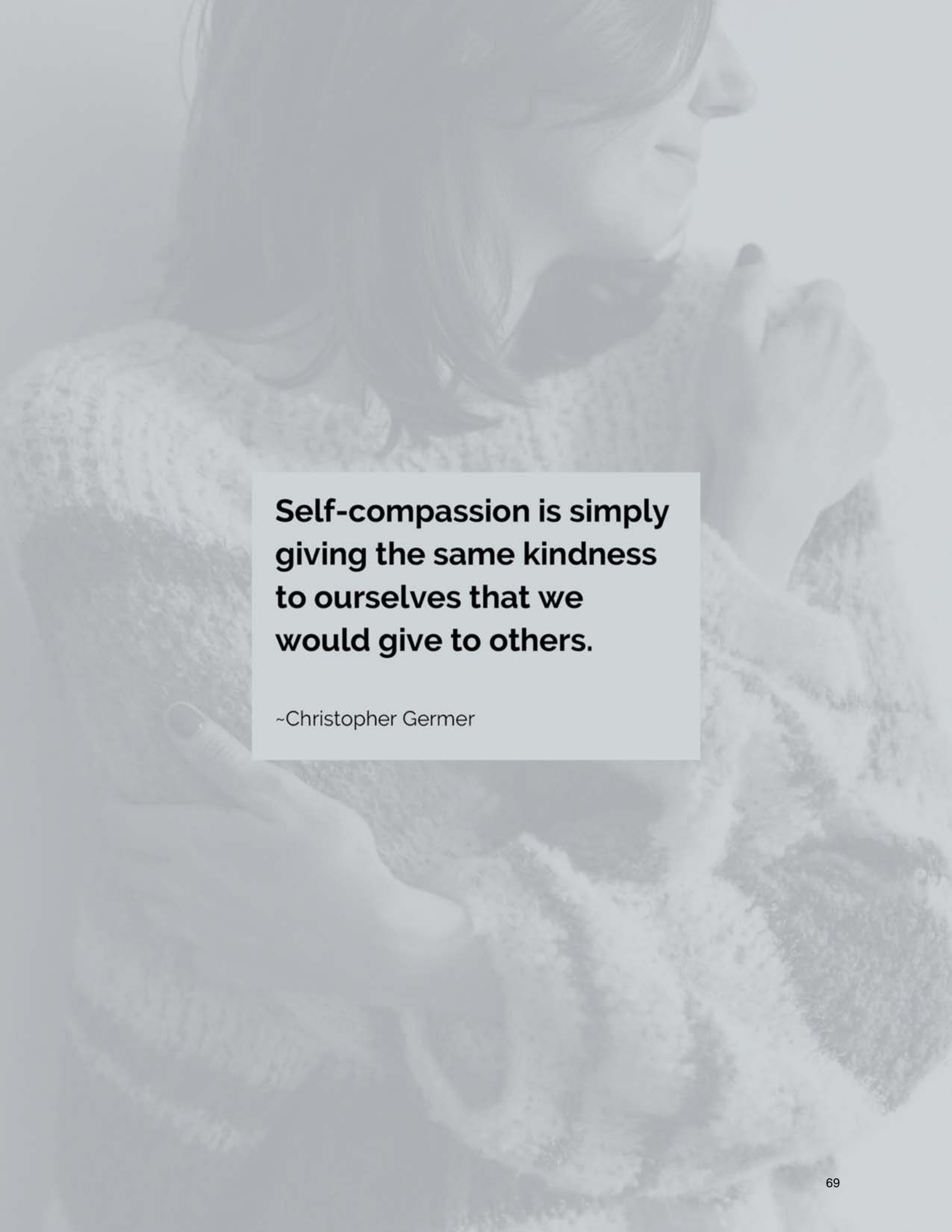
Local Parent Groups -Connecting with others who understand what you're going through can reduce isolation and offer encouragement.



Respite Services -Ask about options for temporary care or support to give you a break.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Asking for help isn't giving up-it's choosing to stay in the game. You are doing an incredibly hard job, and support is part of making it sustainable.



**Self-compassion is simply
giving the same kindness
to ourselves that we
would give to others.**

~Christopher Germer

Sustainable Parenting Assignment

Complete each section by listing simple, realistic actions or ideas. These don't need to be big—focus on what feels manageable right now.

What Helps Me Feel Better (Even a Little Bit)

List small things that help you feel a little more grounded, calm, or cared for—even if just for a moment.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Habits I'd Like to Build

List small habits you'd like to work toward, such as taking a deep breath before responding, journaling for 2 minutes, or drinking water regularly.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

My Support System

List the people, services, or groups you can turn to for support (big or small—this could be a friend, therapist, BCBA®, or online group).

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Encouraging Thoughts to Tell Myself

List some helpful reminders or affirmations for tough moments—things you want to remember when you're overwhelmed or feeling discouraged.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Sustainable Parenting Quiz

1. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Which of the following is an example of a realistic self-care strategy for overwhelmed parents?
 - A. Weekend getaway
 - B. Starting a new fitness program
 - C. Taking a few minutes alone to breathe or stretch
 - D. Reading a full book in one sitting

3. If you don't respond perfectly in every situation, you've failed your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Which of these is one way to practice self-compassion?
 - A. Ignoring your feelings so you can stay strong
 - B. Reminding yourself you're doing the best you can
 - C. Comparing yourself to other parents
 - D. Waiting until everything is perfect before taking a break

5. Having a support network means you're weak and can't handle things on your own.
 - A. True
 - B. False

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS

GOAL

To help you make thoughtful, values-aligned decisions when navigating challenging moments in your child's ABA program, and to give you tools for advocating for ethical, compassionate care.

BACKGROUND

As a parent, you want what's best for your child—but navigating ABA programs can bring up tough decisions. You might wonder:

- Is this strategy respectful of my child's needs?
- How do I balance consistency with kindness?
- What should I do if something doesn't feel right?

These are valid and important questions. Some autistic adults have shared their experiences of ABA as harmful or traumatic, especially when their autonomy or sensory needs were ignored. Understanding this perspective helps ensure your child's support system is truly compassionate and respectful.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Even evidence-based strategies can become harmful if used rigidly. You know your child best, and it's okay to speak up when something doesn't feel right. Watch for signs like:

- Increased anxiety or distress after sessions
- Rigid responses to sensory or communication needs
- Strategies that feel more controlling than supportive

You don't need all the answers—just the confidence to ask questions and advocate for compassionate, individualized care.

SHIFTING FROM CONTROL TO COLLABORATION

It's natural to want to guide your child's behavior, especially when you're trying to teach important skills. But when strategies feel too controlling—like forcing eye contact, demanding compliance without flexibility, or insisting on exact behaviors—they can lead to resistance, stress, and even shutdown.

Instead, collaboration allows your child to feel seen and respected while still learning. By noticing their cues and adjusting your expectations, you create an environment where learning can happen without coercion.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE CONTROLLING RATHER THAN SUPPORTING

- Your child seems anxious or avoidant during learning activities
- Your child resists or shuts down when asked to do something
- Your child shows signs of distress, like crying, yelling, or running away

When we shift toward working with our children rather than doing things to them, their trust—and their willingness—grow.

TEACHING WITH RESPECT AND FLEXIBILITY

Effective teaching honors your child's pace, preferences, and needs. That doesn't mean letting go of expectations—it means adjusting how you get there.

By supporting autonomy, you're not giving in; you're giving your child a voice in their own learning journey. That might mean offering choices, building in movement breaks, or being open to alternative ways to meet a goal.

Strategies that respect autonomy and reduce power struggles:

- Offer choices whenever possible (e.g., "Do you want to use crayons or markers?")
- Use clear, kind communication rather than commands
- Recognize and respect sensory needs before placing demands

Support doesn't have to be rigid to be effective. Flexibility often leads to better learning—and a stronger connection with your child.

TRUSTING YOUR GUT

You don't need to be an expert in ABA to know when something doesn't sit right. If a strategy feels too rigid, or your child seems disconnected or distressed, your instincts are worth listening to. This page will help you recognize potential concerns and give you language to start important conversations with your child's care team.

WHEN SOMETHING DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone. If something about your child's services or learning plan feels off, you're allowed—and encouraged—to speak up. You don't need a clinical background to raise a valid concern. Your observations and instincts are essential in building a program that supports your child well.

Sometimes it's not about a major issue, but a quiet discomfort:

- "This feels too rigid for my child."
- "My child shuts down after this part of services."
- "I don't think they're really learning—I think they're complying."

These thoughts matter.

SPEAKING UP DOESN'T MEAN CONFLICT

You don't have to be confrontational to raise a concern. Many BCBAs genuinely want to do what's best for your child and will welcome your insight. Use collaborative language to invite a conversation:

- "I've noticed my child seems really overwhelmed during this part of the session. Could we talk about what's happening?"
- "I'm wondering if there's another way we can approach this goal."
- "My child does best when they feel in control. Can we find ways to give them more choice?"

When everyone on the team communicates openly, the result is a more ethical, effective, and compassionate plan.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

If you're unsure whether something is worth bringing up, consider whether any of these red flags are present:

- Your child regularly seems distressed or withdrawn during services
- You're told that your child is being noncompliant, without efforts to understand why
- The same strategies are used even when they clearly aren't working
- Your child's sensory or communication needs are being overlooked
- You feel like the goal is compliance over learning or connection

Even one of these signs is reason enough to pause and ask questions.

YOUR VALUES, YOUR VOICE

You are the expert on your child. While professionals may bring knowledge of ABA strategies, no one knows your child's needs, strengths, and history better than you. Your voice matters—especially when it comes to making decisions that shape your child's day-to-day experiences. As you partner with your care team, take a moment to reflect on what's most important to you as a parent. When you clearly understand your values, it becomes easier to advocate for approaches that feel supportive, respectful, and right for your child.

What matters most to you?

Here are some questions to help you think about the role you want ABA services to play in your child's life:

- What are your biggest hopes for your child in the next year?
- What do you want your child to feel during sessions (safe, confident, included)?
- Are there strategies you've seen in the past that didn't feel right?
- What boundaries or goals do you want to protect as a parent?

It's okay to speak up


Even if you're not sure exactly what to say, it's okay to share when something doesn't feel right. Most professionals want your feedback and value your perspective.

Try phrases like:

- "Can we explore a different way to approach this goal?"
- "This strategy doesn't seem to align with how my child learns best."
- "I'd like to make sure we're respecting their sensory needs in this routine."

What's one thing you wish your BCBA® or care team understood about your child?



The background of the image shows the silhouettes of several people clapping their hands. The scene is set against a bright, hazy sky, likely during a sunrise or sunset, which creates a soft, glowing light. The silhouettes are dark and positioned around the central text, with some hands raised in the air.

**If you don't know
what you value,
someone else will
decide for you.**

~Roy Disney

Ethical Considerations for Parents Assignment

Understanding Your Child's Perspective

Think of a skill or routine you're working on right now. Ask yourself:

How might this feel from my child's
point of view?

Is this skill meaningful to them—or
just important to others?

Does the current approach feel
supportive, or could it feel
overwhelming or confusing?

How can you adjust the goal to make
it more meaningful for your child?

Ethical Considerations for Parents Quiz

1. If an intervention is effective at changing behavior, it is always the right choice.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Which of the following is a reason autistic adults have criticized some ABA practices?
 - A. They believe all therapy is unnecessary
 - B. They feel their autonomy and communication needs were ignored
 - C. They prefer unstructured learning
 - D. They don't think children need support

3. It's important to consider whether a goal benefits your child—not just whether it's easy to teach.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. What is one ethical concern when using compliance-based strategies?
 - A. They always lead to more meltdowns
 - B. They can encourage blind obedience without understanding
 - C. They are not based in ABA
 - D. They never use reinforcement

5. Which of the following is a respectful way to address concerns about your child's ABA services?
 - A. Stop services without telling your BCBA®
 - B. Tell your child to ignore the therapist's instructions
 - C. Bring your concerns to the BCBA® in a calm, collaborative way
 - D. Post complaints online instead of speaking directly

INTRODUCTION TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

GOAL

Discover basic teaching techniques to effectively teach an autistic child new skills.

BACKGROUND

Many autistic children exhibit deficits in a variety of skill areas. This may be due to cognitive delays or even a different learning style than their peers. Many autistic children learn best when instruction is more intentional and structured.

YOUR CHILD CAN ACHIEVE GREAT THINGS!

As a parent, you probably aren't accustomed to teaching your child in a structured way. You naturally parent either the way you were parented or in a way that is the complete opposite of the way you were raised, depending on your personal childhood experiences. Either way, it's unlikely that you spontaneously learned to teach skills the way children with autism learn best.

This lesson provides the tools you need to teach your child valuable life skills that will lead to greater independence so your child can ACHIEVE his full potential!


YOU'RE NOT A FAILURE!

Many parents feel as though they failed their child by not teaching them the things they should know.

You are not responsible for the skills your child hasn't learned yet. There is no reason you should have known how to teach your child in the way that he learns best. This training will take you on a journey to help your child learn new skills. It's a process that takes time, patience and perseverance.

You and your child will become partners on this journey, working together to overcome obstacles and accomplish new milestones. Simply take one step at a time and watch your child learn, grow and ACHIEVE.

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU FELT LIKE A FAILURE?



HOW CAN YOU REFRAME THIS THINKING?



IDENTIFYING SKILL DEFICITS



Autistic children often struggle with a variety of different skills. These deficits lead to increased dependence on adults and even challenging behavior.

When deciding which skills your child needs to learn, it's important to consider your child's skills in these areas:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| ✓ Expressive communication | ✓ Listener skills |
| ✓ Imitation skills | ✓ Play |
| ✓ Social Skills | ✓ Life skills |
| ✓ Academics | |

WHAT SKILL DEFICITS DO YOU RECOGNIZE IN YOUR CHILD?

TYPES OF SKILLS

One of the strategies that makes ABA so effective for teaching new skills is the focus on breaking up complex skills like communication into smaller pieces. These pieces are easier to teach and easier for your child to learn. Here you'll learn the types of skills you'll be teaching. We'll dig deeper into each skill in future lessons.

Expressive Communication

Expressive communication refers to the way your child interacts with those around him to fulfill his needs, share his thoughts and engage socially with others. Although speech is the most common form of expressive communication, many children who have difficulty with speech can learn to use alternative methods of expressive communication such as sign language, PECS, and communication apps.

Expressive communication is made up of many pieces including:

- Requesting. In ABA, we call this manding
- Spontaneous vocal behavior which refers to speech sounds or words your child says on his own
- Labeling. In ABA, we call this tacting
- And responding to your communication or that of someone else. In ABA, we call this intraverbals

Social Skills

Social skills are a highly complex group of skills that involve communication, imitation, and play skills. All of these pieces include initiating interactions, responding to peers and sustaining interactions.

Listener Skills

Listener skills involve your child responding physically to something you say. These skills include following explicit, simple directions such as "give me the stick" and responding to complex directions such as "give me something that is brown and fell from a tree."

Imitation Skills

Imitation skills are critical because they help your child learn new skills simply by watching those around him and doing what they do. These skills include motor imitation where your child physically imitates your movements and vocal imitation where your child imitates the speech sounds and words you make.

Life Skills

Life skills incorporate a broad range of skills needed for independent living as an adult. These include self-care tasks, shopping and money, and household chores among many others.

TYPES OF SKILLS CONT.

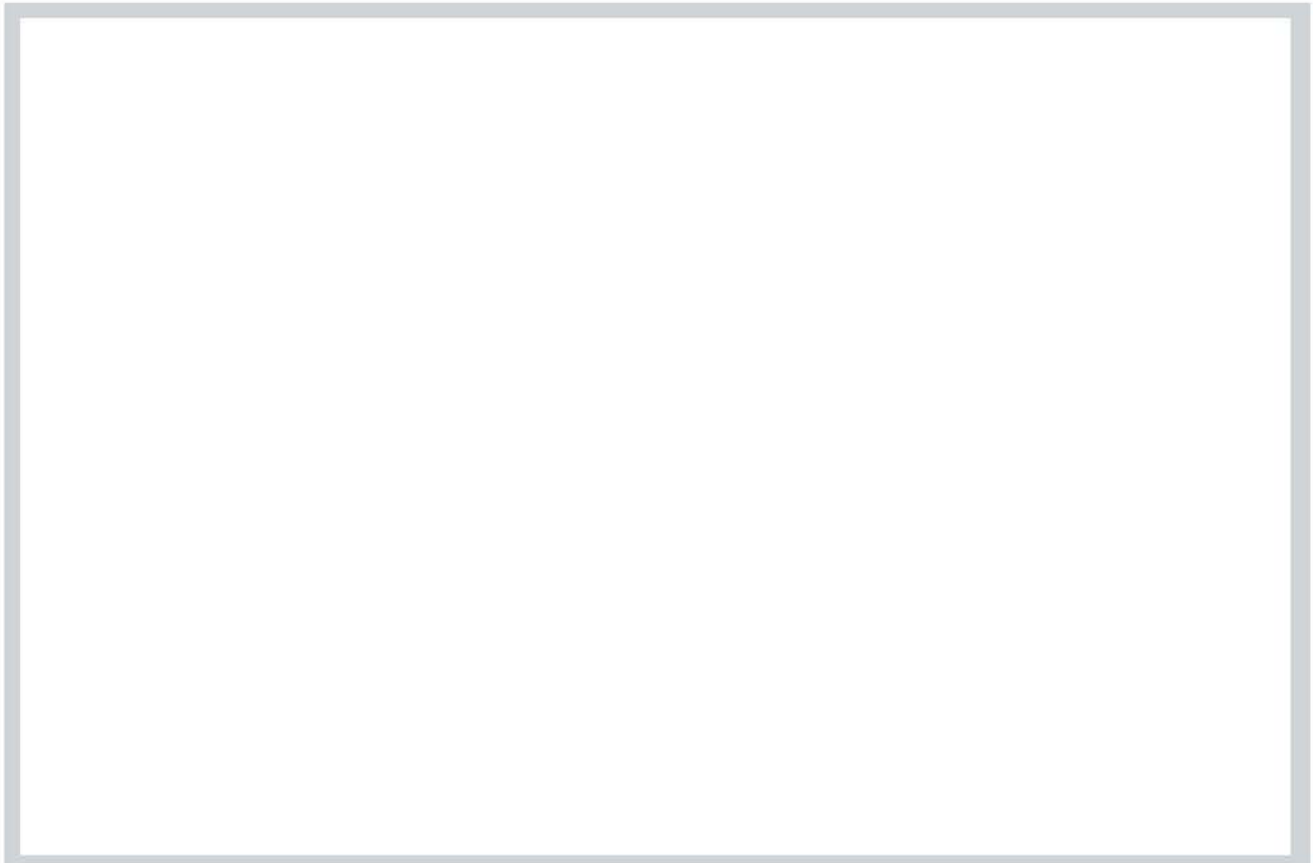
Play Skills

Play is an important part of your child's life. Children learn through play. Play also gives your child a constructive way to occupy her time and interact with her peers. Play consists of both independent and social play skills. Each of these categories include concrete play such as completing a shape sorter and abstract play such as pretend play.

Academic Skills

Academic skills help your child encounter success at school and prepare him for employment as an adult. These skills include reading, writing, math, and group skills such as sitting at a table, walking in line, or learning from group instruction.

WHICH SKILLS SEEMS EASIEST FOR YOU? WHICH SEEM THE HARDEST?

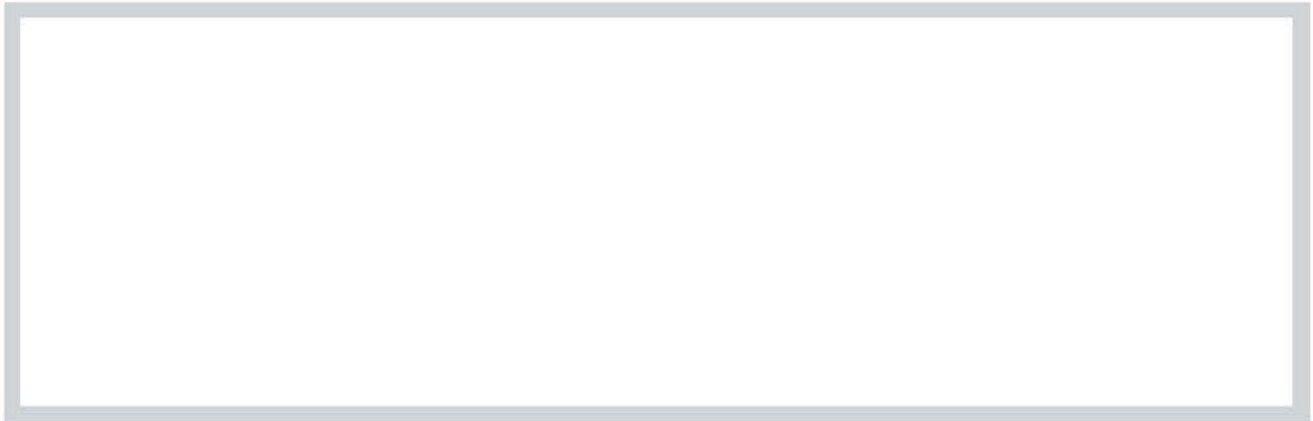


YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT OR CAREGIVER

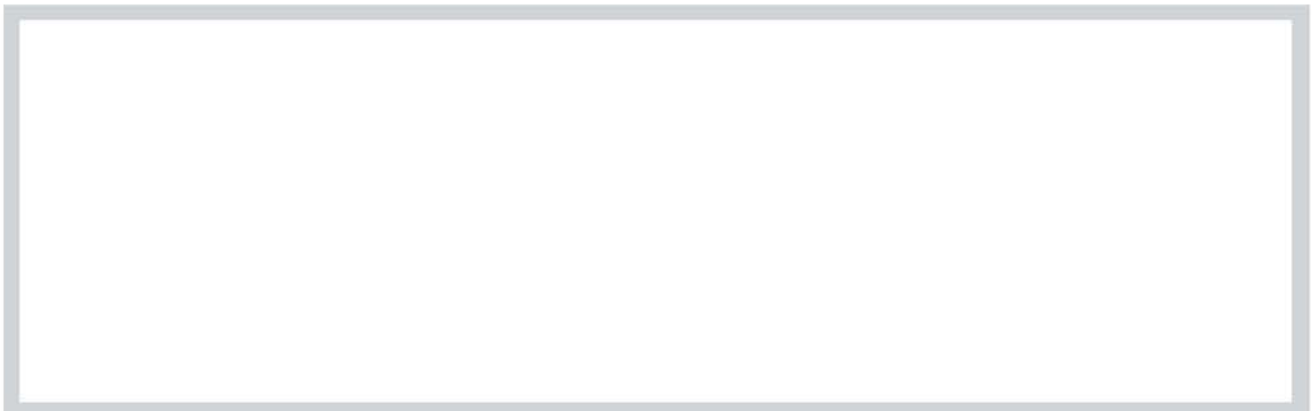
As a parent or caregiver of an autistic child, your role is critical. By participating in this training, you are opening doors for your child and helping him reach his full potential. You don't need to become a BCBA® or an RBT®. Simply walk through each step of the training and you will guide your child on the path to success. You can do this!

Often it's easy to get caught up in your child's challenges and struggles. Take a minute here to really think about his strengths. Often traits that might be considered "challenging" can be reframed as a strength. For example, a strong-willed child might be considered difficult, or he may be viewed as true to himself. Once you've listed your child's strengths, take a minute to also consider his greatest needs.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S GREATEST STRENGTHS?



WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S GREATEST NEEDS?



INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING NEW SKILLS

Ben is a hardworking, single father. He's worried about his son Travis who was diagnosed with autism 2 years ago when he was 4. Travis has 2 older brothers who were playing sports and doing homework and chores by the time they were Travis' age, but Travis spends most of his day watching videos on his tablet or pacing the floor. Ben does a lot of things for Travis like pouring his drink and helping him get dressed because he isn't sure what Travis is actually able to do for himself.

Without planning to, Ben has encouraged Travis to become dependent on him for nearly everything.

Ben learned from a BCBA® about different assessments available to help him figure out what Travis could do and what skills he needed to learn. The BCBA® recommended using the VB-MAPP to get started. Ben learned that the VB-MAPP broke complicated skills such as communication and play into smaller skills to make them easier for Ben to teach and easier for Travis to learn. The assessment used terminology that Ben didn't understand, but the BCBA® helped him learn what those words meant. Then she showed him how to test to see if Travis had a skill or not.

Ben started with the areas of play, listener and social skills because he understood those areas best. He took some time to figure out the language the other areas used and eventually completed the whole assessment. Through the assessment, Ben was able to see that Travis had strong matching and manding skills, but he needed more help in the areas of play and social skills.

Ben now feels confident about which skills to teach Travis to help him become more independent. He still feels a little lost in how to teach these skills, but he has begun to expect Travis to do some chores around the house including sorting the silverware from the dishwasher and matching socks from the laundry since Ben knows that Travis has strong matching skills.

Although it might sound complicated, it's a simple process when you take it one step at a time. Learning what your child can do helps you encourage independence which in turn allows your child to have confidence and a feeling of accomplishment.

Identifying Skill Deficits Assignment

What are your child's greatest areas of need? Think about what you want your child to learn in each of the areas of skill development. Write your answers below.

Expressive Communication

1 _____

2 _____

Listener Skills

1 _____

2 _____

Imitation Skills

1 _____

2 _____

Play Skills

1 _____

2 _____

Social Skills

1 _____

2 _____

Life Skills

1 _____

2 _____

Academics

1 _____

2 _____

Other

1 _____

2 _____

Introduction to Teaching New Skills Quiz

1. Asking your child to “give me something brown that fell from a tree” is an example of what type of skill?
 - A. Listener skills
 - B. Expressive communication
 - C. Imitation
 - D. Play

2. When assessing skill deficits, teaching your child to ask for the things he wants fits into which category?
 - A. Listener skills
 - B. Expressive communication
 - C. Imitation
 - D. Play

3. Skill deficits lead to (select all that apply):
 - A. Dependence on adults
 - B. Laziness
 - C. Challenging behavior
 - D. Lack of motivation

4. Teaching your child to put a pot on his head and pretend it’s a drum is an example of which type of skill?
 - A. Listener skills
 - B. Expressive communication
 - C. Imitation
 - D. Play

5. Assessments help you determine which skills you should teach your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION WHEN TEACHING NEW SKILLS

GOAL

Understand how motivation and reinforcement impact the acquisition of new skills. Learn what a reinforcer is and why it's important to your child's success.

BACKGROUND

Think about why you do some of the things you do. Why do you go to work each day? Is it for the love of your job? Even if you do love aspects of your job, it's a rare individual who loves his job so much that he would do it without receiving a paycheck.

Your child also needs a paycheck when you want him to do something he wouldn't choose to do on his own. He won't go to the bank to cash it, you have to use a currency that's valuable to him. It's unlikely that money holds the same value for your child as it does for you. She probably prefers something a bit more tangible such as a video, toy, game or a favorite snack.

YOUR CHILD NEEDS A PAYCHECK THAT'S MEANINGFUL TO HIM

What would you do if you showed up to work one day and your boss told you he decided that this week, instead of your usual pay, he would give you apples. Apples are a healthy snack and as they say "an apple a day keeps the doctor away." And besides, if you stay healthy, you can work more. How long would you continue to show up at work? If you're honest, you probably wouldn't let him finish the last sentence before you walked out the door.

Your child feels the same way when you try to encourage him to learn a new skill, offering him praise or a sticker in return. Those things, although great for some, are not his currency. You have to find the items, activities, and interactions that drive him to want to do what you're teaching him to do. In ABA we call these reinforcers.

GIVING YOUR CHILD WHAT HE WANTS

Parents commonly give their children the things they know they want. This happens for a variety of reasons:

- ✓ They want their kids to be happy and even see it as their job to make them happy. This starts in infancy. When the baby cries, parents feed, change and comfort their child. As the baby grows into a toddler then a preschooler, there's no point where the parent receives some sort of sign saying it's time to put their child to work.
- ✓ When the kids have what they want, everyone is happy.
- ✓ Parents work hard and need a break. If the kids have what they want, they are usually occupied and the parents can catch their breath.

All this becomes even more true and profound when their child has a disability such as autism.

- ✓ Many parents don't know for sure what their child is capable of so they hesitate to place demands and give free access to what their child enjoys.
- ✓ Their child's responses become even more dramatic if they don't have what they want.
- ✓ They feel guilty that their child is struggling and want to do whatever they can to make life easier for them.

All of these things perpetuate parents doing more for their child than is necessary and allowing their child to have what he wants. This does not make them bad parents, just unsupported.

To teach a child to complete a task, engage in an activity or even communicate, what's the one thing that child needs more than anything else?

Motivation!

IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION

REINFORCERS

What motivates your child?

Without motivation, your child has no reason to do anything other than what he already does. This makes him no different than you or I.

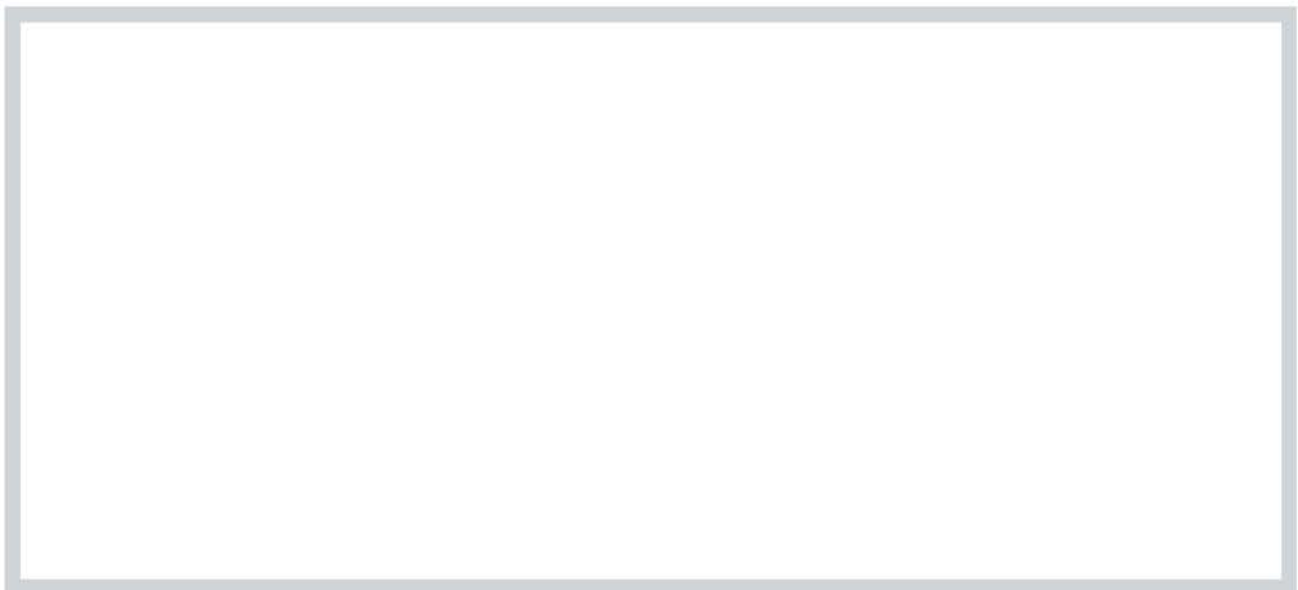
Once you find those reinforcers, you have to guard them carefully. Think of it this way: If you had a money tree in your back yard that produced a million dollars a day, would you go to work tomorrow? What if your boss offered to pay you a million dollars a day? What if he added praise on top of that? You might choose to do parts of your job you enjoy and find fulfilling, but you're not going to do everything he wants you to do.

FREE ACCESS

Does your child have free access to reinforcers?

When your child has free access to the reinforcers he values the most, he has that money tree in his back yard. There is no reason for him to go to work. He will get what he wants whether he completes his "job" or not.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR CHILD?



FINDING EFFECTIVE REINFORCERS

Choice has been identified as a successful way to find effective reinforcers. Watch your child and see how she reacts to different reinforcers you offer her. Reinforcers are likely to change in their effectiveness over time. Their effectiveness can also be influenced by:

- ✓ Other activities going on around them (i.e. siblings watching TV, a dog running around the yard, etc.)
- ✓ Time of day (i.e. before or after a meal, just before bedtime, etc.)
- ✓ Amount of effort already expended in the day (i.e. just getting home from school or therapy)

Keep these factors in mind when deciding what to offer your child as a reinforcer. Offer her a choice between 2 different items (i.e. strawberries and a video). If she can speak, she might tell you what she wants. If she can't speak, watch for her to reach for the item she wants.

WHAT MIGHT IMPACT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR REINFORCERS?

Understanding Motivation Assignment

Make a list of your child's favorite things. Remember, you will need to limit access to these things. If you can't limit access, don't include it on the list.

Foods

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Toys

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Activities

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Electronics

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

The Importance of Motivation When Teaching New Skills Quiz

1. The money tree refers to:
 - A. Free access to potential reinforcers
 - B. Plentiful rewards for learning new skills
 - C. High motivation to complete tasks
 - D. Powerful reinforcers

2. When a child has unlimited access to everything they want, what happens to motivation?
 - A. It increases
 - B. It decreases
 - C. It stays the same

3. What's the one thing a child needs more than anything else when teaching new skills?
 - A. Listener skills
 - B. Expressive communication
 - C. Motivation
 - D. Prerequisite skills

4. Everyone is motivated by the same things.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Objects, activities and interactions that motivate someone to do something are called:
 - A. Prizes
 - B. Tokens
 - C. Motivators
 - D. Reinforcers

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD

GOAL

You might already feel like you have a strong relationship with your child, but in this lesson you'll take this a step further.

Learn how to create a collaborative relationship with your child.

BACKGROUND

As a parent you have many roles when interacting with your child. At any given point you may be a nurse, a chef, a taxi driver, or even a teacher. This lesson primarily focuses on this role of a teacher, but you won't necessarily learn strategies that classroom teachers use. You will learn to identify what motivates your child and how he learns best.

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

As you begin your journey to learn how to teach your child, the first step is to help your child view your teaching as something positive. Even if your child doesn't speak or know how to interact with those around him yet, you can build a collaborative relationship with him.

This empowers your child and puts him in the driver's seat of his own learning.

CREATING A PLAN

CREATE A NEW RELATIONSHIP

When starting out with a plan to teach your child, the first step is to shift your relationship with him.

Even if you already have a positive, loving relationship with your child, as you step into the role of teacher, you want your child to see you as the giver of all good things. You want him running to you, excited to learn what you have to teach. You might hear ABA professionals use terms like rapport, instructional control or pairing.

These terms just mean that your child associates you, and learning, with the things that he likes best. This is the beginning of your collaborative relationship with your child. Together you will work toward a life of happiness and independence for your child.

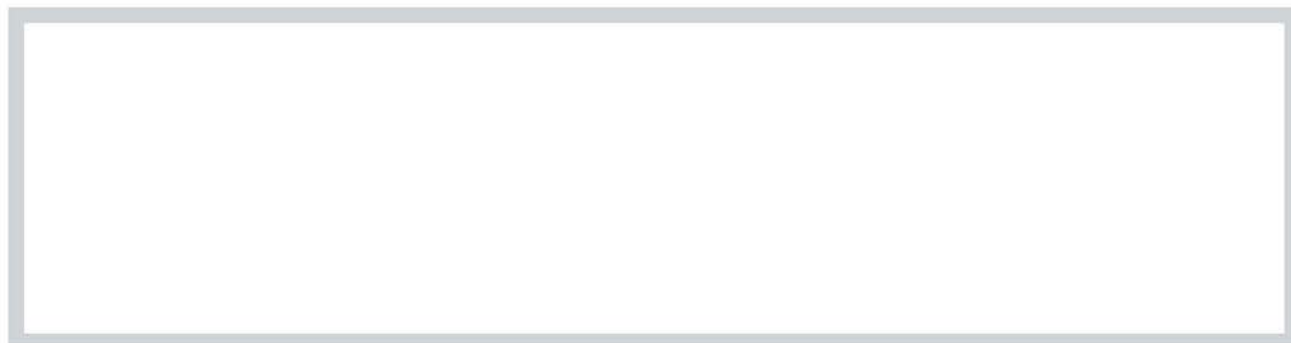
CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT

To begin building a collaborative relationship, you must make some adjustments to the environment.

Collect your child's favorite items and go to where he likes to play. Make sure there aren't other things in the environment he will want to play with. The goal is to get him to come over to you to get access to the things you have, rather than simply finding them around the room.

When he shows interest in any of the items you have, give him the item. Don't ask him to do anything at all, just hand it over. Model language by saying the word as you hand it over, but don't ask him to repeat it. He can have any of the items as long as he gets it from you and stays near you while he has it. If he starts to move away, gently remove the item and allow him to go.

WHERE DOES YOUR CHILD LIKE TO PLAY?



LET YOUR CHILD COME TO YOU

Spend as much time as you can hanging out with your child's favorite things, waiting for him to approach you. When he approaches you, engage with him in any way that he likes while handing over the object he wants. Do this in different places and continue until he runs up to you rather than the toys.

When you're ready to begin teaching, go to a place he enjoys and just play with him for several minutes. Be silly and engage with him in any way that he enjoys. Do this any time you want to teach new skills or when you need to ask him to do something he might see as hard. Remind him that you are the one who gives him all the things he likes and you're the one who makes things fun. Enjoy your collaborative relationship, but don't take it for granted. Keep being the source of fun and excitement for your child as you work together to help him develop into an independent, happy adult.

LIST THE ITEMS AND ACTIVITIES YOUR CHILD ENJOYS:



Collaborative Relationship Assignment

Your relationship with your child has a significant impact on your ability to teach him new skills.

Make a list of activities that he enjoys engaging in with you like blowing bubbles, swinging or being tickled. Make another list of toys or objects that he enjoys that you can give him access to.

Activities

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>
6	<input type="text"/>
7	<input type="text"/>
8	<input type="text"/>
9	<input type="text"/>
10	<input type="text"/>

Toys or Objects

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>
6	<input type="text"/>
7	<input type="text"/>
8	<input type="text"/>
9	<input type="text"/>
10	<input type="text"/>

Building a Collaborative Relationship with Your Child Quiz

1. When building a collaborative relationship with your child you should:
 - A. Avoid demands and give him access to the things he likes best
 - B. Engage with your child during his favorite activities
 - C. Sit with his favorite items so he comes up to you to get them
 - D. All of the above

2. You should make sure that your child's favorite items are spread around the room so he can be positively engaged when you're trying to build a collaborative relationship.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. You should spend a few minutes engaged in some of your child's favorite activities before trying to teach him new skills.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Rapport, instructional control, and pairing mean:
 - A. He's happy to see you when you get home
 - B. Your child associates you and learning with getting the things he likes best
 - C. He listens and follows all of your directions
 - D. He's willing to sit at the table and work for at least 15 minutes

5. If you already have a positive, loving relationship with your child, you can immediately jump in to teaching new skills.
 - A. True
 - B. False

PROMPTING

GOAL

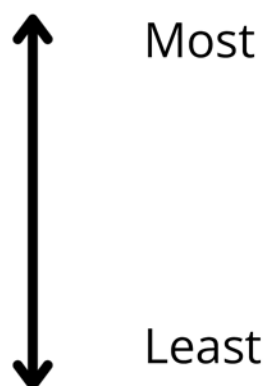
Learn the basics of prompting in ABA and how it can be used to teach children with autism. Understand how and when to use prompting with your child.

BACKGROUND

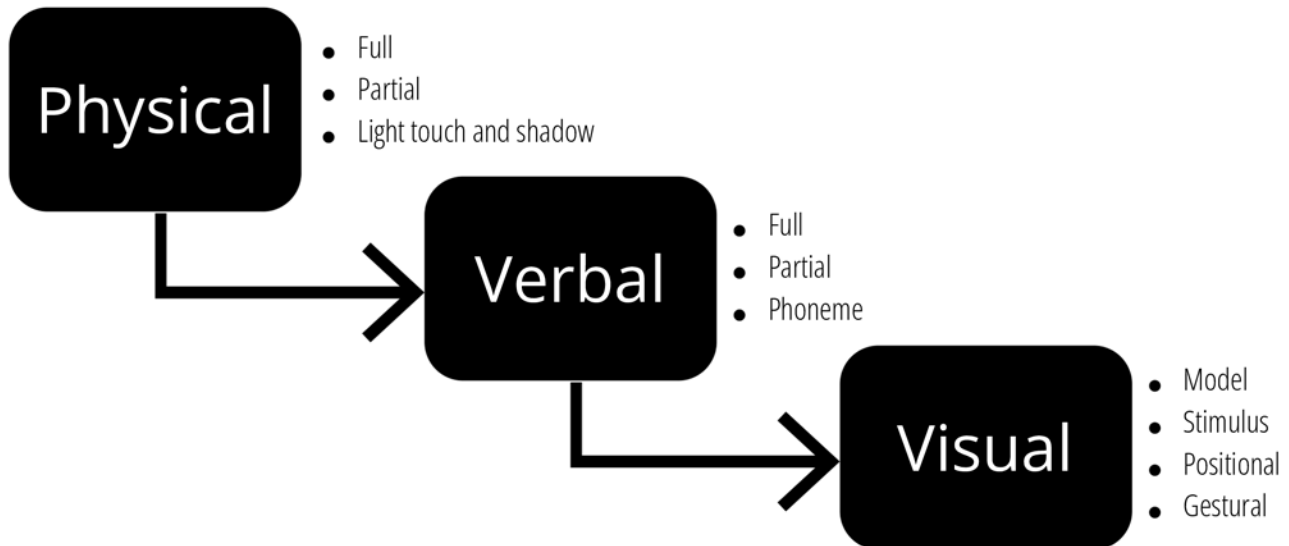
Prompts are essential for teaching your child new skills. A prompt is the help you give your child to get him to respond correctly. Prompts provide a cue to your child. What the cue is depends on the type of skill you're teaching and what types of prompts work best for your child.

LEVELS OF PROMPTS

Prompts range from the least amount of help to the most amount of help. Generally, when teaching new skills, you will provide more help at first and gradually provide less help as your child gets better at performing that skill. Your child's BCBA® may recommend different prompting strategies for your child but they will still fall along this continuum.



TYPES OF PROMPTS



There are 3 main types of prompts that you can use to teach your child: physical, verbal and visual.

Each of these can be further broken down into specific types of prompts that we will cover in this lesson. These 3 types of prompts fit along the continuum we just talked about with physical prompts usually being the most amount of help you can give your child and visual prompts usually being the least amount of help. Providing less help allows your child to become more independent in completing the task.

PHYSICAL PROMPTS

When to use

Physical prompts are useful when teaching tasks that require your child to complete some sort of physical movement such as motor imitation or listener responding tasks, as long as he doesn't mind you moving his body.

How to use

Typically, these types of prompts involve you gently guiding your child's body to perform the action. If you want to teach your child to imitate you when you wave your hand, you would say "copy me" then help him move his hand in a waving motion. If you were teaching him to put his arms up when you say "show me arms up" then you would gently move his hands in an upward direction.

Teaching using physical prompts

This process is similar to the way you might teach a child to write the letters in his name. When using physical prompts to teach these skills, you would begin with your hand gently guiding his hand to perform the skill you are teaching, helping him through each part of the movement. Gradually fade this help by moving your hand further down his hand toward his wrist, then his forearm, then elbow, his upper arm, then shoulder. Fade this help until he's performing the skill on his own.

Physical prompts are useful for teaching skills that require physical movement such as motor imitation, matching, listener tasks, personal care tasks, and many academic tasks. Physical prompts are not used to teach vocal communication but are useful when teaching PECS, sign language or other forms of alternative communication

VERBAL PROMPTS

When to use

Verbal prompts are only helpful if your child imitates the words and sounds you make. It can also be difficult to completely eliminate verbal prompts so when possible, consider using either physical or visual prompts.

How to use

Verbal prompts are words or sounds that you say that help your child respond correctly in a specific situation. For example, you want to teach your child to sing a song with you by finishing part of the song when you say, "the wheels on the". You can give him a full verbal prompt by saying the whole word you want him to say. In this example, you would say, "bus." You would then expect that he repeat the word "bus." To fade these prompts, you would give him just part of the word, making the "bu" sound and expecting him to say "bus".

VISUAL PROMPTS

When to use

Visual prompts are useful for all of us. Any time a you put a reminder on the calendar, move reusable grocery bags closer to the front door so you don't forget them, or put your vitamins next to the coffee maker you're using a visual prompt.

Similarly, visual cues can help your child learn many new skills.

How to use

Visual prompts provide some type of visual cue to help your child respond correctly. Modeling is a type of visual cue that is useful when teaching many listener skills. For example, if you want to teach your child to wave when you say "show me waving", you would wave your hand to show him what you want him to do.

Teaching using visual prompts

Let's look at another example. Think of the earlier example where you were teaching your child to say "bus" when you said "the wheels on the..." Instead of using a verbal prompt by saying "bus", you could hold up a picture of a bus or even a toy bus. This is a visual prompt.

Positional prompts are another form of visual prompt. You might change an element of a correct item to help him choose it. For example, you want to teach him to respond to "which one quacks?" by choosing the correct animal. You can move the duck closer to him so he's more likely to choose it. Then, you would gradually move the duck so that it was more inline with the other animals. Another option might be to make the correct answer slightly bigger. There are lots of ways you can provide visual cues to help your child respond correctly.

If using pictures to teach your child different skills, consider making the correct answer bolder in color and the other pictures more faded. Another option might be to make the background color of the correct answer a different color. As you can see, with a little creativity, there are lots of ways you can give your child a visual prompt to help him learn the correct answer.

A background image showing several pairs of hands reaching up from the bottom and sides, forming heart shapes. The image is faded and serves as a backdrop for the text.

PROMPTING

No matter what type of prompt you decide to use, you must help your child become more independent by fading the prompts you use. Gradually move along the continuum toward the least amount of help you can give him until he learns to respond on his own.

Prompting Assignment

We use prompts in lots of different situations, often without realizing that we do it. When you remind your child to use soap when washing her hands, that's a prompt.

Make a list of all the different ways you already use prompts to help your child perform tasks. Think about all 3 main types of prompts used in ABA: physical, verbal, and visual.

Physical Prompts

Verbal Prompts

Visual Prompts

Prompting Quiz

1. Prompts are the help you give your child to help him respond correctly.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. What are the 3 main types of prompts?
 - A. Visual
 - B. Physical
 - C. Gestural
 - D. Verbal

3. Verbal prompts are the easiest prompts to fade so you should use them whenever possible.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. If you want to teach your child to finish the phrase "the wheels on the..." you could use which of the following prompts?
 - A. Point to a bus
 - B. Hold up a picture of a bus
 - C. Say the word bus
 - D. All of the above

5. You should fade prompts from the most intrusive to the least intrusive to help your child build independence.
 - A. True
 - B. False

REINFORCEMENT

GOAL

Understand how reinforcement is different from motivation. Learn why reinforcement is important and how to use it effectively with your child.

BACKGROUND

Reinforcement is closely related to motivation except that it follows a behavior. Just like you, your child must be motivated to perform a task and that behavior must be followed by reinforcement if you want it to continue.

The concept of reinforcement applies to everyone, not just your child.

WHAT IS REINFORCEMENT?

Reinforcement strengthens behavior. Think about why you do some of the things you do. In the lesson on motivation, we talked about how you go to work to earn a paycheck, but there are other behaviors you engage in because of the reinforcers you receive.

When your phone rings, do you pick up the call? The answer depends on your reinforcement history. If, in the past, good things have resulted from answering the phone, then you're likely to pick up the call. You might pick up the call if you see it's a friend calling because talking to your friend is reinforcing. If you see it's a telemarketer, will you pick up? Maybe not because it's unlikely that doing so will result in something positive.

USING REINFORCEMENT

Positive association

Teaching your child new skills involves making an association between a specific behavior and something positive occurring. This is the basics of reinforcement. Some behaviors have naturally occurring results. For example, washing your hands results in having clean hands. Clean hands are motivating for some people, but not for everyone. Some children need a little extra reinforcement to make the task valuable.

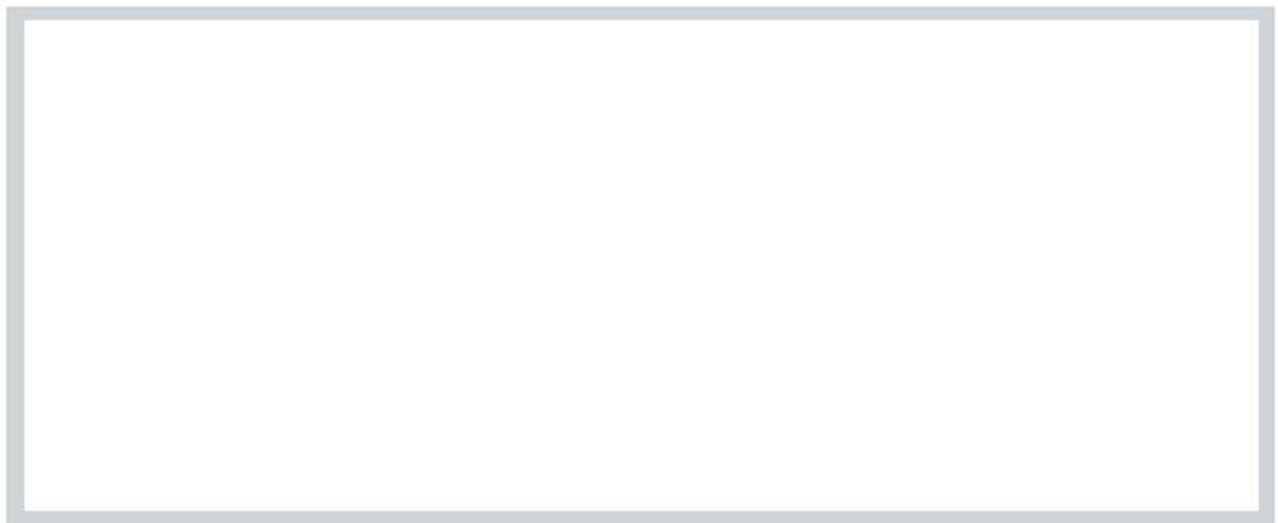
What motivates your child?

When planning for reinforcement for your child, you must first determine what motivates your child to perform different tasks. Some children are highly motivated by a feeling of accomplishment for having completed a task such as peddling a tricycle or making a basket. When asked to complete a task that's more difficult such as reading a book, some children need something more to stay motivated.

Finding reinforcers

Think about those items or activities that your child seems most interested in. These are all potential reinforcers. How about bubbles, tickles, swinging, balloons, beads, favorite toys, music, videos, water play, small snacks, high fives, verbal praise, fist bumps, physical touch, or marbles? Do any of these things motivate your child? Are there other things he enjoys?

LIST POTENTIAL REINFORCERS FOR YOUR CHILD





CHOOSING THE REINFORCER

Consider the following when selecting which reinforcer to use from your list.

Once you have a list, think about how motivating each item is. In this example, the most motivating items are listed in the inner circle with the items that are usually motivating in the middle circle and the ones that are sometimes motivating in the outer circle. The items in the outer circle will be used for easy tasks or throughout the day for things your child already knows how to do. The most reinforcing items on the list will be saved for your child's most difficult tasks.

Next, you need to think about how often he needs reinforcers. When teaching your child new skills, it's often best to provide reinforcement following each attempt your child makes. When your child needs help performing the skill, use a reinforcer in the middle or outer circles, but when he performs the new skill on his own, use a reinforcer in the inner circle.

HOW MUCH REINFORCEMENT?

Match the difficulty of the task

The amount of reinforcement should match your child's perception of the difficulty of the task. If your child sees the task as difficult, give her more reinforcement for completing the task. Keep in mind that what your child sees as difficult isn't necessarily what you see as difficult.

"More" reinforcement could mean more of the specific item such as more water beads or it could mean a longer amount of time with a preferred activity such as bubbles or it might also mean that you give her something she likes more than the other possible reinforcers.

Limiting access

Keep in mind that if your child has free or frequent access to a preferred item or activity she's unlikely to find that item or activity motivating. Imagine going up to your child while she's swinging and saying "when you clean up your toys, you can swing!" She's not likely to want to rush inside and clean up.

This reinforcer will be much more motivating if she's not already swinging.

Using reinforcement

Give your child access to the promised reinforcer as soon after the behavior as possible to make sure she associates the reinforcer with the behavior and you reinforce the right behavior. Picture this common situation:

You tell your child she earned swinging for cleaning up her toys, then while on your way to the swing you answer a call on your cell phone. While you're talking on the phone she starts throwing rocks. You end your call and help her up on the swing. What behavior have you reinforced? Probably throwing rocks. Do your best to give a reinforcer as quickly after a behavior as possible.

This might seem like a lot to remember, but it gets easier with practice. Keep these things in mind. Choose a reinforcer that will motivate your child to complete the task you want to reinforce then give her the reinforcer as quickly as you can after she completes the task. Those are the most important pieces. You will get better at providing reinforcement over time.

Reinforcement Assignment

Reinforcement is essential for teaching new skills. Different reinforcers are effective for teaching different skills. Change the reinforcer depending on what your child is motivated for in the moment and the difficulty of the task.

Sort the activities, objects and social reinforcers that motivate your child by how motivating each item usually is. Motivation often changes over time, so this just provides you with a guide to get started.

Most motivating

Usually motivating

Sometimes
motivating

Reinforcement Quiz

1. Reinforcers include your child's favorite:
 - A. Objects
 - B. Activities
 - C. Social interactions
 - D. All of the above

2. Reinforcement strengthens behavior.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. You will save your child's most motivating reinforcers for (select all that apply):
 - A. New tasks
 - B. Easy tasks
 - C. Mastered tasks
 - D. Difficult tasks

4. You should provide reinforcement as soon after the behavior you want to reinforce as possible to avoid accidentally reinforcing the wrong behavior.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. The most important things to remember about reinforcement are (select all that apply):
 - A. Don't reinforce when your child needs help to complete a task
 - B. Choose reinforcers that motivate your child
 - C. Deliver reinforcement quickly
 - D. Change your schedule of reinforcement over time to reduce reliance on reinforcement for task completion

MOTOR IMITATION

GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to imitate the actions of those around him.

BACKGROUND

Motor imitation is the ability to watch what someone else does and then perform the same movements. It is one of the most important skills we can learn. Imitating others allows us to learn new skills quickly without specific teaching. We use imitation to problem solve when we are in new or unique situations.

While most children develop this naturally, many autistic children need specific teaching to pay attention to those around them. Teaching your child to imitate others allows him to become more independent. He learns to look for cues around him without waiting for someone to tell him what to do.

WHY MOTOR IMITATION IS IMPORTANT

Imagine you boarded a plane to a country across the planet from where you live. You have traveled for endless hours without stopping and they didn't provide food on the flight. You're hungrier than you have ever felt.

As you step off the plane and into the airport, you see people milling about, many of them eating. You want to ask them where and how they got the food, but you don't speak the language.

What do you do? How do you find the food? How do you learn how to get the food?

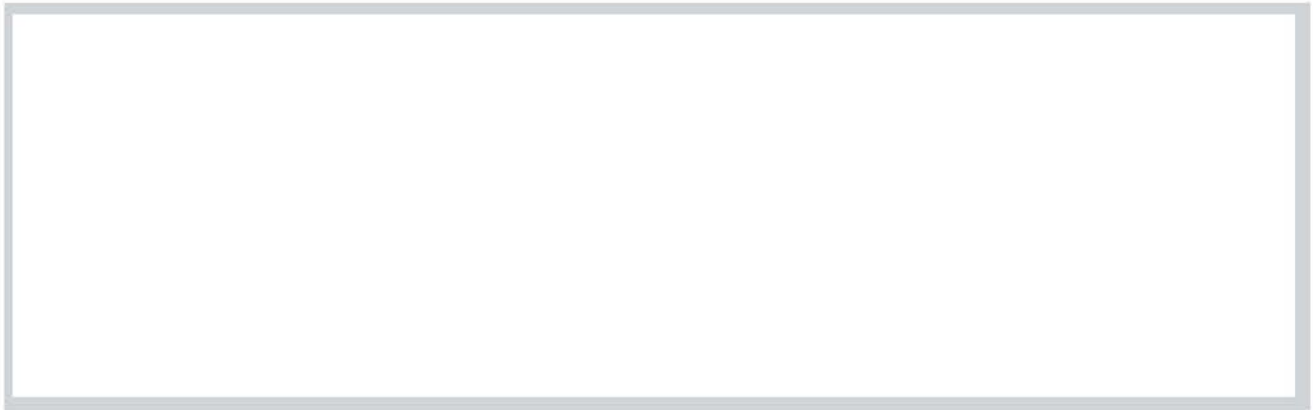
WHAT ACTIONS BENEFIT YOUR CHILD?

Consider what actions will help your child problem solve or be independent.

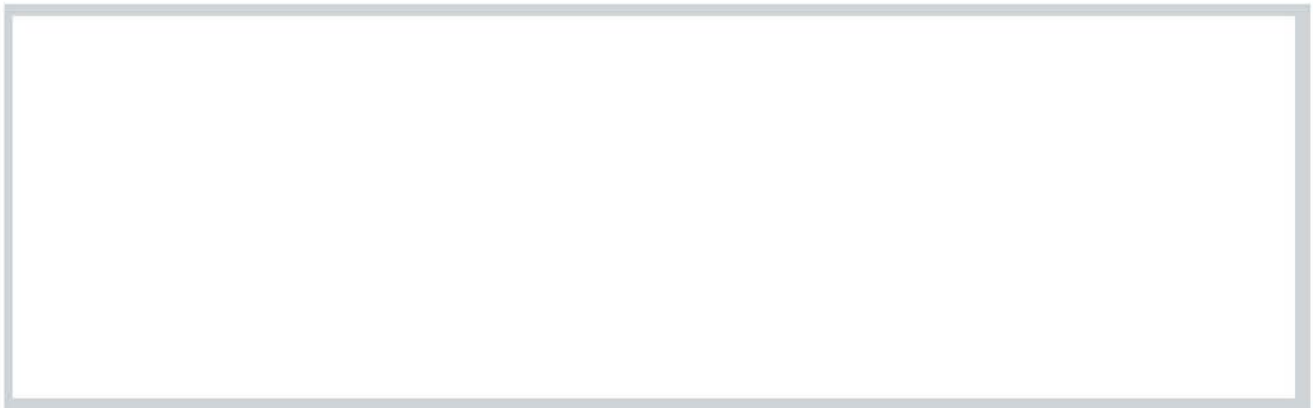
If you ended up at the airport with no idea how to get food, you would probably look at the people around you until you saw someone getting food. You would follow that person and do what she does. You might try to say the things she says or make the gestures she makes. In short, you would imitate her actions. Imitation allows you to learn new skills without specific teaching.

This is why it's so important for your child to learn to imitate others if he doesn't already do so. Many autistic children need specific teaching to learn to do this. Think about times when your child should naturally imitate others. When his brother waves hello to him, does he wave back? Does he participate in games like follow the leader and Simon says?

WHAT ACTIONS DOES YOUR CHILD PERFORM ON HIS OWN?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write down actions their child performs on their own.

WHAT ACTIONS WOULD HELP HIM BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write down actions that would help their child become more independent.

TEACHING MOTOR IMITATION

This lesson will focus on teaching your child to pay attention to what you're doing and then do the same. As with all other skills, you begin teaching simple actions and gradually introduce actions that are more complex.

BASIC STEPS TO TEACH MOTOR IMITATION

Choose Targets

Make a list of the actions your child makes on his own and break down the more complex actions into simpler actions. These become your teaching targets.



Perform the Action

Perform the target action and say "do this" or "try this one" or "copy me." Do not say the word for the action, just perform the action yourself.



Prompt if Needed

If your child does not immediately imitate the action you make, physically help him perform the action. Gradually reduce the amount of help you provide to allow him to become more independent.



Provide Reinforcement

When your child performs the action correctly, immediately provide a tangible reinforcer along with praise. At first, give him reinforcement even if you help him, but gradually start to wait until he does it independently.

MAKE LEARNING FUN

MAKE IT PART OF YOUR CHILD'S DAY

Create opportunities for your child to imitate your actions during different parts of your daily routine.

No child wants to sit through endless drills when learning a new skill. Think about times during your daily routine where you can create quick teaching opportunities.

Consider times where there might be a few minutes of waiting or quiet time such as:

- Meal time
- Bath time
- Play
- Waiting for the bus
- Waiting for a video or game to load

You can also practice imitation when your child asks you for something or shows that he wants something. Rather than immediately giving him what he wants, ask him to perform a quick motor imitation.

Take just a minute or 2 during each opportunity to practice motor imitation.

Make sure to have something motivating with you that you can use to reinforce imitation.

BE FUN!

Don't be afraid to be silly!

Even though this skill is important, you don't need to pressure your child to perform. He will learn to imitate you more quickly if you make it a fun experience!

Be silly by making a funny face for him to imitate or try placing an object on your head and letting it fall to the floor.

Perform actions he wants to imitate or that are motivating on their own.

Pay attention to the targets he learns more quickly. This lets you know what he likes or what he finds easier. Remember each child is different!

Imitate his actions.

Many children enjoy when you imitate the actions they make. By doing this, you draw his attention to you. Attending to your actions is an important first step in getting him to imitate you.

Be light and fun when imitating your child's actions Parenting is hard work, but enjoy this time with your child. This will help him enjoy it as well!



NEVER QUIT

Remember, each child grows and develops at his own rate. For many children, this process is slow and somewhat tedious. Don't give up!

If your child struggles with imitating your actions after you have gone through this process for several weeks or even a month, try different reinforcers. Often finding new foods, activities and toys your child is interested in sparks the motivation you need in your child.

MOTOR IMITATION

Mona is worried about her son Emmet. Emmet has been receiving ABA services since receiving his autism diagnosis at the age of 2, but he seems to be making limited progress. His teacher is frustrated because Emmet doesn't follow what the other kids are doing so he needs to prompt Emmet constantly to keep him on track.

Although Emmet has an IEP and there's an aid in the classroom, Mr. Parker says Emmet should be following the other kids in the class more. Mr. Parker said that he spoke to the BCBA® at the school who suggests focusing on teaching Emmet motor imitation skills. She said if Emmet learns to pay attention to what the people around him are doing and then do what they're doing, he will be more likely to follow the other kids in his class and become more independent. Mr. Parker said they would be working on this a little at a time.

Mona spends a few minutes several times a day practicing simple motor imitation skills with Emmet. They have a busy family life so it's hard for her to remember some days, but she builds the practice into some of their routines. While Emmet takes a bath each night, they practice a few skills. She started with movements he seems to enjoy, including clapping, waving and pushing a boat. At first, he needed a lot of help but gradually he began to respond more independently.

Over time, Mona introduced skills that were a little more complex including 2 and 3 step imitation such as clap and jump. She has noticed that Emmet is starting to spontaneously imitate some of the things she does. This has made it easier to teach him to do other things such as putting his plate in the sink after he eats.

When Mona meets with Mr. Parker again, he reports that Emmet has become much more independent in class. When the other kids do things like line up or go to circle, Emmet will usually follow them. Mr. Parker is confident that Emmet will continue to learn the classroom routines much more quickly now.

Motor Imitation Assignment

Imitation allows your child to build independence and problem solving by learning to attend to those around him and do what they do.

Make a list of activities that are made easier by imitation then make a second list of simpler movements that will lead to those more complex activities.

Activities

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Simpler Movements

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Motor Imitation Quiz

1. The first step in teaching motor imitation is ____.
 - A. Providing reinforcement
 - B. Performing the action
 - C. Choosing targets
 - D. Prompting

2. Motor imitation skills help your child become more independent and develop problem solving skills.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. When teaching your child to imitate clapping, you should clap your hands and say "clap."
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Motor imitation is important because
 - A. It allows us to learn new skills without specific teaching
 - B. It helps your child do what she's told
 - C. It helps your child interact socially with peers
 - D. It allows her to play games such as Follow the Leader

5. Which type of motor movements should you introduce first?
 - A. Oral motor
 - B. Fine motor
 - C. Play
 - D. Gross motor

MATCHING SKILLS

GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to match a variety of 2D and 3D items in different contexts.

BACKGROUND

Matching skills, like imitation skills, help your child solve problems and make connections more easily. Matching involves putting together things that are exactly the same or that are similar in some important way.

Think about times when you naturally match items such as when you sort silverware or match socks. Your child might already be matching when he does an inset puzzle or sorts his toys in different bins. Your child should learn to match both pictures and objects.

Many autistic children have relative strengths in matching because it is a concrete task that doesn't involve language.

HOW TO TEACH MATCHING

Teach your child to match during every day activities including play and basic daily tasks like dressing.

Your child should learn to match:

- Identical objects and pictures
- Nonidentical objects and pictures
- Objects to pictures and pictures to objects

Use physical prompts to help her if she needs help when you're teaching. Fade these prompts until she matches the objects or pictures on her own. Even though your child might enjoy some of these tasks, make sure to have a reinforcer available to keep her motivated.

IDENTIFY THE STEPS

The steps to teach your child to match are similar to those for teaching other skills:

- Choose targets
- Present the opportunity to match
- Provide help in the form of prompts, if needed
- Provide reinforcement

THE STEPS IN MORE DETAIL

Choosing Targets

It may be helpful to choose your child's favorite items or pictures of things she's interested in at the beginning. Gradually include everyday objects and even some symbols.



Presenting an Opportunity to Match

Place objects or pictures out on the floor, table or other surface and hand your child an item or picture that matches one you laid out.



Provide Help

Gently guide her hand or point to the correct match, if she needs help.
Gradually fade this prompt until she starts matching on her own.



Provide Reinforcement

Even though many children enjoy matching tasks, have a reinforcer ready to keep her motivated! Know what motivates your child. Some may be encouraged by praise, but other children need something more tangible.

BUILD DIFFICULTY GRADUALLY

BEGIN WITH SIMPLE PICTURES AND OBJECTS

Start with identical matching of simple pictures or objects.

Begin with pictures or objects that are identical. You can easily find pictures on Google Images by searching for an object name followed with "clear background". This ensures that the images you use will be simple and clear. Once you have an assortment of pictures make 2 copies.

From these pictures, choose the targets you will start with, choosing pictures that are distinctly different from each other, looking at color, shape or other features.

Place the pictures you chose as your first targets in a pile. Choose a few of the other pictures to use as the wrong answer or distractors.

Now you have 2 piles, one with targets and one with distractors or pictures you won't be teaching your child right away. Make sure you also have the duplicates of the targets you chose so you can have your child match the pictures. Start by placing one of the targets and 1 or 2 of the distractors out in front of your child. This can be while she's playing on the floor, standing at the counter, or even at the table just before you give her her dinner. Hand her the target picture and say "Match!"

Once you hand her the picture, make sure she puts it in the right place so you can give her a reinforcer. You can point or gently guide her hand to the right place. Remember you need to fade this prompt so that she starts to match independently.

Increase the difficulty

Gradually increase the number of pictures you put out in front of your child. Don't forget to mix the pictures up so she looks at all the pictures before choosing where to put the match.

As your child begins to match these identical pictures independently, introduce nonidentical matching by finding pictures that are of the same objects but are a bit different.

Continue to gradually challenge your child to think in more abstract ways by teaching her to match objects to pictures or pictures to objects. Begin by using pictures of the actual objects then use pictures or objects that are just a little different.

Be prepared to teach her matching skills in a variety of ways and don't forget to make it fun for her!



TEACH DURING PLAY

Teach your child to match during play. Inset puzzles, shape sorters and small toys offer great opportunities to make learning fun for your child. Teaching through play encourages your child to match spontaneously and promotes generalization.

MATCHING SKILLS

Trevor has been working to help his daughter Ashley learn new skills. Ashley can do a lot of things for herself, including dress herself, but he has struggled to teach her to help with simple chores. Her older brother was doing simple chores at Ashley's age and Trevor wants to make sure that Ashley can be as independent as possible when she grows up. Trevor knows that Ashley can do things like fold socks and help to put dishes away, but Trevor realizes that she's missing an important skill, matching.

While Trevor would love to jump right in to teaching Ashley to do the chores, he realizes that she learns best when he breaks the skills down into easier steps. Trevor decides to start by teaching Ashley to match pictures. He sits at the table with some of Ashley's favorite reinforcers. He lays out 4 pictures and when Ashley approaches him to get one of the reinforcers, he simply asks her to match the picture.

Trevor practices matching with Ashley in a variety of ways including completing inset puzzles and matching nonidentical objects. He builds to teaching her to sort her toys into the bins they belong in. He found that if he places just a few cars and blocks in front of the bins that she can sort them without too much help.

He gradually introduces simple chores including matching socks and sorting silverware from the dishwasher. Ashley seems to enjoy doing chores like her big brother and Trevor feels more hopeful for Ashley's future as she becomes more independent.

Matching Assignment

Complete each task listed below. As your child becomes independent with matching identical objects or pictures, introduce nonidentical matching and finally object to picture or picture to object matching.

Include matching as part of every day activities and during play. Make it fun for your child and avoid pressuring her.

Targets

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____
6	_____
7	_____
8	_____
9	_____
10	_____



- ☐ List potential teaching targets
- ☐ Collect items and pictures of targets
- ☐ Teach your child to match 2 targets
- ☐ Record independent vs prompted matches

Matching Skills Quiz

1. Matching skills are important because they help your child
 - A. Make associations between items or objects
 - B. Learn to do chores and other skills needed to build independence
 - C. Succeed in academic tasks
 - D. All of the above

2. Once your child learns to match identical objects or pictures what should you teach next?
 - A. Matching nonidentical pictures or objects
 - B. Matching nonidentical pictures to objects and objects to pictures
 - C. Matching pictures to pictures in a book
 - D. Simple inset puzzles

3. Which play activity requires matching skills?
 - A. Cars
 - B. Inset puzzles
 - C. Building blocks
 - D. Dolls

4. When teaching matching skills, you always must start by teaching your child to match pictures.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. You should build the difficulty of matching tasks gradually so your child feels successful and doesn't become frustrated.
 - A. True
 - B. False

INTRODUCTION TO EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

GOAL

Understand the definition and basic components of expressive communication, and become familiar with related ABA terminology.

BACKGROUND

Expressive communication refers to the way your child interacts with those around him to fulfill his needs, share his thoughts and engage socially with others.

Although speech is the most common form of expressive communication, many children who have difficulty with speech can learn to use alternative methods of expressive communication such as:

- Sign language
- PECS and
- Communication apps

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Being a parent is hard. Being a parent of an autistic child sometimes feels overwhelming. Communication delays are common in autistic children which makes parenting even more difficult.

Many parents say they want their child to speak, but what is it they really want? Sure, speaking is the easiest form of communication for us, but what if their child can't speak?

They want their child to be:

- happy
- healthy
- independent
- successful and
- accepted.



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

What would you do if you were dropped into another country where no one spoke your language? Not only do these people not speak your language, they have signs, customs and gestures you've never seen before.

What would you do if you needed to find a bathroom? How would you get this need met?

When faced with an inability to get your needs met using communication, would you rely on behavior to get what you need? There's no other way. This is why so many autistic children engage in challenging behavior. They aren't bad kids. They just don't know how to get their needs met in a more appropriate way.

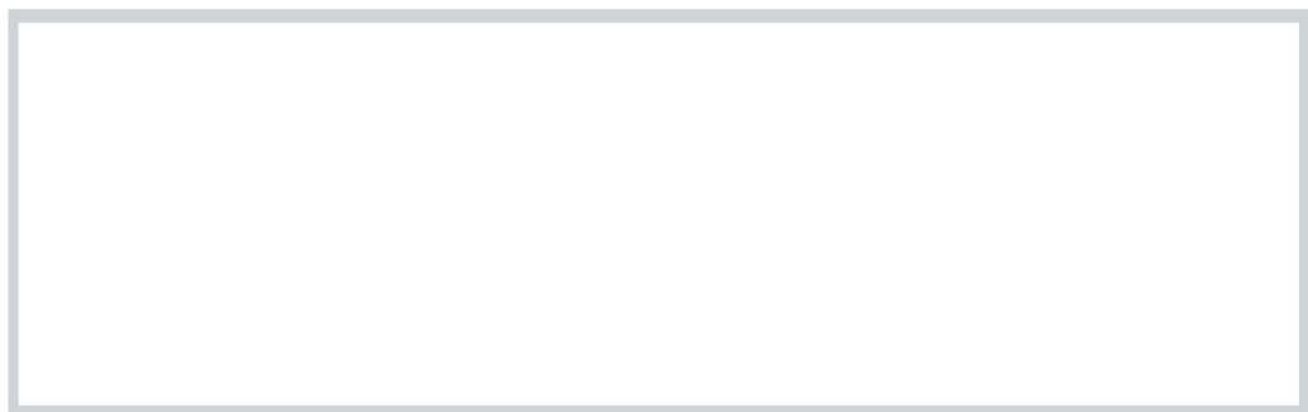
CHOOSING AAC

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

Although each child develops communication differently and there is no guarantee that speech develops for all children, many children do develop at least some spoken language.

Alternative communication methods provide a structured teaching approach and the opportunity to teach the importance of communication for your child.

HOW DOES YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATE NOW?



WHAT WORDS, GESTURES OR BEHAVIOR DOES YOUR CHILD USE TO COMMUNICATE NOW?



WHY TEACH COMMUNICATION?

At this point, you probably have gotten pretty good at figuring out what your child wants so you might be asking yourself, why should I go through the process of teaching communication if I already understand what my child wants most of the time? Communication for your child is so much more than just getting what he wants.

WHAT YOUR CHILD GETS FROM LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE:

Opens Doors to New Opportunities

Communication allows him to engage with the world around him in a variety of new ways and helps him be more independent.

Communicate Exactly what He Wants

He can tell you exactly what he wants.

Eliminates Guessing Games

When your child communicates effectively, you no longer need to guess what he wants based on how he behaves. He can share his thoughts, ideas and desires.

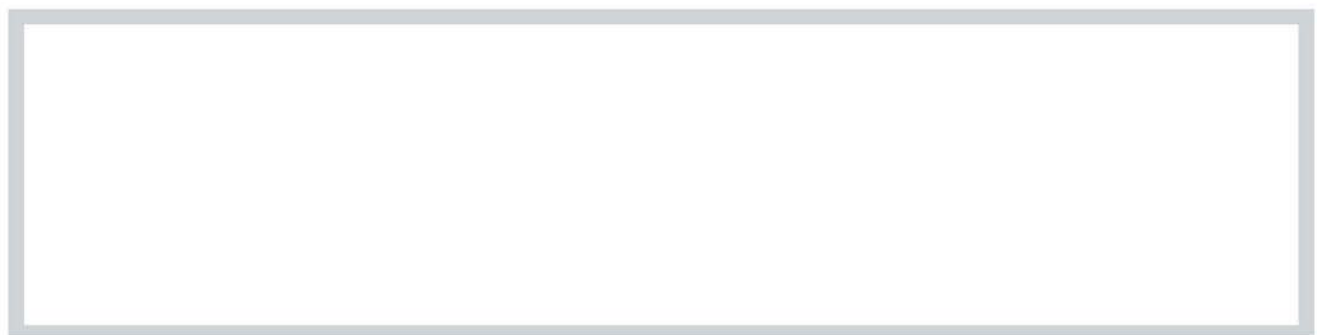
Interact and Develop Relationships

Communication is the foundation of friendships. It allows him to share his wants, thoughts and ideas. Teaching communication helps him see interactions with others as valuable.

Reduces Problem Behavior

Problem behavior may be caused by your child's inability to effectively communicate. Communication gives him a better way to get what he wants.

HOW WILL YOUR CHILD BENEFIT FROM LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE?



PARTS OF EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

Requesting

In ABA, requesting is called manding. A child requests when he wants something such as an object, activity, or an interaction. Requests can include attributes such as color, shape, size, quantity, or quality.

Requesting is often the first communication skills young children learn.

Imitating

In ABA, imitating speech is called echoics. A child imitates when he hears a word or sound and repeats it verbally. This is the only type of communication that can't be done using an alternative communication system. This is a spoken skill. It can include a simple speech sound, whole word, or even phrases.

Labeling

In ABA, labeling is called tacting. A child labels when he takes in something through his senses and gives a name to it. It can be something the child sees, smells, tastes, hears or feels. Labeling can also include attributes such as color, shape, size, quantity or quality.

Responding

In ABA, responding is called intraverbal. A child responds when someone says something and the child says something that is different but related. This is what makes it different from imitating. The words are different from what the child hears.

You will learn more about each of these parts of communication in future lessons.



COMMUNICATION IS VITAL!

Your child must have effective communication skills to experience success at school, develop relationships with others and become as independent as possible as an adult.

A child who does not learn to communicate effectively relies on someone else to guess what he needs or wants. This reduces autonomy and promotes dependence.

INTRODUCTION TO EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

Jenny was a 3-year-old autistic girl. Although she was often a happy little girl, she would cry every time she wanted something. Her mother, Sarah, was frustrated for her daughter and didn't know how best to help her. She hoped that Jenny would one day talk, but in the meantime, Sarah did her best to keep her happy by anticipating all of her needs.

Jenny's pediatrician referred her for ABA therapy and Sarah shared her concerns with the BCBA®. The BCBA® recommended introducing an alternative form of communication so Jenny wouldn't have to cry to communicate. The BCBA® assured Sarah that giving Jenny another way to communicate didn't mean that Jenny would never speak. Although there was no way to know if she could speak in the future, the BCBA® explained that research shows that children who use alternative forms of communication often also develop at least some speech. Sarah was a little apprehensive but decided that teaching Jenny how to communicate effectively was what was really important.

The BCBA® worked with Jenny to teach her to use a tablet to ask for things she wanted. Jenny loved her cup and many different toys, and she quickly learned how to get what she wanted without crying. Although she sometimes got frustrated when she didn't know how to ask for something new, Jenny used the tablet throughout her day with a lot of independence.

One day, Jenny and her mom were in the kitchen. Sarah held Jenny's cup in her hand with her favorite juice. Jenny's tablet was on the counter, just out of her reach and rather than try to reach for it, Jenny said, "cup!" Sarah was amazed to hear Jenny speak and immediately handed over her cup.

Over time, Jenny gradually learned to say more and more words and by the time she was 6, she was speaking in complete sentences.

Although she continues to use the tablet when words fail her, Jenny uses speech for most of her communication. She even enjoys having conversations with her peers. Although some of the details of this story, like the names, are fiction, this story is fundamentally true. There are many ways to communicate. You just need to help your child find the method that works for him or her.

Introduction to Communication Assignment

How does your child communicate with you? What are the things she says and does to let you know she wants something? How does she get your attention?

Make a list of the spoken words she says most often and of the other ways she communicates with you.

Spoken Language

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____
- _____

Other Ways of Communicating

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____
- _____

Introduction to Expressive Communication Quiz

1. Your child has tantrums throughout the day. When he starts crying, you put on your detective hat to try to figure out what he wants. Teaching him which form of communication would reduce your need to be a detective?
 - A. Responding
 - B. Labeling
 - C. Requesting
 - D. Imitating
2. Expressive communication refers to how your child interacts verbally with those around her. this includes requesting, labeling, responding to others and
 - A. Questioning
 - B. Imitating
 - C. Following
 - D. Listening
3. Expressive communication includes all of the following except
 - A. Listener skills
 - B. Spoken language
 - C. PECS
 - D. Sign language
4. Teaching your child to communicate opens new doors for her.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Learning to communicate has no impact on challenging behavior
 - A. True
 - B. False

TEACHING REQUESTING

GOAL

Teach your child to use communication to ask for what he wants.

BACKGROUND

The first step in teaching requesting is to identify what form of communication will work best for your child. Even though you want your child to speak, vocal language may not be his best option right now.

Consider the following questions:

- How does he communicate now?
- Does he say words or word approximations that can easily be understood?
- Does he say the word for each of his favorite objects, foods, and activities?

If he doesn't, consider introducing an alternative method of communication.

DOES MY CHILD NEED AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM?

According to the AAP Council on Children with Disabilities, approximately 30% of autistic children have a limited ability to communicate vocally.

Although you will continue to learn strategies to help your child communicate vocally, you must give him a way to communicate now. Doing so builds independence and reduces challenging behavior.

If he can't ask for the things he wants, introduce AAC.

Choose from 3 common AAC options:

1. Sign language
2. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
3. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

CHOOSING AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Sign Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hands are always available -Allows for teaching self-talk -Provides a means for true labeling rather than simply matching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not understood by the general public -Not suitable for children with motor challenges -Requires strong motor imitation skills
PECS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Structured method of teaching communication as an interaction -Easily understood by the general public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Time and labor intensive to make the pictures needed -Often missing or losing pictures needed -Need to carry the book around, may be stigmatizing
Communication Apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Easily understood by the general public -Peers may see the app as "cool" -Can create an unlimited vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can be expensive, \$1000+ -Requires some technical skills to teach -Need to carry the device around

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

The right communication system for your child is the one that helps him communicate his needs.

There is no one right communication system for all children. Some children benefit from a combination of speech and AAC. Other children might be able to use sign language as a backup to a communication app in case they can't use their communication device because it needs to be charged or is damaged.

Choose one form of communication to teach at first. Once he's proficient with that system, consider teaching alternatives, if appropriate for your child.

What if my child speaks sometimes?

Some autistic children who do speak find it difficult to speak in specific situations such as when under pressure or during social interactions. By being aware of alternative methods available, you are prepared to help your child should he need it.

All of the strategies we will cover work regardless of the type of communication your child uses. Your teaching methods might look slightly different when your child uses alternative communication, but the basics remain the same.

FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR CHILD WANTS OR WANTS TO AVOID

WHAT HE WANTS

Tangible

A tangible is something your child can see and touch. What toys, foods or objects does your child like best?

Activities

Activities generally involve some sort of object but require an action to make it work. These could be bubbles, balloons or the swing.

Interactions

Interactions with you will be motivating for some children. Consider how your child responds to tickles, light touches, or being swung in the air.

WHAT HE WANTS TO AVOID

Tasks

Many children want to avoid unpleasant tasks such as cleaning up or sitting at a table.

Sensory Stimulation

Bright lights, loud noises, textures or touches can be uncomfortable or painful. Does your child try to avoid any sensory stimulation?

Attention

Are there times when your child prefers to be alone or otherwise avoid your attention? Not all children want attention all the time.

WHAT MIGHT YOUR CHILD WANT OR WANT TO AVOID?



CHOOSE TARGETS AND START TEACHING

Now that you have a list of your child's favorite items, activities and interactions, you need to choose targets that you can restrict access to. If he has free access to something, he has no reason to ask you for it so don't try to teach him to.

4 STEPS TO TEACHING REQUESTING

1. Choose your target

Choose items or activities that make sense for your child in a given moment. If he's hungry, teach him to ask for his favorite food. If he has a lot of energy, teach him to ask for jumping. Motivation is fluid and what he wants changes over time.

2. Put items out of reach

Remember that whatever you want to teach him to ask for must be visible but where he can't access it on his own. Put food in clear containers he can't open, put toys up on a shelf or a table he can't reach.

3. Prompt the request


When your child shows he's motivated for one of the items, prompt him to say the word or use the alternative communication system

4. Give access to the item

As quickly as possible after he asks for the item, give him the item. Try to get it to him within 3 seconds if possible. The faster you are, the stronger the connection between the request and getting what he wants.

TIPS

- ✓ Choose 1-2 items per category (food, toys, etc.)
- ✓ Start with 4-6 targets
- ✓ Make sure targets are available in AAC
- ✓ Teach the request in the space where he uses the item
- ✓ Place items out of reach but where he can see them
- ✓ Break food items into small pieces to increase opportunities
- ✓ Limit time with toys or activities he requests-1-2 min
- ✓ Wait until he shows he's interested (points or reaches for item)
- ✓ If teaching spoken language, accept word approximations
- ✓ Practice throughout your child's day during different routines
- ✓ Reinforce gradual progress your child makes
- ✓ Keep it fun and rewarding

The background of the page features a faded, grayscale image of two children. On the left, a child is shown from the chest up, crying with their eyes closed and mouth open. On the right, another child is shown from the chest up, shouting or screaming with their mouth wide open and hands raised in the air. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rectangular box in the center of the image.

TEACH REQUESTING TO REDUCE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

If your child engages in challenging behavior, teaching requesting may help. A child who can't effectively communicate what he wants or needs relies on behavior to get those needs met. Help your child develop the skills he needs to get his needs met in a better way.

TEACHING REQUESTING (MANDING)

Travis was an autistic 4-year-old who went to a local preschool. Usually, he did pretty well in class. He was learning to follow the classroom routines and participated in most of the group activities, but he preferred to play alone during choice time.

Another boy, Justin often tried to play with Travis, but Travis would yell and sometimes even hit Justin when he touched the blocks that were Travis' favorite.

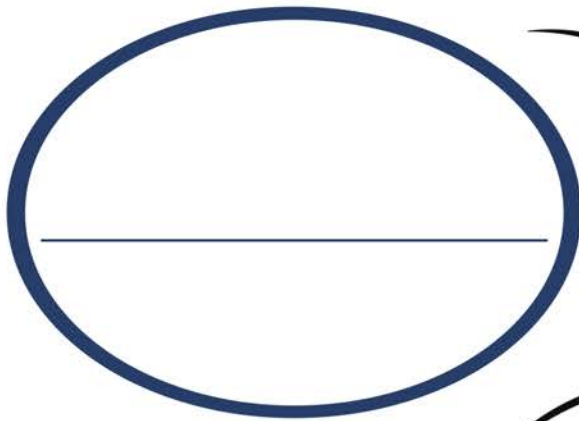
The classroom teacher, Donna, knew that Travis wasn't a bad kid, he just didn't have the language he needed to communicate with Justin. Although Travis had a growing vocabulary, he didn't have the words to get his needs met in this situation. Donna spent some time sitting with Travis during choice time. She taught him to say "my turn" when Justin had a block that Travis wanted.

When Travis discovered that Justin would give him the toys he wanted when he said, "my turn," Travis quickly started using the words on his own. Travis was more willing to let Justin have some blocks knowing that he could get them back with just a few words. Donna watched the interactions from across the room and gave Travis a big thumbs up when he chose to use his words instead of behavior to get his needs met.

Teaching Requesting Assignment

Think about each step in the process and answer the questions in the space provided or on a separate piece of paper.

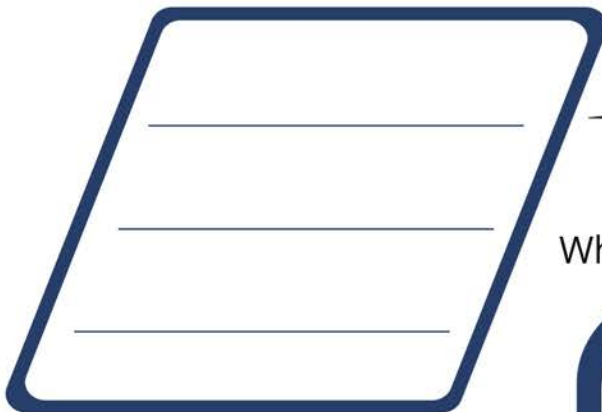
What type of communication is
right for your child?



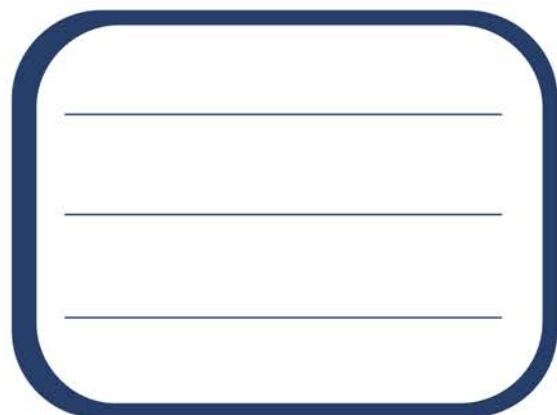
What targets will you start with?



Which items can you limit access to?



When will you teach the request?



Teaching Requesting (Manding) Quiz

1. Teaching your child to request may reduce challenging behavior because he will have a more appropriate way to get the things he wants.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Why should you put items out of reach when teaching your child to request?
 - A. If he can reach the items himself, he will be too distracted to ask for them
 - B. Having the items out of reach causes problem behavior, allowing you to practice extinction
 - C. If he can reach the items himself, he does not need to ask
 - D. All of the above

3. Your child must be able to speak to request an item.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. If your child doesn't currently say the words for his favorite things, what should you do?
 - A. Consider introducing an alternative form of communication
 - B. Teach your child to imitate your sounds
 - C. Wait for him to start speaking before teaching him to request
 - D. Take him to a speech pathologist who will teach him to speak

5. How quickly should you give the requested item to your child after he makes a request?
 - A. 3 minutes
 - B. 10 seconds
 - C. 1 minute
 - D. 3 seconds

6. When teaching your child to request, it's often best to start with something tangible, something he can see and touch.
 - A. True
 - B. False

SPONTANEOUS VOCAL BEHAVIOR AND IMITATION

GOAL

Learn the steps to encourage and shape spontaneous vocal behavior and imitation.

BACKGROUND

Parents of children with limited vocal communication skills worry about what the future holds for their child.

When their child's young, just 2 or 3, parents have hope that their child's speech will come eventually, but as their child gets older they start to wonder if he will speak at all. They are unsure of what they can do.

While we can't predict a child's communication abilities, there are steps we can take to encourage this development.

THE EFFECTS OF SHAPING

Shaping is a procedure commonly used in ABA to reinforce gradual steps toward an end goal. This procedure, especially when used for speech development, takes time and a lot of patience.

Initially, you can encourage vocal play by engaging with your child when he makes speech sounds. Try imitating his sounds and see how he responds.

Keep these points in mind:

- Avoid pressuring your child to make speech sounds

- Stay positive

- Make it fun

- Engage with your child the way he likes

ENCOURAGE VOCAL SOUNDS

This lesson will focus on encouraging the vocal sounds, words and communication your child uses every day. You will learn to shape these sounds into words and gradually teach your child to imitate your words. Vocal imitation opens the door to teaching a wider range of communication skills.

BASIC STEPS TO SHAPE SOUNDS INTO ECHOICS

List Sounds and Reinforcers

Make a list of all the sounds your child is currently making. Make another list of items or interactions that your child enjoys.



Reinforce Any sound

Give your child a reinforcer whenever he makes vocal sounds. This might be a quick interaction like tickling him or he might need something a bit more tangible like a favorite snack or toy.



Shape Sounds Into Words

Shape the sounds he's making into words that include the sounds he's already making by providing reinforcement for sounds that are gradually closer to the words you are helping him create.



Shape Vocal Imitation

Shape those words into vocal imitation by providing reinforcement when he makes the sounds or words you make after you make them.

LIST SOUNDS AND REINFORCERS

Make a list of all the sounds your child makes every day

Start to listen carefully to the speech sounds your child is already making. This could be humming, babbling, or even parts of or whole words. On a piece of paper, whiteboard, or your cell phone, make a list of everything you hear. Later this will help you decide which sounds you might be able to shape into words.

While you're at it, make a list of your child's favorite things including foods, toys, items of special interest and interactions. You will use some of these items for reinforcers through the rest of the process. Try to think of things he likes that are quick and easy to deliver and that disappear quickly or you can control easily such as tickles, bubbles, pieces of cereal, fruit, or balloons flying round the room. Even if you can't easily take the item away, add it to the list anyway.

WHAT SOUNDS DOES YOUR CHILD MAKE RIGHT NOW?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write down the sounds their child makes.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S FAVORITE ITEMS, ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write down their child's favorite items, activities, and interactions.

REINFORCE ANY SPEECH SOUNDS

MAKE IT PART OF YOUR CHILD'S DAY

Show your child you value the sounds he makes every day.

Now that you have a better idea of what sounds your child makes and items, activities and interactions that might be motivating to him, it's time to just play with your child.

Sit wherever he's most comfortable such as on his bed or on the floor. Keep some of his favorite things you listed in the last step next to you, within easy reach.

If your child prefers not to sit, that's fine too. Put the things he enjoys up on a counter or shelf that's out of his reach, but easy for you to get to.

Engage with your child in any way that he enjoys. If he likes you to follow him around the room, play with toys, read a book, or spin in circles, do those things with him.

Avoid activities that include sounds such as TV or music because you want to be able to focus on the sounds he makes at first.

REINFORCE!

Provide reinforcement when your child emits any speech sound.

Whenever he makes any speech sound, provide reinforcement in a way that he enjoys. Some children enjoy loud, excited praise followed by quick tickles, bubbles or a moment to play with a favorite toy. Other children respond better to a quietly stated "yes! Great!" And a gentle shoulder rub accompanied by one of their reinforcers.

Remember to match your delivery of praise to what your child enjoys. Avoid startling him in your excitement.

Imitate his speech sounds

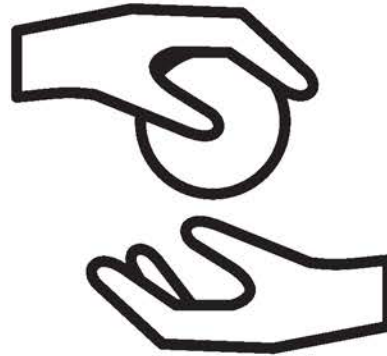
Many children enjoy when you imitate the speech sounds they make. Try this throughout the day to see how he reacts. If he responds negatively by pushing you away or becoming agitated, stop and try again another time. If he has a limited reaction or a positive reaction, continue to do this periodically as though you were having a conversation with him. Provide extra encouragement and reinforcement any time your child makes a new sound. The goal is to gradually expand the different speech sounds and the frequency of those sounds throughout the day.

If your child makes a lot of speech sounds throughout the day, you're ready to start the next step in the process, shaping those sounds into words.

SHAPING SOUNDS INTO WORDS

Shaping is a process of reinforcing smaller steps to your end goal. As your child develops more speech sounds, start reinforcing only those sounds that are closer to words than the previous sounds.

- ✓ mmmm
- ✓ mmmuuhhh
- ✓ mmmuuhhnn
- ✓ mmuhn
- ✓ muhin
- ✓ mufin



In the example above, provide reinforcement initially for the mmmm sound.

Once your child makes the mmmuuhh sound, stop reinforcing the mmmm sound and wait for him to make a sound that's closer to the word you're trying to shape.

In the example above, it's the mmmuuhhnn sound, but it could also be mmmuuufff depending on what sounds your child finds easier to make. The steps don't need to be as clearly defined as in this example, but what you're looking for is continual, gradual progress toward your end goal. If at any point he says the full word or comes very close, give him extra reinforcement. Every child develops and progresses at their own rate. Don't get discouraged if this process takes a long time, just continue to provide reinforcement for sounds that are closer and closer to words.

SHAPE WORDS INTO IMITATION

Imitation

Once your child starts making more sounds and maybe some word approximations, use the same process to get your child to imitate or echo your speech sounds.

This is an important skill because it can grow his vocabulary much more quickly once he understands what you want him to do.

Teaching him new communication skills becomes easier and faster once he's able to imitate the sounds and words you make.



Teaching Imitation

What you want is for your child to hear you say a word or sound such as cup and then repeat the exact word or sound you made.

The process is essentially the same as with the other steps.

- First, identify the words or sounds he's already making and the reinforcers you will use.
- Make one of the sounds and wait for him to repeat it.
- If he makes the sound, provide reinforcement.
- If he doesn't make the sound, repeat the sound and wait.

Repeat this process until he makes the sound. If you have tried 3 times and he still hasn't made the sound, don't give him the reinforcer, but move on to a different activity. Avoid putting pressure on him to repeat you.



KEEP TRYING

Remember, each child grows and develops at his own rate. For many children, this process is slow and somewhat tedious. Just keep trying.

If your child struggles with echoing your sounds and words after you have gone through this process for several weeks or even a month, try different reinforcers. Often finding new foods, activities and toys your child is interested in sparks the motivation you need in your child.

If these new reinforcers don't motivate him to imitate your speech sounds and you have been consistent in following this process, switch to teaching him motor imitation and requesting. Children who have difficulty learning to imitate speech sounds may be more successful at it once they develop motor imitation and requesting skills. Once he learns how to imitate your actions and ask for his favorite items, come back and try to teach him to imitate your speech sounds again.

EXPANDING SPONTANEOUS VOCAL BEHAVIOR AND VOCAL IMITATION (ECHOICS)

Kristin has decided to work on teaching her son Samuel to imitate her speech sounds. She hopes that this will help expand the sounds and words he makes. She begins by making a list of all the sounds she hears him make each day. Then she makes a list of his favorite toys and activities that she might be able to use as a reinforcer.

Kristin sits on the floor with him with his favorite train set. Whenever Samuel makes speech sounds, she cheers and gives him a train to push on the track. As the train comes around the track in front of her, she playfully scoops it up. Then, when Samuel makes another speech sound, she gives him the train again. She does this for countless hours, gradually shaping the types of sounds he's making.

Next, Kristin plays with Samuel on the trampoline. She wants to work on teaching Samuel to imitate her speech so while holding his hands, she makes a sound that she has heard him make frequently in the past, mmmm. When he makes the sound, she starts to jump. Samuel laughs and giggles. Kristin stops jumping and repeats the process. They continue to play this way, with Kristin making a variety of different, familiar sounds and Samuel imitating them.

One day, while getting Samuel's dinner ready, Kristin says "French fries" as she places his plate in front of him. Out of the blue, Samuel says, "eye!" Kristin is so excited that she cheers and quickly tickles Samuel. He smiles and looks at her as if to say, "oh, is that all you wanted?"

Expanding Speech Sounds Assignment

Make a list of the speech sounds your child currently makes. Make another list of words that include those sounds related to activities he enjoys.

Sounds

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>
6	<input type="text"/>
7	<input type="text"/>
8	<input type="text"/>
9	<input type="text"/>
10	<input type="text"/>

Words

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>
6	<input type="text"/>
7	<input type="text"/>
8	<input type="text"/>
9	<input type="text"/>
10	<input type="text"/>

Expanding Spontaneous Vocal Behavior and Vocal Imitation (Echoics) Quiz

1. You have been working on shaping the word banana. Your child has been routinely saying "nana" for banana and you have been reinforcing this. One day when you say "banana" he repeats the entire word. What do you do?
 - A. Quickly introduce a new vocal imitation target to keep up the momentum
 - B. Continue on with programming as you normally do by providing reinforcement
 - C. Provide him with more reinforcement than you usually give him, including additional praise and more time with his favorite reinforcer
 - D. Immediately call your neighbor to tell her the good news
2. When teaching your child to imitate your words, you should never give reinforcement unless he says the full word.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. When teaching vocal imitation, where should you and your child be?
 - A. In a quiet room with minimal distractions
 - B. Listening to music or watching TV to encourage him to imitate the other sounds he hears
 - C. At the table conducting formal DTT sessions
 - D. Anywhere your child enjoys being
4. If your child makes any speech sounds, it may be possible to shape those sounds into words.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Another term for vocal imitation is:
 - A. Repetition
 - B. Echoic
 - C. Mand
 - D. Intraverbal

INTERACTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH LABELING

GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to label objects, actions, emotions, sounds, and smells in the world around him.

BACKGROUND

Labeling is a fundamental part of communicating. It is integral to how you engage with those around you every day. Think of the different ways you label things throughout your day:

- Pointing out an interesting object or event in your environment to the person you're standing next to
- Talking about what someone else is doing
- Telling someone how you're feeling or
- Teaching someone something new

Labeling these things in your environment provides you with a way to interact with someone else.

WHAT IS LABELING?

The act of labeling, or tacting as it's called in ABA, is simply attaching a name to something such as an object, action or emotion.

This labeling might just be a single word that specifies what that "something" is or it might be more complex and include attributes such as size, shape, color, or texture. You can label other things in your environment including smells and sounds.

When you smell a great cup of coffee, you might say "mmmm, coffee." You don't need to see it to know it's there. You can also label sounds around you. For example, if you hear a car screeching toward someone, you might say "there's a car coming!"

REINFORCE ANY SPEECH SOUNDS

MAKE IT PART OF YOUR CHILD'S DAY

Show your child you value the sounds he makes every day.

Teaching your child to label follows many of the same steps as teaching your child other skills. Start where she's already likely to be successful and provide reinforcement as she gradually gets better or closer to her goal. Here are the steps altogether, but we will break each one down to make it easy for you to teach your child.

1. Make a list of some words your child knows and another list of your child's favorite things that you might use as reinforcers
2. Gather the items on the list from step 1 or pictures of the items and go to where she's most comfortable
3. Show your child one of the items or a picture of one of the items
4. Immediately say the name of the item or prompt her to use the alternative communication system she already uses
5. If she says the word or uses the alternative communication to say the word, immediately provide praise and access to one of the reinforcers
6. If she doesn't say the word, don't give her the reinforcer and try prompting her again

WHEN TO TEACH LABELING

Wait until your child is ready.

It's often best to wait to teach labeling until your child learns to imitate your speech sounds or has learned to use an alternative form of communication such as PECS or a communication app to request what she wants.

He must have already have a functional way to communicate or have the ability to imitate sounds and words. Without these prerequisite skills, you both will feel frustrated very quickly.

Wait for him to be motivated.

You may be tempted to try to teach your child at times that are convenient for you. With your responsibilities and obligations, it may seem like you only have a few minutes a day that you can devote to teaching this skill.

What's more important than the amount of time that you spend teaching is your child's motivation for the reinforcers you have available. If he's not motivated for what you have to offer, it's usually best not to even try to teach him.

LIST WORDS AND REINFORCERS


Make a list of all the words your child has said and potential reinforcers

Once you're ready to begin, make a list of all the words she says either with speech, PECS or her communication app. If she's not yet saying full words, include any words she says that are close to understandable. These words will guide you in selecting the first labels you will teach your child. Start with the words she already knows how to say so she will feel successful right away.

Make another list of her favorite things, those things that she is most motivated for. These are potential reinforcers for your child. They are her paycheck for labeling the items you have on your list. Giving her the reinforcer lets her know that she did what you wanted her to do.

Remember, you will need to limit her access to these things so she doesn't have that money tree. If you can't limit her access then don't include it on the list.

WHAT WORDS DOES YOUR CHILD MAKE RIGHT NOW?



WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S FAVORITE ITEMS, ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS?



GET READY TO TEACH

Look at the list of the words your child can say and collect each of the items on your list. You will want to have them near by during the next step. Small versions of these items can make this a little easier. It's often best to have a picture of these items as well. They don't have to be exact pictures of the objects your using, but the background should be a solid color to avoid confusion or distractions.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU NEED?

Objects

Objects allow the activity to be meaningful for your child, but you are limited by the objects available in your environment.

Objects are a great place to start, but may not be enough as your child starts to learn more words.

Pictures

Using pictures helps distinguish a label from a request. Remember, you want to teach your child to use language in different ways. Communicating is about more than just getting what you want.

Actions

Introduce actions once your child independently labels several objects or pictures. You can model the action, show a picture or even use a GIF of the action.

You might need to try each type to find the right one for your child.

Sounds and Smells

Sounds and smells are less tangible and may be a bit abstract for your literal child. These labels should be introduced once your child develops labels for many concrete items and actions. Use cotton balls soaked in essential oils and placed in jars for smells, and audio files for sounds.



CHOOSE TARGETS AND REINFORCERS

While you're collecting things, gather together your child's reinforcers. You will also need these within easy reach so you can give them to her quickly. Have her cereal in a bowl or bag and her favorite video cued up. Since you are teaching her to label rather than request, avoid using a reinforcer that is also a target. Look at this example:

Words she can say:

- Baby
- Bubbles
- Apple
- Please ("peas")
- Dog
- Bear
- Dada
- Banana ("nana")
- Popcorn ("opcorn")
- More
- Car
- Mama

Possible reinforcers:

- Swing
- Bubbles
- Video
- Cereal
- Popcorn
- Balloons
- iPad game
- Candy
- Tickles

In the example above, the best targets to start with may be:

- Baby
- Apple
- Dog
- Bear
- Car

It's easy to find multiple examples, including pictures, of each item and none of these are specifically reinforcing on their own. You want to give her something other than the word she says to help her understand the difference between labeling and requesting. In addition, these are words she says fully rather than word approximations. If your child doesn't say full words, it's fine to accept words she doesn't say fully, but it's better to start with ones she does, if you can.

TIME TO TEACH

Be Prepared

Keep all the items you collected in a bin or bag so they are handy when you need them.

Play with Your Child

When you have a few minutes to play with your child, sit down next to her.

Check Her Motivation

Check to see if she's motivated for any of the reinforcers you have. Hold out a bin that has them. If she reaches for any of them, she's motivated.

Get Attention

Get her attention by saying her name or tickling her. You can also hold the reinforcer she seems most motivated for in front of you.

Present the Item or Picture

Check to see if she's motivated for any of them. When she's paying attention to you, show her one of the items or pictures that has them. If she reaches for any of them, she's motivated.

Give Her the Answer

Say the word for the picture or item you're holding. If she's using PECS or another form of alternative communication, physically direct her hand to the correct item in her book or app or model the sign.

Respond

If she responds by repeating the word or using her alternative communication.,
REINFORCE!

If she doesn't repeat you or use her communication system, try again or move on to something else.



MAKE IT FUN

Remember, this should be fun and rewarding for your child. She should see this as a fun interaction with you and a way to get the things she likes. Incorporate lots of praise and always finish with something she knows how to do so she ends with a reinforcer.

INTERACTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH LABELING (TACTING)

Gabriel's daughter Mia has started saying more words, but usually only after he says them. He wants to help her use language more spontaneously, so he decides to start teaching her to label objects in their environment. He feels that this will help her engage more freely with him as well.

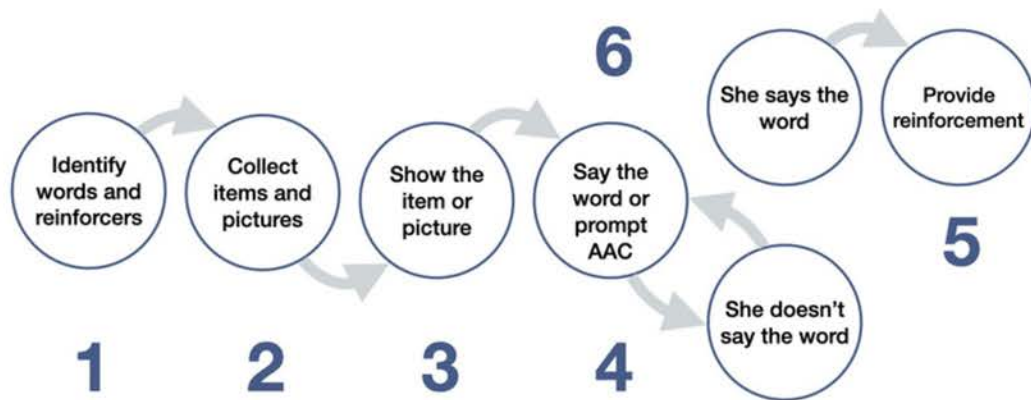
Gabriel sits down with her while she's playing. He puts a bin of familiar objects along with some reinforcers next to him. He has also prepared some pictures of those objects so he can practice labeling with both pictures and objects. Mia needs some help at first, but quickly starts saying the word for each picture or object he shows her.

As Mia begins labeling more items at home, Gabriel starts to ask her to label things while walking home from school. As they pass a tree, he pauses, points to the tree, says "tree" then waits for Mia to respond. When she says, "tree," Gabriel cheers and gives her a quick tickle. He continues with other things they pass, including cars, flowers, rocks and even a cat.

One day, when he and Mia walked home from school, Mia saw a dog across the street. Grabbing Gabriel's hand, she pointed and said, "dog!" Gabriel couldn't be happier that he worked so hard to help Mia learn to share her view of the world.

Labeling Things in the Environment Assignment

Complete each task listed below. As she becomes independent with the labels you teach, choose new targets. If she gets stuck, problem solve with your BCBA.



Words

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

<input type="checkbox"/>	List words and reinforcers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collect items and pictures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teach 2 labels using the process above
<input type="checkbox"/>	Record independent vs prompted labels

Interacting with Others Through Labeling (Tacting) Quiz

1. Your child often asks for cookies as a favorite snack. You decide to teach her to label "cookie". When you present a picture of a cookie, she says "cookie" without you saying or doing anything to teach her. What do you do?
 - A. Give her reinforcement other than a cookie and continue to teach her to label cookies
 - B. Say "yes, that's a cookie!" then give her a cookie
 - C. Do nothing. Since she already can label the item, you shouldn't give her reinforcement
 - D. Give her reinforcement other than a cookie and choose a different target
2. How should you choose targets for teaching labeling?
 - A. Find objects around your child's environment and start there
 - B. Use a picture book of first words to make it easy to do
 - C. Choose words your child already knows how to say by requesting or imitating
 - D. Identify new words you want to teach your child
3. Labeling allows you to engage with those around you. You might label by doing all of the following except:
 - A. Asking your coworker to take your place at a meeting you don't want to go to
 - B. Pointing out an interesting object or event in your environment to the person you're standing next to
 - C. Teaching someone something new
 - D. Talking about what someone else is doing
4. While attributes such as color, shape, and texture are helpful with requesting, they are not part of labeling.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. You can label smells, sounds, tastes or even textures in addition to objects and actions.
 - A. True
 - B. False

RESPONDING VERBALLY TO SOMEONE ELSE'S VERBAL COMMUNICATION

GOAL

Learn to teach your child to respond when communicating with others using the various types of responding including:

- Fill-ins
- Questions
- Conversations

BACKGROUND

Before teaching your child verbal responding, make sure he has some requesting, imitating and labeling skills. These skills are the building blocks for this more complex form of communication and will be needed for teaching. If you try to teach responding and your child struggles, go back to teaching some of the other skills and come back to this later.

For the sake of simplicity, in this lesson, rather than saying "responding to someone else's communication", we will use the phrase "verbal response" or even more simply "response."

Although we are using the term "verbal response," this includes whatever form of communication your child uses including sign language, PECS or a communication app.

TYPES OF RESPONDING

Fill-ins: Fill-in occurs when you start saying something and your child finishes what you are saying. This response can be from songs or common phrases.

Questions: Answering questions is an important part of communication. Some children require specific teaching to do this. Start with what, where, then who questions before introducing more complex questions.

Conversations: Conversations involve at least 2 people talking about the same topic in an exchange back and forth.

These exchanges might include questions and answers or simple comments that volley back and forth .

RESPONDING TO FILL-INS

Fill-ins are usually the easiest verbal response to learn, and the most fun. A fill-in occurs when you start saying something and your child finishes what you are saying. This response can be from songs or common phrases. Teaching your child to verbally respond follows the same basic steps that you used to teach each of the other skills.

BASIC STEPS

Identify Targets and Reinforcers

Think about songs your child knows and likes. Does he know "Row row row your..." or "Twinkle twinkle little..."? When you leave off the last word, you create an opportunity for someone to fill-in the ending. If your child can label or imitate any of these words, these songs might be good targets for you to teach.



Collect Pictures for Prompting

Collect pictures of each of those targets. These will help you teach your child the correct response. If he doesn't yet label the target, try teaching him the label before teaching the verbal response. This makes teaching the response much easier.



Start the Phrase and Prompt

Go to where your child likes to play. Set the pictures and reinforcers you might want to use within easy reach. Start the phrase. Immediately present the picture that matches the target phrase and prompt him to use his alternative communication, if he uses one.



Reinforce Correct Responses

If he says the word or uses his alternative communication, immediately give praise and a reinforcer. You can also vary the reinforcers you give him to keep him motivated and excited.

TEACH ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Once your child begins to fill-in your statements more regularly, introduce some simple questions. Keep the questions concrete. Start with what, where, then who questions before introducing more complex questions.

What Questions

- ✓ What buzzes?
- ✓ What keeps food cold?
- ✓ What do you wear?
- ✓ What do you ride?
- ✓ What smells?

Where Questions

- ✓ Where do you sleep?
- Where does a
- ✓ bird fly?
- Where do you
- ✓ shop?
- Where do you
- ✓ cook?

Who Questions

- ✓ Who hops?
- ✓ Who barks?
- ✓ Who bakes cookies?
- ✓ Who cuts the grass?
- ✓ Who eats hay?
- ✓

Choose targets that are familiar to your child or relate to something he enjoys. Try questions such as "what bounces?" Or "What flies?" Then introduce questions like "where do you sleep?" And "where do you jump?" Next add some questions such as "who hops?" And "who is your friend?"

Follow the same procedure as before, using pictures of the targets to help your child answer the questions correctly. Create opportunities for your child to practice communicating throughout his daily activities. This makes communication and learning much more natural. It's ideal to embed teaching when he's engaged in fun activities, as long as you can get his attention. Keep pictures and reinforcers nearby so you're always ready to teach.

MORE COMPLEX CONVERSATIONS

MAKE IT FUN

Turn conversations into a game

Don't start teaching conversation skills until your child readily responds to a variety of fill-ins and questions, including questions you didn't teach him to respond to. Teaching conversations is just a little different than teaching other responding in that you won't use pictures to help your child respond.

Many children still benefit from the use of some sort of visual. Try playing an "on-topic" game where each time one of you says something related to what the other person says, you lay down a green link. When someone says something off-topic, you lay down a red link in the opposite direction. See how long you can make the chain before changing directions.

Avoid pressuring your child. Show him that you sometimes make mistakes and say something off-topic. Be silly about it and show him that having conversations is fun.



REINFORCE!

Make it motivating

Conversations can be hard for some children so make sure to make this a motivating experience. Follow conversations with things your child enjoys that are easy for him.

Consider providing access to reinforcers periodically throughout a conversation, especially when you introduce new topics or try to engage him longer.

What items, activities or interactions are most motivating for him?

Parts of a conversation

Use this as an opportunity to teach your child how to gracefully switch topics. No conversation goes on forever. At some point, in every conversation, the topic shifts. Make sure your child knows that this is natural and perfectly ok.

This is also a good time to talk to your child about the interests of other people. He can absolutely talk about his topic of special interest, but remind him that his conversation partner might want to talk about his interests too.



PRACTICE

It may take many months or years to teach your child these responding skills. Stay patient. Your child will develop skills at his own rate. Continue to create opportunities for him to communicate. Make it fun and avoid pressuring him.

RESPONDING TO THE COMMUNICATION OF OTHERS (INTRAVERBALS)

Kelsey has been working hard to teach her son Cameron to communicate. He can ask for many of the things he wants and labels a variety of things including objects, sounds, and even the smell of his favorite cookies. However, she's worried that his communication is robotic and not spontaneous.

Kelsey decides to teach verbal responding to Cameron. She envisions asking him questions about his day and having conversations with him about the things he enjoys. She feels that the teaching procedure is familiar since it's so similar to the procedure she used to teach Cameron to imitate, request and label.

Kelsey chooses targets that are related to things she knows Cameron likes. She thinks this will help keep him motivated and lead to her ultimate goal of having a conversation with him. She creates opportunities as often as possible throughout their day, although she admits there are many days when she simply forgets. Over time, she notices that his communication is becoming gradually more spontaneous.

Although Cameron still mostly talks about concrete things he can see, he has answered some questions about school when something fun and unusual happens that he's really excited about. Kelsey knows that with continued practice, Cameron's communication will continue to improve.

Verbal Responding Assignment

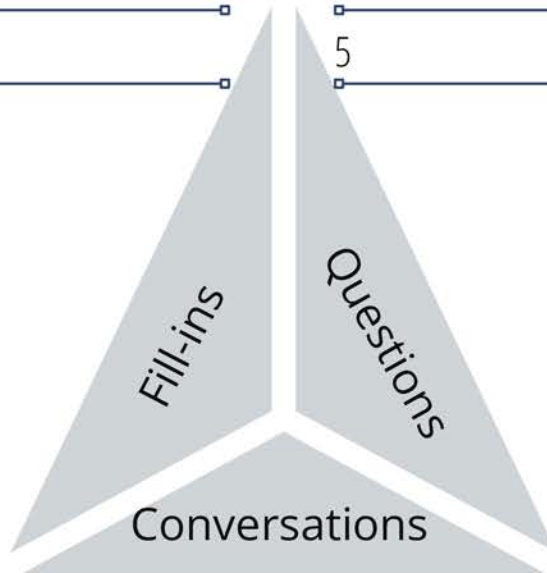
List some possible teaching targets below. Include targets that are somehow related to things your child's most interested in. Create opportunities to practice responding throughout your child's day.

Fill-ins

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Questions

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5



Conversations

- 1
- 2
- 3

Responding to the Communication of Others (Intraverbals) Quiz

1. Verbal responses include which of the following (select all that apply):
 - A. Answering questions
 - B. Conversations
 - C. Fill-ins
 - D. Asking questions

2. When teaching fill-ins, you can teach your child to finish parts of familiar songs or
 - A. Who questions
 - B. Common phrases
 - C. Labels
 - D. Conversations back and forth

3. Responding to someone else's verbal communication can also be called:
 - A. Response
 - B. Verbal Response
 - C. Intraverbal
 - D. All of the above

4. You can teach verbal responding during any activity that's fun for your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. You must teach answering questions before fill-ins to make sure your child has enough language to respond correctly.
 - A. True
 - B. False

BASIC LISTENER SKILLS

GOAL

Learn to teach basic listener skills while making it fun and motivating for your child to follow simple directions.

BACKGROUND

Basic listener skills require 2 people, a speaker and a listener. For the purposes of this lesson, we will focus on the listener's physical response to what the speaker says. We cover a verbal response to someone else's verbal communication in a different lesson.

The speaker says something such as "touch the dog" and the listener responds by performing some action on the environment that corresponds with what the speaker said.

Most listener skills you will teach involve either touching or pointing to something in the environment as you saw in the previous example or performing some sort of action with his body.

MAKE FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS FUN!

As with other skills, you begin by teaching listener skills that are easy for your child and build to more complex skills. This creates a positive experience and allows you to provide frequent reinforcement.

Choose targets that are fun and enjoyable on their own. Play games like follow the leader and Simon Says. Take turns with your child and allow him to give directions and be the leader.

Make sure to have plenty of reinforcers around to keep him motivated. Choose reinforcers that are time-limited to create more opportunities to practice basic listener skills with your child.

CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS

When choosing what to teach first, start with things that your child is already at least a little familiar with to give him the greatest chance for success. If he's likely to want the items you decide to teach first, use pictures of those items instead of the real items.

PROGRESS THROUGH DIFFERENT TYPES OF TARGETS AS YOUR CHILD'S SKILLS IMPROVE

Objects

Begin with teaching your child to identify common objects as a listener. Use either small versions of the actual object or pictures of the object. If your child has special interests, start with pictures of some of those objects, if possible.



Body Parts

Build to teaching your child to identify various body parts as a listener. He should be able to identify facial features as well as larger body parts such as his legs. Try the song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes to make it fun.



Actions

Begin by teaching simple actions that you can help him with such as clap, wave or point and gradually move to actions you will need to model to teach such as dance, stomp or jump.



One-Step Directions

Gradually introduce simple one-step directions such as "go get your shoes" or "put your bowl in the sink." These directions are likely to be less fun and motivating on their own, so make sure to have reinforcers ready!

TEACH SIMPLE LISTENER SKILLS

Check for the skill

To get started, place a small number of items or pictures in front of your child. Usually, it's best to start with 2 or 3 but if this is hard for him, you could start with just 1.

Place the items in front of your child, wherever he chooses to play. Make sure he sees the reinforcers you have available, get his attention, and say, "touch the..."

It's best to check to see if he can do this on his own before you decide to teach him. If he touches the dog on his own, you can move on to other targets, or try increasing the array by adding another item or picture and check to see if he can still respond correctly.

If the speaker says "touch the dog" and the listener touches the rabbit, the listener made an error. This is an indication that you might need to do some teaching, especially if this type of error happens frequently.

Teaching and prompting

When teaching your child to respond correctly, you will begin by physically guiding your child to the correct answer. If possible, it's best to guide your child to the correct answer before he actually makes an error. If you see his hand move toward the wrong answer, immediately correct him before he has the opportunity to touch the wrong one. It's a minor distinction, but an important one.

As your child begins to improve in his response, you can begin to reduce the amount of help you give him. Do this gradually so he doesn't make mistakes.

Eventually move from guiding his hand to simply pointing to the correct answer, then pointing in the direction of the correct answer.

Keep fading back until he answers correctly without any help from you.

MAKE THE TASK MORE DIFFICULT

Gradually make the task more difficult by adding new targets and increasing the array of items or pictures you put in front of him. Include more items that are similar to each other over time.

Each time you put the items or pictures in front of him, make sure to change their positions so he doesn't learn that "point to dog" means to point to the picture in the middle on the bottom row.

3 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Ball
- ✓ Couch

4 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Bird
- ✓ Car
- ✓ Chair

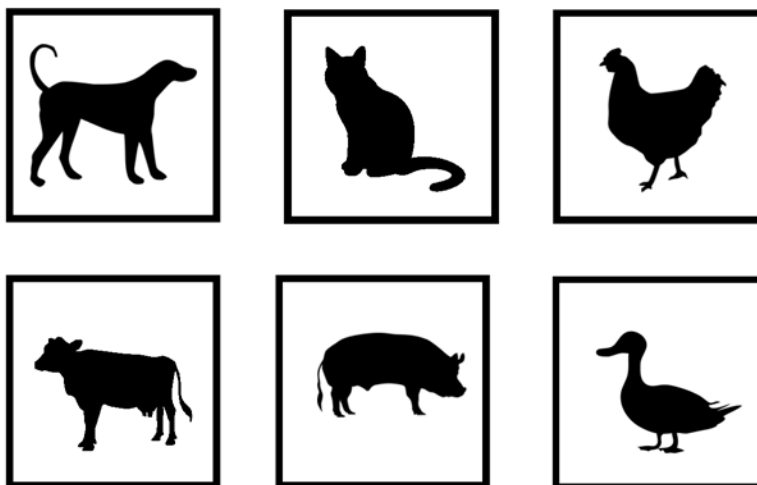
6 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Cat
- ✓ Chicken
- ✓ Cow
- ✓ Pig
- ✓ Duck

In the example above, "dog" is the target you are teaching. You start by presenting 3 pictures of unrelated objects with "dog" being the only animal. As your child demonstrates improved listener skills, you include more pictures in the array while also introducing objects that are increasingly similar. In this example, you begin to introduce other animals, gradually moving to include animals that are very similar to "dog" such as a cat.

Vary the pictures in the array to make sure your child is learning what the actual target is, not just what it isn't.

Many children also benefit from using multiple examples of the target. In this example, it would include using pictures of different types of dogs.



TEACH LISTENER RESPONDING TO ACTIONS

TEACHING ACTIONS

Make it fun for your child.

When starting to teach listener responding with actions, begin with targets that are easy for you to help him do like clap, wave, or point. Be silly and include things he likes to do.

Often the actions and your praise may be sufficient reinforcement; however, some children need additional, tangible reinforcers. Do what works for your child.

Use songs such as Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, A Tooty Ta, or Animal Actions to make following directions enjoyable. If using a video from YouTube, make sure your child doesn't see them modeling the action. Remember, the goal is to teach your child to respond to the words, not imitate the actions.

FADE THOSE PROMPTS

Help your child respond correctly, but reduce help to build independence.

You can use physical prompts, for some actions, such as clapping. For gross motor movements that you can't help him complete like jumping, it's best to make sure he's able to imitate your movements before trying to teach him to display these actions when you tell him to. Immediately after you give him the direction, model the action. Over time, fade this help so he starts to do it independently.

When asking him to do different things throughout his day, avoid providing additional prompts or cues such as pointing or even looking at what you want him to do. Teach him to pay attention to what you say rather than relying on other cues. If he needs help, go ahead and help him, but then work on fading that help so he begins to become more independent.



KEEP IT REWARDING

Remember, each child grows and develops at his own rate. Many children are resistant to following directions, even when the directions are to do something fun.

Avoid pressuring your child and create multiple opportunities throughout your child's day to practice. Incorporate your child's special interests when you can.

Teach wherever your child likes to hang out. He doesn't need to sit at a table with his feet on the floor and his hands clasped in front of him to learn.

BASIC LISTENER SKILLS

Frank is autistic and has some trouble with communication. He received ABA when he was younger, but since starting school, it's been hard to fit it into the schedule. When Frank was in ABA, his dad, Max, received some training from the BCBA®. Max feels like he learned a lot and is prepared to help his son as he gets older.

One day, while Max was outside doing yard work, he saw Frank run toward the road. Max yelled "stop!" But Frank didn't stop. Max ran after him and caught him before he was injured, but in that moment, Max realized that Frank was missing some very important basic listener skills.

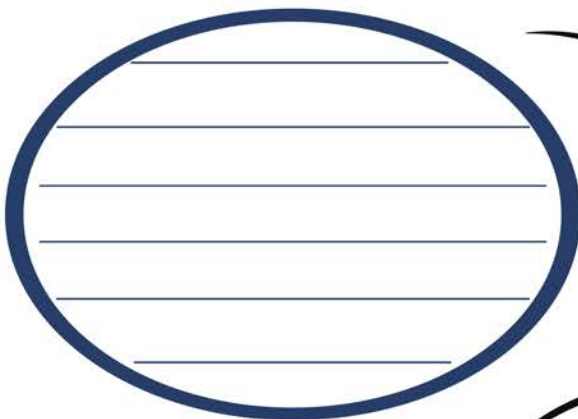
Max remembered from his training from the BCBA® that to teach a skill, he should break it down into smaller pieces. Frank could point to objects when asked but couldn't follow simple directions, so this is where Max decided to start. Max taught Frank to follow directions that were fun for him such as clap, dance, and jump. Finally, they worked on a game similar to Red Light, Green Light where Max would say "stop" and "come here." This game made it fun for Frank to practice following directions that may one day prove to be lifesaving.

The next time Max and Frank were outside, and Frank headed off toward the street, Max shouted, "Come here!" And Frank immediately turned around and headed for his dad. Max felt a lot more at ease now that Frank reliably followed some simple directions.

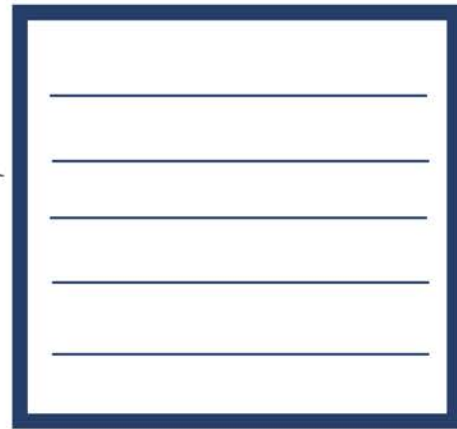
Basic Listener Skills Assignment

Complete each task listed below. As she becomes independent with the targets you teach, choose new ones. gradually making the tasks more difficult.

Choose object targets.



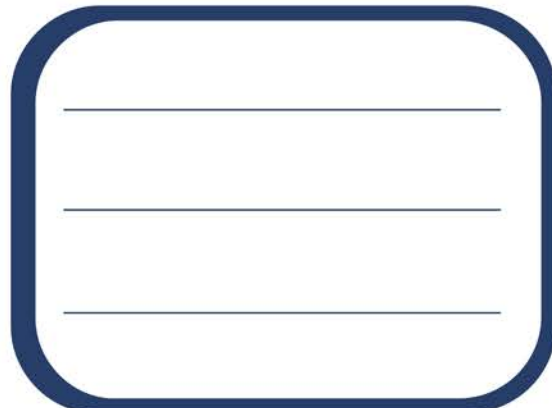
Choose body parts targets.



Choose action targets.



Choose one-step directions.



Basic Listener Skills Quiz

1. Your child should be able to imitate any gross motor action you target if you can't help him physically perform the action.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. If Sarah jumps when Gabriel says 'jump', this is an example of::
 - A. Requesting
 - B. Labeling
 - C. Basic listener
 - D. Verbal responding

3. Responding to someone else's verbal communication can also be called:
 - A. Response
 - B. Verbal response
 - C. Intraverbal
 - D. All of the above

4. You can teach verbal responding during any activity that's fun for your child.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. You must teach answering questions before fill-ins to make sure your child has enough language to respond correctly.
 - A. True
 - B. False

TEACHING COMPLEX LISTENER SKILLS

GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to follow increasingly complex directions.

BACKGROUND

Did you ever play the game I Spy when you were growing up? Someone says "I spy..." providing clues to something in the environment and your job was to guess what they were looking at based on the clues.

Developing more complex listener skills is like playing an organized game of I Spy. Your child listens to a direction and shows us that she knows by responding physically usually by pointing to the item or picture. In these activities, you won't say the name of the target directly. Instead, you will say a:

- feature (i.e. has a tail)
- function (i.e. barks)
- class (i.e. animal)

WHY TEACH COMPLEX LISTENER SKILLS?

Complex listener skills are important to your child for a variety of reasons. They help your child:

- Respond appropriately to their peers' requests
- Engage in more complex interactions with others
- Experience independence at school and later on in a job
- Experience success in less predictable or structured settings within the community

By following complex directions or other more complex language from peers and adults, your child experiences more independence and success!

CREATE TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

Create both structured and more natural learning opportunities for your child

Begin by introducing the skill in a structured way using pictures or objects at home. As she begins to respond more independently, introduce opportunities during play and eventually while out in the community.

As with teaching other listener skills, gradually make the task more difficult by adding new targets and increasing the array of items or pictures you put in front of her. Each time you put the items or pictures in front of her, make sure to change their positions so she doesn't learn that "show me the one you eat" means to point to the picture in the top left corner.

Think about those times you might have a few minutes to work on this skill. Jump in to her play time or invite her to join you while you make dinner. You only need a few minutes at a time. Make sure to have something motivating ready for her!

WHAT ACTIVITIES AT HOME WOULD CREATE OPPORTUNITIES?



WHAT ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY WOULD CREATE OPPORTUNITIES?



FEATURE, FUNCTION AND CLASS

When teaching complex listener skills, you will be teaching your child to pay attention to the feature, function or class of the item. While you no doubt understand these aspects of a large number of items, use these lists to get you thinking about what you can teach your child.

Feature-What...

- Has a tail
- Has legs
- Is green
- Has doors
- Has a trunk
- Is soft
- Has wheels
- Is square
- Is thin
- Has pages
- Has a point
- Has fur

Class-Which one is...

- An animal
- A vehicle
- Furniture
- Clothing
- Food
- A drink
- A vegetable
- A person
- A plant

Function-What one...

- Do you drive
- Do you eat
- Barks
- Grows
- Cries
- Do you watch
- Bounces
- Hops
- Wags
- Floats
- Do you sleep in
- Do you read
- Do you drink from
- Holds food
- Keeps food cold
- Makes food hot
- Do you ride
- Picks up garbage
- Cleans your teeth
- Gets you wet
- Do you eat
- Do you cut

GET READY TO TEACH

Start with a small array of pictures or objects, then introduce the skill during play time or other activities around the house. Finally, teach her to respond while out in the community. Make it fun and make sure you have a reinforcer ready. Give her a clue about one of the items using a feature, the function or the class of the item. If she points to the correct item, give her a reinforcer along with praise. If she gets it wrong, help her by showing her the correct item but don't give her the reinforcer.

HOW SHOULD YOU PROGRESS?

Pictures or objects at home

Begin by placing a small array of pictures or objects out in front of your child on a table, the counter, or even the floor.

Teach her wherever she's most comfortable.



Increase the array

Gradually increase the number of pictures or objects you present. The right number is an array that's just a bit challenging but not overwhelming for her, somewhere between 4-10 items.



Take it on a walk

Take a walk with your child through your neighborhood, a park, or even a fenced in playground. Ask questions and wait for her to respond. Remember, the goal is for her to touch the item, but if she says the word, that's fine too.



Try a busy environment

Finally, introduce the skill in a busy environment such as the grocery store, mall, department store, or even a restaurant. These environments may present a bit of a challenge so be ready to help her get it right!



TEACH EVERY DAY

use everyday moments as opportunities to practice these skills. When sitting at the table for a meal, try "Which is a vegetable?" or "What has a point?" Playing in the sandbox try "What has wheels?" or "What holds sand?"

TEACHING COMPLEX LISTENER SKILLS (LRFFC)

Jessica is worried about her daughter Vanessa. Vanessa did well in kindergarten, but now that she's in first grade she seems to be having some trouble. The teacher, Mr. Parker, says she simply doesn't follow directions and it's becoming a real problem. Jessica meets with the teacher to get a better understanding of his concerns. He's frustrated that she requires so much direct prompting to get her to do the things the other children do willingly. Jessica knows that Vanessa is usually cooperative, so she doesn't understand why this year is so different.

Jessica talks with the BCBA® who worked with Vanessa when she was in preschool. Vanessa had stopped going to ABA therapy once she started in school because she had been doing so well, but now Jessica was unsure how to help her daughter. The BCBA® asked Jessica to explain which directions Vanessa was having trouble following. Jessica gave the example Mr. Parker used when they met. Mr. Parker often asks the class to "get something to write with" and meet him on the rug. When he does, Vanessa just goes to the rug and Mr. Parker has to tell her to go get her pencil. The BCBA® explained that Vanessa probably wasn't being intentionally uncooperative, but she probably didn't understand Mr. Parker's directions. The BCBA® reviewed how to teach Vanessa to follow complex directions.

Jessica spent some time practicing gradually more complex directions with Vanessa. Vanessa picked up the skills quickly when Jessica used pictures and a structured teaching format, but when Jessica tried to introduce the skills in a more natural way, it seemed a bit more difficult. Jessica did her best to make it fun, but there were times when they both seemed frustrated. When that happened, Jessica took a step back to something a bit easier and tried again with a skill just a little less challenging.

Over time, Vanessa began to follow more complex directions more easily. Jessica met with Mr. Parker again to talk about what they have been working on. He even commented that Vanessa was beginning to listen better at school. It turns out it really was a problem with understanding, not behavior after all.

Complex Listener Skills Assignment

List some possible teaching targets below. Include targets that relate to the feature, function or class or an object. Begin with targets that are familiar for your child and gradually introduce ones that are more novel.

Feature

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Class

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Function

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Teaching Complex Listener Skills (LRFFC) Quiz

1. The goal of teaching complex listener skills is to help your child _____.
 - A. Follow less specific directions in the natural environment such as at school
 - B. Better understand the world around him/her
 - C. Neither A nor B
 - D. Both A and B

2. Teaching complex listener skills is like playing an organized game of I Spy.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. When presenting pictures or objects for your child to choose from, you should always leave the correct answer in the same place so your child can easily find the right one.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Teach complex listener skills by gradually building his/her understanding of
 - A. Features, different parts that make up an item
 - B. Functions, what different things do
 - C. Classes, how different items are grouped together
 - D. All of the above

5. You can incorporate teaching complex listener skills into your everyday activities with your child including play, chores at home, and errands in the community.
 - A. True
 - B. False

USING TASK ANALYSIS TO TEACH SKILLS

GOAL

Understand how to use task analysis to break down complex tasks into simpler steps to teach your child new skills.

BACKGROUND

Many skills needed for independent living can be broken down into smaller, easier-to-teach skills or steps using a teaching strategy called task analysis. The best way to create a task analysis for any skill is to perform the skill and write down each of the steps you used to complete the task.

Task analysis is helpful for teaching many complex skills including:

- Cooking
- Vacuuming
- Getting dressed
- Feeding pets
- Laundry
- Brushing teeth
- Bathing
- Washing hands
- Doing dishes
- Taking out the garbage

The list includes nearly every skill needed to become an independent adult. Even if your child is very young, there are skills you can teach him using this teaching strategy.

SELF-CARE

Many autistic children struggle to learn important self-care or life skills. While many different teaching strategies are valuable for teaching these skills, the most valuable is called a task analysis. A task analysis is simply a step-by-step breakdown of a specific activity such as hand washing or brushing hair.



BREAK DOWN COMPLEX SKILLS

The best way to break any skill down is by simply doing the task and writing down each step you needed to do to complete the task. In addition to hand washing and brushing hair, this strategy is great for a long list of different skills including:

- bathing laundry
- getting dressed
- making a bed.
-

Breaking the skills down makes them easier to teach and easier for your child to learn.

WHAT OTHER SKILLS CAN YOU THINK OF?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to write down other skills that can be broken down.

TEACHING LIFE SKILLS

WASHING HANDS

Washing your hands is something you do without really thinking about it because you have performed the task so many times. Think about the steps required to wash your hands.

- 1 Walk to the sink
- 2 Turn on the water
- 3 Wet your hands
- 4 Get soap
- 5 Rub your hands together
- 6 Rinse your hands
- 7 Turn off the water
- 8 Dry your hands

There may be more or less steps depending on the type of faucet or soap or if you want to include rubbing the backs of the hands or between the fingers. This task that we all do without thinking about it consists of 8-10 or even more steps. The benefit of breaking the skill down and teaching it in this way is your child can learn to chain these skills together to become one fluid behavior just like you do.

BRUSHING HAIR

Let's try another skill, brushing hair. That seems like a skill with very few steps, right? What if I told you it could have up to 7 steps or more? Look at these possible steps:

- 1 Get hair brush
- 2 Brush left side of hair 10 times
- 3 Brush right side of hair 10 times
- 4 Brush back of hair 10 times
- 5 Brush bangs until they fall straight
- 6 Check mirror
- 7 Put brush away

Your child might need more or less steps depending on the length of hair and their overall abilities. No matter how many steps, the overall goal of teaching skills in this way is to link each step or behavior into a chain that eventually requires little thought or effort.

BEHAVIOR CHAINS

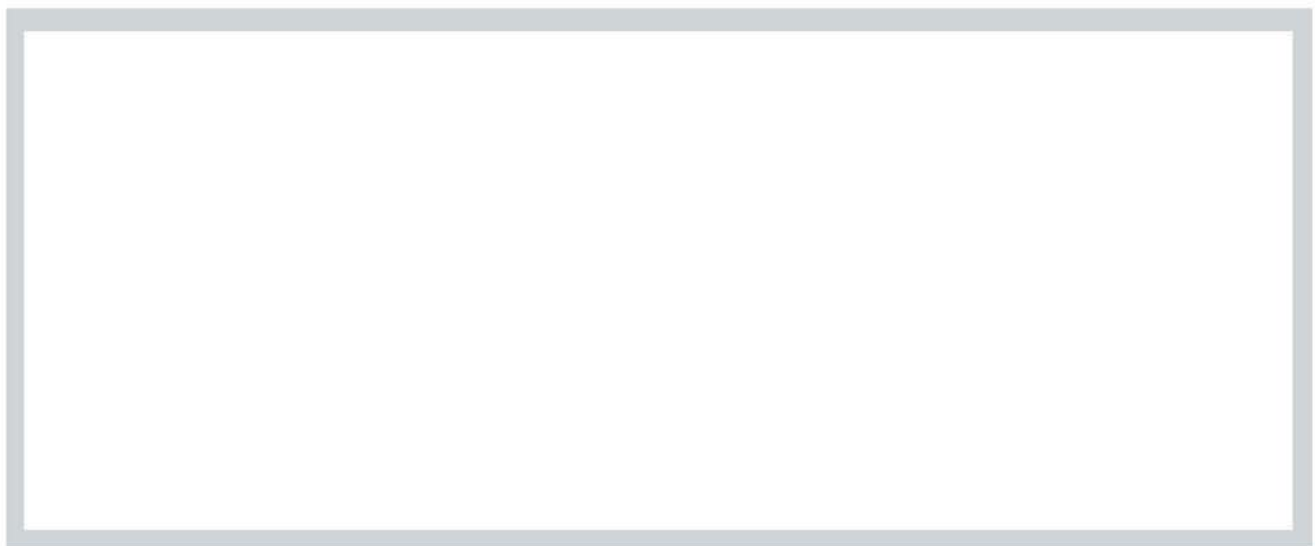
When you link each step from the task list together to form a single behavior, such as washing your hands, you can begin to preform the task with much less conscious thought.

Have you ever traveled somewhere that has very different sinks than those you're used to? When this happens, you pause to think about the steps and how to perform them. You might need to search for the mechanism that turns the water on or look around until you find the soap. The greater the difference the environment is to what you're used to, the more effort it takes for you to perform a task you could otherwise do with little thought. This happens because the chain of behaviors you use to wash your hands is now broken.

PROMPTING AND REINFORCEMENT

There are several strategies for providing prompting and reinforcement when teaching skills using this technique. One method is to start by teaching the first step of the skill and then teaching each of the subsequent steps in turn. This is called forward chaining. Another method is to start by teaching the last step of the skill and then teaching each previous step in turn. This is backward chaining. And the final strategy teaches all of the steps at the same time. This is total task chaining. This sounds complicated, but it's really not.

WHAT BEHAVIOR CHAINS DO YOU HAVE?



3 TYPES OF CHAINING

FORWARD CHAINING

Take a look at the hand washing example. If you use forward chaining to teach the skill, you will begin by teaching your child to walk to the sink and helping her perform each of the rest of the skills. When your child walks to the sink on her own, you will begin to teach her to turn the water on while helping her complete all the remaining steps. You will continue to teach the next step in order once your child learns to do the current step independently.

TOTAL TASK CHAINING

When using total task chaining you teach her to complete all of the steps as you go along. Although this is a more familiar form of teaching, it might be difficult for some autistic children.

BACKWARD CHAINING

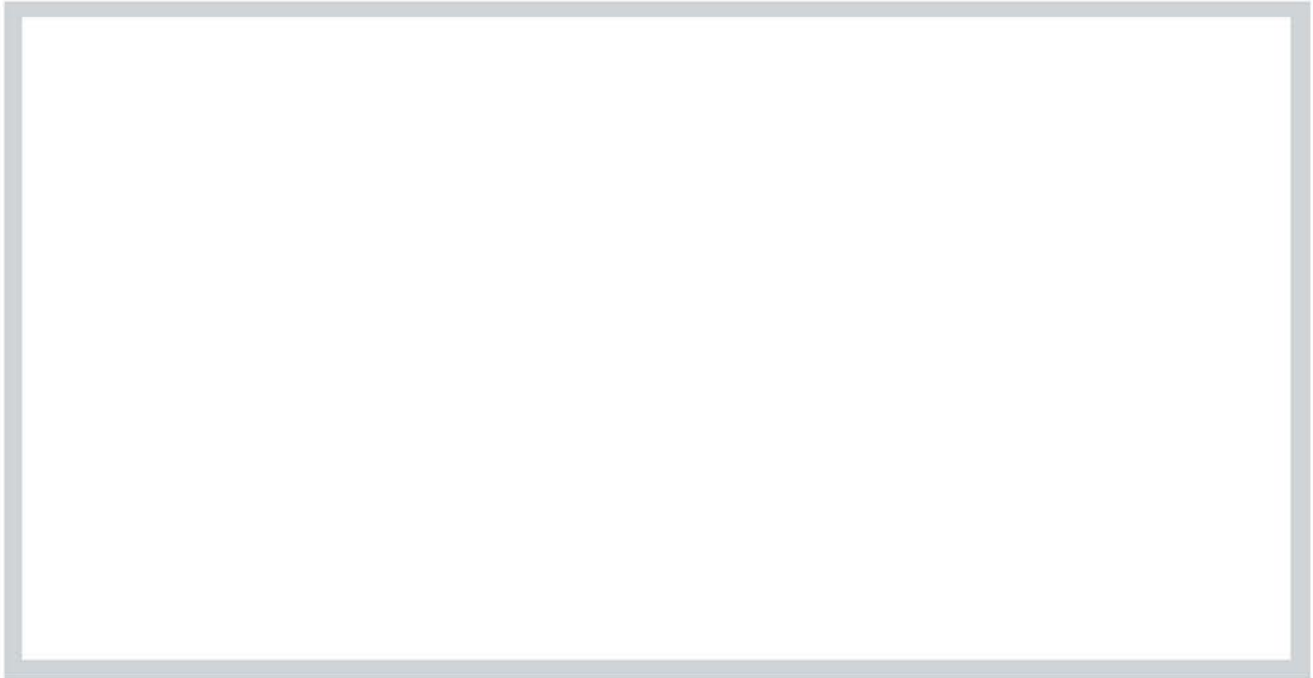
If you use backward chaining, you will begin by helping her complete all the steps until the last one and focus on teaching her to dry her hands. Once she's able to dry her hands on her own, you continue to help her with the beginning steps and teach her to turn off the water then allow her to dry her hands on her own. As she becomes independent with a step, you will begin to teach her the step that comes just before the step she just learned.

WHICH IS BEST?

There isn't one strategy that is right for all children and there isn't one right way to teach your child. Find a teaching strategy that is comfortable for you and effective for your child. This might involve trying each one on a different skill. What's really important to this process is breaking that skill down into teachable parts and gradually encouraging independence with different parts as your child learns those skills.

HOW WILL YOU USE TASK ANALYSIS?

LIST THE SKILLS YOU MIGHT TEACH USING TASK ANALYSIS:

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to list skills that might be taught using task analysis.

WHICH TYPE(S) OF CHAINING WILL YOU USE?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for the user to list the type(s) of chaining they will use.

Task Analysis Assignment

Think about the skills you want to teach your child. The following is a list of ideas to get you started:

- Bathing
- Hand washing
- Chores
- Dressing
- Brushing teeth

Make a list of the skills you want to teach and then think about which teaching strategy you want to try.

Targets

1	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input type="checkbox"/>	Forward chaining
<input type="checkbox"/>	Backward chaining
<input type="checkbox"/>	Total task chaining

Using Task Analysis to Teach Skills Quiz

1. When a chain of behaviors is broken by performing a familiar skill in an environment that is very different, the task may require more thought and effort.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Which skills can be taught using task analysis? (choose all that apply)
 - A. Brushing teeth
 - B. Taking out the trash
 - C. Washing dishes
 - D. Asking for a snack

3. The chaining method that teaches all the steps of the task at once is called
 - A. Forward chaining
 - B. Backward chaining
 - C. Total task chaining
 - D. None of these

4. The best way to identify all the steps needed to complete a task is to perform the task yourself and then write down the steps you had to do.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Which type of chaining teaches the last step of the task first?
 - A. Forward chaining
 - B. Backward chaining
 - C. Total task chaining
 - D. None of these

TOILET TRAINING

GOAL

Discover the toilet training strategies that work best with autistic children.

BACKGROUND

Many autistic children learn to use the bathroom the same way that other children learn. Others need a slightly different teaching strategy. This is most often when they don't have the communication skills for us to explain what we want them to do. Often, simple strategies are effective in guiding your child to use the toilet. Although the process is simple, it's often not easy. It does require a commitment to the process.

WHEN TO GET HELP

The process used in this lesson is effective for most young children. If you have diligently followed the procedure and your child still doesn't void on the toilet or has had limited success after several weeks, consult with a professional who can help you problem solve and identify the best course of action.

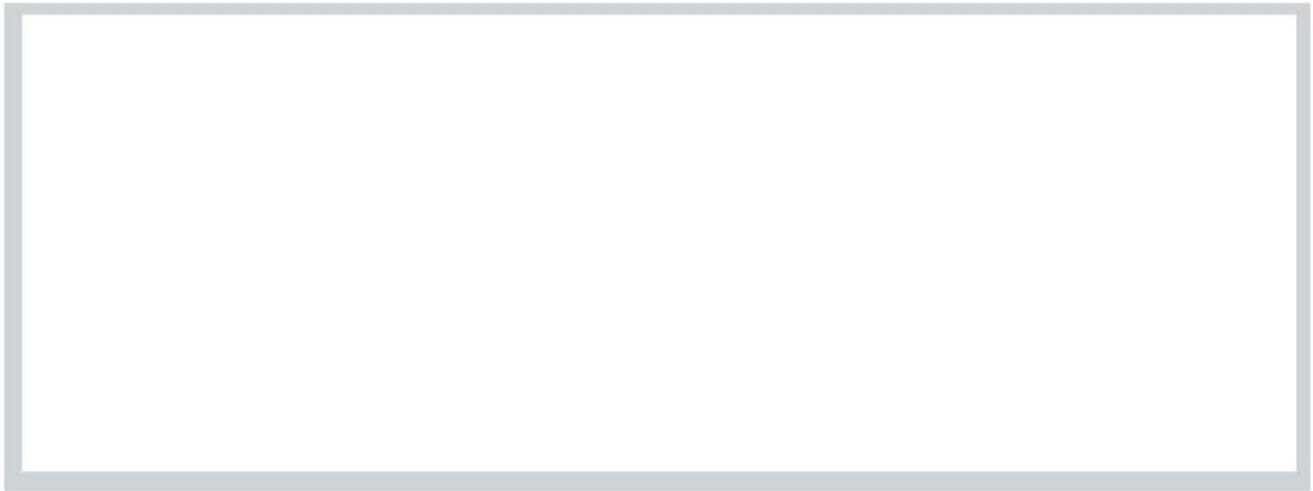


- ☒ **Stays dry**
- ☒ **Shows interest**
- ☒ **Appears uncomfortable**
- ☒ **Doctor approved**

WHEN TO START

Before beginning, look for signs your child is ready for toilet training. Does he keep his diaper dry overnight or for 1-2 hours during the day? Does he show interest in the toilet? Does he seem uncomfortable when his diaper is wet? Check with your child's doctor to make sure there are no physical reasons you shouldn't start toilet training. Once you're confident your child is ready, it's time to get started.

DOES YOUR CHILD SHOW SIGN HE IS READY TO START?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray border, intended for a parent to write their response to the question above.

COMPONENTS OF TOILET TRAINING

There are 3 main components of effectively teaching your child to use the toilet, underwear, frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet, and reinforcement. Each of these pieces is critical to your child's success.

Toilet

Frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet provide the chance for you to catch your child when he's ready to void and provide reinforcement. "Frequent" means something a little different for each child, but usually every 15-30 minutes is needed to get started, sometimes even more often than that.

When you get started, take him every 30 minutes, unless a shorter amount of time is recommended by a BCBA. If he has frequent accidents, take him more often.

Underwear vs Diapers

Diapers create a barrier to toilet training, even training pants such as Pull-ups. They prevent your child from feeling what it's like to have an accident and they prevent you from recognizing when an accident is occurring. So get rid of them while toilet training. Yes, that means a lot of laundry and potential mess so don't start toilet training until you're ready for this. Roll up the rugs and cover your couch if you can.

Commit to having your child in underwear as often as possible. This helps your child feel when he's wet. It helps you see when he's in the process of having an accident so you can immediately take him to the bathroom.

COMPONENTS OF TOILET TRAINING CONT.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement tells your child that he did what you wanted him to do. Choose a reinforcer that is highly motivating for your child that you can set aside only for toilet training.

At first, you might need to give him a reinforcer just for sitting on the toilet. That's fine, just choose something that's not quite as special as what you set aside for when he actually voids on the toilet. This might be watching a video on the phone or you reading a book or even playing in a small bin of water while he sits.

When he voids in the toilet, give him a reinforcer immediately, while he's voiding is actually best if you can get it to him in time. You need him to make the connection between voiding and the reinforcer so the longer the gap, the less likely he is to make the connection and the longer the whole process will take.

If the reinforcer is an activity like a game on the phone, let him have the phone for an amount of time that makes the most sense. If he voids just a little, maybe give him 1 minute on the phone. If he voids a lot, maybe give him 3 minutes on the phone.

Avoid letting him have the reinforcer too long. You want him to be excited to earn it again when it's time to come back to the bathroom. Keep the reinforcer in the bathroom in a place your child can see it. If he reaches or asks for it, tell him "when you pee in the potty, you can have ____."

STEPS TO TEACH

STEP 1: OPPORTUNITY

To get started, take your child to the bathroom and have him sit on the toilet. Make this as easy for your child as possible. Help him remove his clothes and put them back on when he's done. There will be time later to teach him to dress himself.

Do everything you can to make this fun and easy. It's ideal if you can encourage him to sit for a minute or 2 by singing songs or letting him watch a video, as long as the video isn't the reinforcer for voiding. Do your best to entertain him while he sits and make this a positive experience. When he indicates he's ready to get up, let him get up, even if he didn't void. Set a timer to remind you to take him back to the bathroom to try again.

STEP 2: WATCH FOR SIGNS

Allow him to do whatever he normally does, but watch for any signs that he needs to void. If he gives any indication that he might need to void, don't wait for the timer, take him back to the bathroom and encourage him to sit. If he doesn't indicate he needs to void, simply wait for the timer and take him to the bathroom when it goes off.

STEP 3: REPEAT

Repeat this process going back and forth between play and sitting at least every 15-30 minutes. When he voids on the toilet, even just a little bit, immediately give him the reinforcer you put in the bathroom for this specific purpose. As he's voiding, provide whatever praise your child enjoys. If he likes when you're loud and exuberant, go ahead and cheer for him. If he prefers when you quietly say "you did it" while rubbing his arm, do that.

WHAT TO KNOW

Accidents

If, or rather when, your child has an accident, don't make a big deal about it. Accidents are part of the process. Simply take him to the bathroom immediately and have him sit on the toilet. If he voids in the toilet, give him a reinforcer as you would any other time. Avoid the urge to reprimand him. If you feel you need to respond in some way, tell him "pee goes in the potty" or some other neutral phrase to tell him what you want him to do.

Following a schedule

As your child begins to void on the toilet on the schedule you set without accidents in between, gradually increase the time between trips to the bathroom. Generally, it's best to increase the time by small amounts, about 5 minutes, at a time. Continue to increase the time until you are taking him to the bathroom every 1 1/2-2 hours. The right schedule for your child is the one where he voids nearly every trip to the bathroom and stays dry in between.

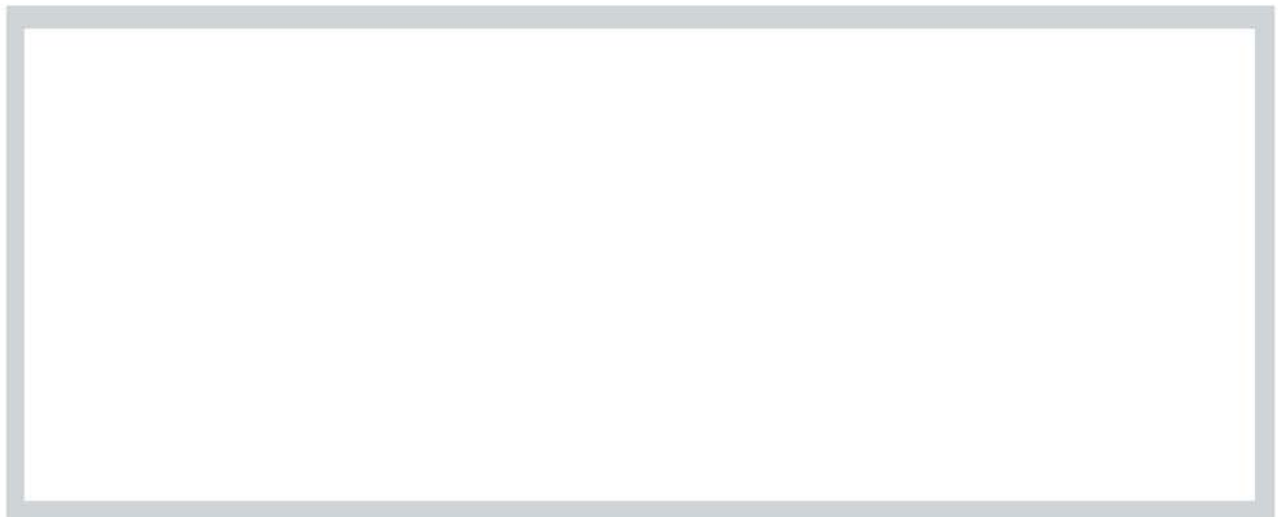
Once your child reaches a comfortable toileting schedule, it's time to start gradually teaching him to dress himself and wash his own hands. Take a look at the lesson on using task analysis to teach skills for a more detailed process for teaching these skills. Only after he can complete the whole process from beginning to end should you start teaching him to ask to use the bathroom.

TIPS

Although the process is somewhat simple, it's not easy and can feel frustrating for everyone. Here are some tips to help the process go more smoothly

- ✓ Choose a time when your child can be in fewer clothes such as the summer when it's warm.
- ✓ If your child is in school, it's best to start when he doesn't have school such as during a vacation or over the summer.
- ✓ Increasing your child's fluid intake will provide more opportunities for him to need to void.
- ✓ Pick a time when you have fewer obligations and can devote time to the process.
- ✓ If you're not seeing progress, try offering a different reinforcer.
- ✓ Don't force fluids, but make sure he has fluids available as often as possible.
- ✓ If your child still isn't making progress, it might be time to consider whether he's truly ready. He should be able to keep a diaper dry for at least 1-2 hours and be willing to sit on the toilet. If he's not ready, consider waiting a few months and trying again.

LIST CONSIDERATIONS FOR BEGINNING TOILET TRAINING:



Toilet Training Assignment

Toilet training often provokes fear and anxiety for both parents and children alike. Parents wonder if they will ever be rid of diapers forever and children simply don't understand what they are supposed to do.

To get started with the toilet training process, spend a little time planning:

When will you commit to having
your child in underwear?

How often will you take him
to the bathroom?

What reinforcers will you offer your child?

For sitting

For voiding

Toilet Training Quiz

1. What are the 3 most important parts of toilet training? (select all that apply)
 - A. Frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet
 - B. Reprimands for accidents
 - C. Wearing underwear
 - D. Reinforcement for voiding
2. You should anticipate that your child will have accidents through this process and do what you can to protect soft surfaces such as your rugs and couches.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. If your child has 1 or more accidents a day after a week of toilet training you should stop and wait for him to be more ready.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. How often should you take your child to the bathroom at the beginning of toilet training?
 - A. Every hour regardless of when he voids
 - B. Every 2 hours so he doesn't become overwhelmed
 - C. Every 7 minutes until your child has no accidents
 - D. Often enough to minimize accidents and catch him ready to void, usually about every 15-30 minutes
5. The reinforcer you use for voiding in the toilet should
 - A. Not be available at any other time
 - B. Also be used for sitting on the toilet
 - C. Be given to your child for about 30 minutes each time he voids
 - D. Be something he has frequent access to

PLAY SKILLS

GOAL

Expand your child's play skills to include a variety of activities that she enjoys.

BACKGROUND

Play skills are important for a number of reasons. Children learn best through play because it makes learning fun and teaches problem solving skills.

Play skills reduce challenging behavior by providing your child with alternative enjoyable activities to fill her day. All play involves exploring, being creative and having fun.

There should be no objective posed from the outside (yeah, that's you). It's a child-driven activity.

6 STAGES OF PLAY

There are 6 stages of play that children go through as they develop.

- Unoccupied play
- Solitary play
- Onlooker play
- Parallel play
- Associative play
- Cooperative play

Understanding these stages helps you determine your child's current stage of development and set realistic goals for play. If your child only engages in solitary play, she likely won't be successful if you try to teach her cooperative play skills.

Use the stages as a general guide rather than a set rule. Be flexible when teaching play skills and let your child take the lead.

STAGES OF PLAY

Unoccupied Play

The first stage begins to develop in infancy and involves simple play through movement. This type of play helps children understand their place in the world around them. A child jumping and spinning is engaged in unoccupied play. She is moving her body and exploring how it feels.



Solitary Play

The next stage also begins at birth and usually develops until the child is about 2 years old. Children involved in solitary play can engage in play with objects but have not developed an interest in including others in their play.



Onlooker Play

Onlooker play usually develops around 2 years of age. The child will watch others play but still doesn't play with them.



Parallel Play

Many autistic children struggle to develop play skills beyond the first few stages of play without a little help. Parallel play occurs when the child plays next to her peers engaged in the same activity but doesn't play with her peers.



Associative Play

Associative play occurs when the child begins interacting with her peers, but these interactions are still pretty limited.



Cooperative Play

The final stage of play is cooperative play where children work together toward a shared goal.

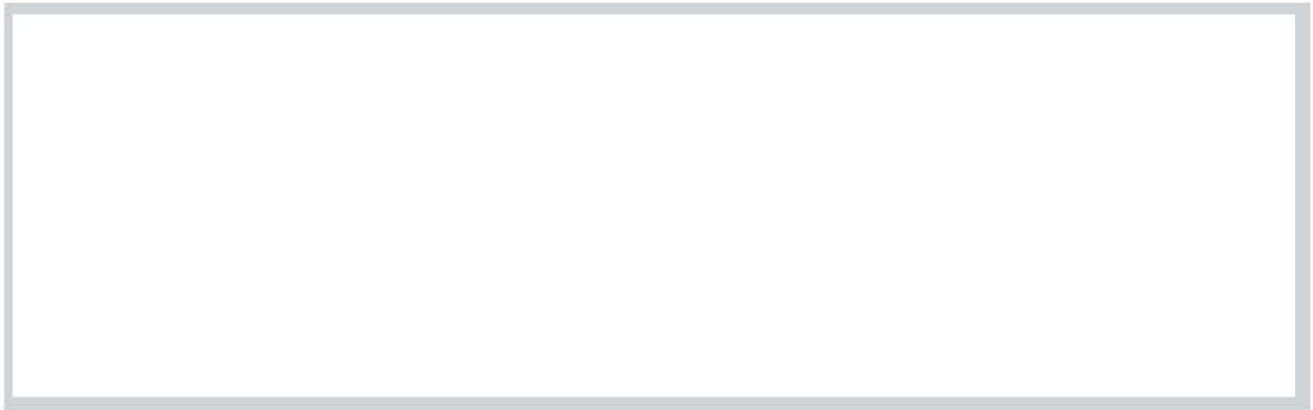
HOW DOES YOUR CHILD PLAY?

Play develops gradually and should be fun for you and your child.

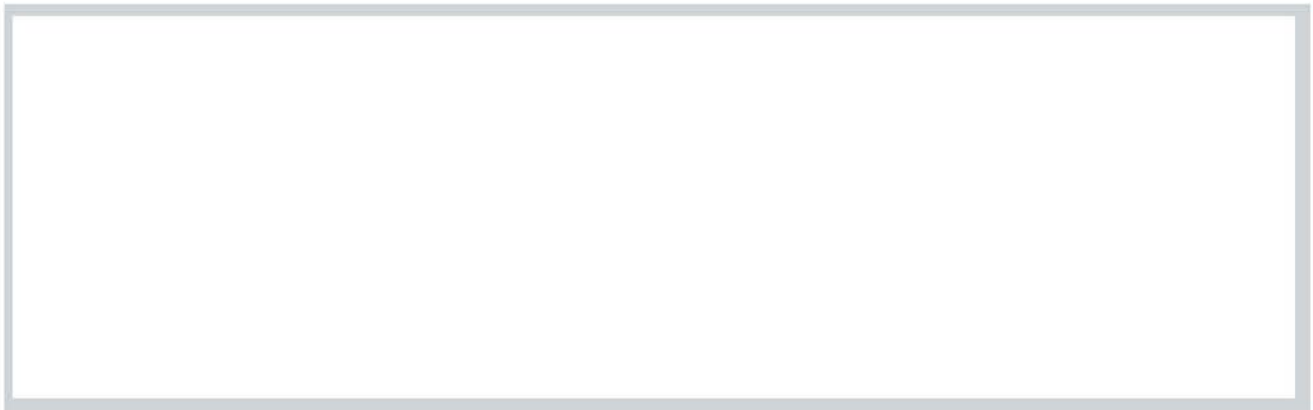
The first step in teaching play skills is to identify how your child currently plays. What are some of the things she likes to do? How does she engage with toys, objects or other people? What type of play does she engage in most often? What are her favorite items or objects? Answering these questions will help guide you in expanding her play.

Rather than thinking about teaching play skills, focus more on gradually expanding on the play she already engages in. Remember that play should be fun for her so teaching or expanding play should also be fun for her, and you.

HOW DOES YOUR CHILD CURRENTLY PLAY?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the user to write their child's current play habits.

WHAT OTHER ACTIVITIES IS SHE INTERESTED IN?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the user to write other activities their child is interested in.

TEACHING PLAY SKILLS

Follow these steps for helping your child develop play skills: join, imitate, expand.



JOIN

Join your child in play. Position yourself so that your child can easily make eye contact or look at you if she chooses by sitting slightly in front or across from her. Have your own toys that are similar or the same as her and just join in what she is doing without making her share with you. You can model different ways to play with the toys she likes. Try being unexpected or funny.



IMITATE

Once your child accepts you joining in her play, start to imitate the things she does. Jump when she jumps. If she spins the wheels of a car, spin the wheels of a car with her. Help her see value in engaging in play with you. If you notice your child move away or shut down when you do this, back off. Imitate small actions she makes and see if she gradually becomes more accepting of you imitating her play. Allow her to control and direct play.



EXPAND

Very gradually work to expand the play she enjoys. Include items or objects of special interest when adding new elements to play. This step takes a lot of creativity and patience but also produces the results you've been waiting to see. Include her special interests in as many activities as she will tolerate without overwhelming her or detracting from her enjoyment of those interests.

DEVELOP A PLAN

Plan each step of the process

A plan will help you prepare for engaging with your child. Don't lock yourself into the plan you create but use the plan to determine if there are any materials or resources you might need available.

HOW CAN YOU JOIN YOUR CHILD IN PLAY?

WHAT PLAY ACTIVITIES CAN YOU IMITATE YOUR CHILD DOING?

HOW CAN YOU GRADUALLY SHAPE THIS PLAY TO EXPAND IT?

MAKE PLAY FUN



Remember the goals of teaching your child play skills. You want to help her explore the world around her, spend time engaged in enjoyable activities and learn through those activities. The goal is not to teach a rigid, structured play routine. Be flexible and creative. Avoid placing your values on her play. If you don't enjoy crushing leaves and watching the pieces float in the wind, recognize that she's acting as a young meteorologist. Encourage play and exploration even when it doesn't look like how you played when you were young.

A grayscale photograph of a man and a young girl sitting on a light-colored, textured rug. The man, on the right, is smiling and holding a ukulele. The girl, on the left, is looking down at a small object in her hands. The background is softly blurred, showing a white wall and a white object. A semi-transparent gray box with text is overlaid in the center of the image.

PLAY SKILLS

Many children develop play skills on their own. Often autistic children need a little support and guidance. Although their play may always look different than their peers, expanding play skills should be about helping your child discover more enjoyable ways to interact with the world around her.

Play Skills Assignment

Think about your child's favorite activities and objects. What are some ways that you can join, imitate and then expand her play using some of these ideas?

Join

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Imitate

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Expand

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Play and Leisure Skills Quiz

1.To teach play skills, you should follow these 3 steps: join, imitate and _____

- A. Instruct
- B. Model
- C. Expand
- D. Direct

2.Avoid including your child's special interests in play so he/she doesn't become too consumed by them.

- A. True
- B. False

3.Play skills can reduce challenging behavior by giving children more appropriate activities to fill their time.

- A. True
- B. False

4.One important goal of teaching play skills is to teach your child to _____

- A. Learn to fit in with the other kids
- B. Explore the world around him/her
- C. Follow a rigid routine
- D. Complete activities you tell him/her to

5.Rather than teaching specific skills related to play, you should work to gradually expand his/her play interests and skills.

- A. True
- B. False

TEACHING COMMUNITY AND LIFE SKILLS

GOAL

To help you teach your child essential life skills for greater independence in both home and community settings by using structured, evidence-based strategies.

BACKGROUND

Life skills—like getting dressed, following a routine, and navigating public spaces—are essential for your child's independence. These skills often require explicit teaching and practice.

Your child may struggle with life skills because:

- The task feels too overwhelming.
- They need more support to get started.
- They aren't motivated.
- Community settings add extra challenges.

By breaking tasks into steps, using reinforcement, and providing the right level of support, you can set your child up for success. With the right strategies, you can help your child build independence one step at a time.

KEY STRATEGIES

Teaching life skills isn't just about telling your child what to do—it's about breaking tasks down, providing the right support, and reinforcing progress.

Keep in mind:

- Break it down.
- Provide visuals.
- Use reinforcement.
- Practice in real-life settings.
- Adjust as needed.

Teaching life skills takes time and patience, but with a structured approach, you can help your child gain confidence and independence in daily routines.

BREAK IT DOWN

For many children, everyday tasks like getting dressed, brushing teeth, or preparing a simple snack can feel like too much to handle all at once. Instead of expecting them to complete the full task, breaking it down into small, manageable steps makes it easier to learn and practice.

HOW TO BREAK A TASK INTO STEPS

Think about the exact sequence of actions required to complete the skill. For example, putting on a pair of pants isn't one step—it's a series of smaller steps:

1. Lay the pants on the floor
2. Slide one leg in
3. Slide the other leg in
4. Pull pants up to the knees
5. Stand up and pull them all the way up
6. Fasten button or zipper if needed



Some children naturally begin filling in the missing steps, but others need to be taught every part of the skill explicitly. The key is breaking it down just enough so your child can succeed while still being challenged.

KNOWING HOW SMALL TO GO

If your child struggles to complete a step, break it down further. If they pick it up quickly, you can move faster through the steps. A BCBA® can help determine how detailed the steps should be for your child's needs.

USING VISUALS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

Many children benefit from visual step-by-step pictures or checklists showing each part of the skill.

When tasks are broken down and supported with visuals, your child is more likely to complete them with confidence and independence.

PROVIDE SUPPORT AND FADE IT OVER TIME

When teaching life skills, most children won't master them immediately. They need support at first, but the goal is always to gradually reduce help so they can do the task independently.

HOW TO PROVIDE THE RIGHT SUPPORT

Your child may need different levels of support depending on the skill and their experience with it. Here are common ways to help them succeed:



Physical Guidance – Gently guiding their hands or body through the motion (e.g., helping them zip a jacket).



Modeling – Showing them exactly how to do it first before asking them to try.



Gestural Prompts – Pointing or gesturing to guide them (e.g., tapping their toothbrush to remind them to pick it up).



Verbal Cues – Giving simple, clear instructions (e.g., "First, pull up your sock").

FADING SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE

Once your child starts getting the hang of a step, it's time to step back! Gradually reduce the level of help by:

- ✓ Using less physical guidance.
- ✓ Waiting longer before giving hints or cues, allowing them time to problem-solve.
- ✓ Using fewer words, shifting from full instructions to quick reminders.
- ✓ Encouraging them to try on their own first, then stepping in only if needed.

ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE

As your child becomes more confident, celebrate their progress! Even small steps toward independence are worth acknowledging. The goal isn't perfect performance right away, but rather steady growth toward doing more on their own.

REINFORCE SUCCESS

We all feel more motivated when we know our efforts are noticed. The same is true for children! When learning new life skills, reinforcement helps your child stay engaged and continue trying.

WHAT IS REINFORCEMENT?

Reinforcement means immediately rewarding a behavior to increase the chances that it will happen again. For life skills, reinforcement can be anything that is motivating to your child, such as:

- Praise – A simple, enthusiastic "Great job!" or "You did it!"
- High-fives, hugs, or smiles – Nonverbal encouragement can be just as powerful.
- Special privileges – Extra playtime, a favorite activity, or a preferred item.
- Tangible rewards – Stickers, tokens, or a small treat, if appropriate.

WHAT IF MY CHILD ISN'T MOTIVATED?

If reinforcement isn't working, consider:

- Are you using something truly motivating? What excites one child may not interest another.
- Is the task too hard? If frustration builds, go back a step and support them more.
- Are they getting reinforcement for other behaviors? Make sure the biggest rewards come from practicing the skill, not avoiding it.

Reinforcement is a powerful tool to help your child build independence and feel successful. When they associate life skills with positive experiences, they're more likely to keep trying!

HOW TO REINFORCE EFFECTIVELY

To make reinforcement work best, keep these key points in mind:

- Be immediate – Reinforce right after your child completes a step to strengthen the connection.
- Be specific – Instead of just saying "Good job," try "Great job putting on your shoes all by yourself!"
- Match the reward to the effort – A big accomplishment may need a bigger reward, while small successes may just need verbal praise.
- Fade reinforcement over time – As your child becomes more independent, gradually reduce rewards while still offering encouragement.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR CHILD?

PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

A skill isn't truly learned until your child can use it in different situations—at home, at school, in public, and beyond. Practicing life skills in different places helps your child generalize what they've learned, making it easier for them to adapt when routines change.

START SIMPLE, THEN EXPAND

New environments can be overwhelming, so start small and gradually increase the challenge.

- Begin in a familiar place – If your child is learning how to wait in line, practice at home first, like waiting for a turn with a favorite toy.
- Use controlled environments – Try quieter, low-stress locations before moving to busier public spaces.
- Gradually increase complexity – Once your child is successful in one setting, practice in a slightly different environment.

PREPARE FOR SUCCESS

Because new places can bring new distractions, it helps to prepare ahead of time:

- Preview the experience – Show pictures, watch videos, or talk through what will happen before going.
- Use visuals – A simple checklist or picture schedule can remind your child of what to expect.
- Keep reinforcement consistent – Praise or rewards should match what they've experienced in practice.

BE PATIENT & CELEBRATE SMALL WINS

Some children take longer to feel comfortable with new environments, and that's okay! Every small success—whether it's waiting in line for 10 seconds longer or staying calm in a new place—deserves to be acknowledged.

The more positive experiences your child has practicing skills in different places, the more confident and independent they will become!

NAVIGATING THE UNEXPECTED

Even with careful planning, unexpected situations happen. A loud noise, a long wait, or a sudden change in routine can throw off even the best-laid plans. Teaching your child to handle these moments will help them feel more confident and adaptable.

STAY CALM & MODEL FLEXIBILITY

Children take cues from their parents. If you stay calm and patient, they'll be more likely to feel safe and follow your lead. If something unexpected happens:

- **Acknowledge the change** – "I know we were going to the park, but it started raining. Let's come up with a new plan!"
- **Use reassuring language** – Keep your voice steady and positive, even if things feel stressful.
- **Show them how to adjust** – If a favorite snack isn't available, model choosing a different option.


HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

Sometimes, having a plan B can make all the difference.

- **Bring familiar supports** – Visuals, a small comfort item, or a favorite snack can help ease stress.
- **Use "if/then" language** – "If we can't go to the library today, then we can read a new book at home."
- **Practice problem-solving** – Encourage your child to suggest solutions when things don't go as expected.

REINFORCE FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is a skill, and like any other, it gets easier with practice. Praise your child when they handle changes well. Unexpected moments will happen, but by preparing, modeling, and reinforcing flexibility, you can help your child navigate them with greater confidence and less stress.



**Life is 10% what
happens to you and
90% how you react
to it.**

~Charles R. Swindoll

Teaching Community and Life Skills Assignment

Choose one ABA strategy that you're currently using with your child and go through the troubleshooting steps outlined in this lesson. Write your responses below.

Choose a Life Skill

Pick a skill that would help your child become more independent at home or in the community.

- ☐ Dressing
- ☐ Bathing
- ☐ Ordering at a restaurant
- ☐ Crossing the street safely
- ☐ Other: _____

Break It Down

What are the steps needed to complete the skill?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

What Motivates Your Child?

What possible reinforcers could you offer?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Where Will You Practice the Skill?

Choose a location to practice the skill.

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Grocery Store
- ☐ Park
- ☐ Other: _____

Community and Life Skills Quiz

1. Why is it important to break down life skills into smaller steps?
 - A. It makes skills easier to learn and practice
 - B. It helps parents keep track of progress
 - C. It prevents the child from making mistakes
 - D. It makes the skill more fun

2. When teaching a life skill, it's best to start in a challenging environment to prepare your child for real-world situations.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Which of the following is an example of using reinforcement to encourage life skill development?
 - A. Offering praise or a small reward after your child waits in line successfully
 - B. Letting your child figure out the skill without guidance
 - C. Telling your child what they did wrong when they make a mistake
 - D. Practicing a skill only once and expecting them to remember it

4. When preparing your child for a new experience, which of the following strategies can help?
 - A. Showing them pictures or videos of the place
 - B. Role-playing the experience at home
 - c. Walking them through what will happen step by step
 - D. All of the above

5. Every child learns at the same pace, so if your child isn't mastering a life skill quickly, it means they aren't ready for it.
 - A. True
 - B. False

SLEEP PROBLEMS

GOAL

To help you support your child's sleep through routines, environmental changes, and behavior-based strategies rooted in ABA.

BACKGROUND

Sleep challenges are extremely common among children with autism. If your child has difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or staying in bed, you're not alone. Children may struggle with sleep for a variety of reasons, including:

- Sensory sensitivities (such as noise, light, or texture of pajamas)
- Irregular routines or unpredictable schedules
- Anxiety or difficulty calming down
- Difficulty understanding sleep-related expectations

But here's the good news: behavioral sleep strategies, when used consistently, can make a big difference. You don't need to wait for perfect conditions to begin helping your child build healthier sleep habits—small steps can lead to meaningful change.

START WITH A MEDICAL CHECK-IN

Sleep challenges can sometimes be linked to medical concerns like sleep apnea, reflux, or other health issues. Even if your child's sleep problems are primarily behavioral, it's helpful to rule out medical causes first.

Here are some questions you can ask your child's doctor:

- Could a medical issue be contributing to my child's sleep challenges?
- Would a referral to a sleep specialist be helpful?
- Are there safe options to consider if behavioral strategies aren't enough?

Having this conversation with your pediatrician ensures that any changes you make are built on a strong, safe foundation.

CREATING A STRONG SLEEP FOUNDATION

Helping your child sleep better starts with building healthy sleep habits. Small, consistent changes can make a big difference over time. This page focuses on setting the stage for better sleep through environment and routine.

SET THE ENVIRONMENT FOR SLEEP

A calm and predictable environment helps signal to your child that it's time to wind down. Think about how the room looks, feels, and sounds at bedtime.

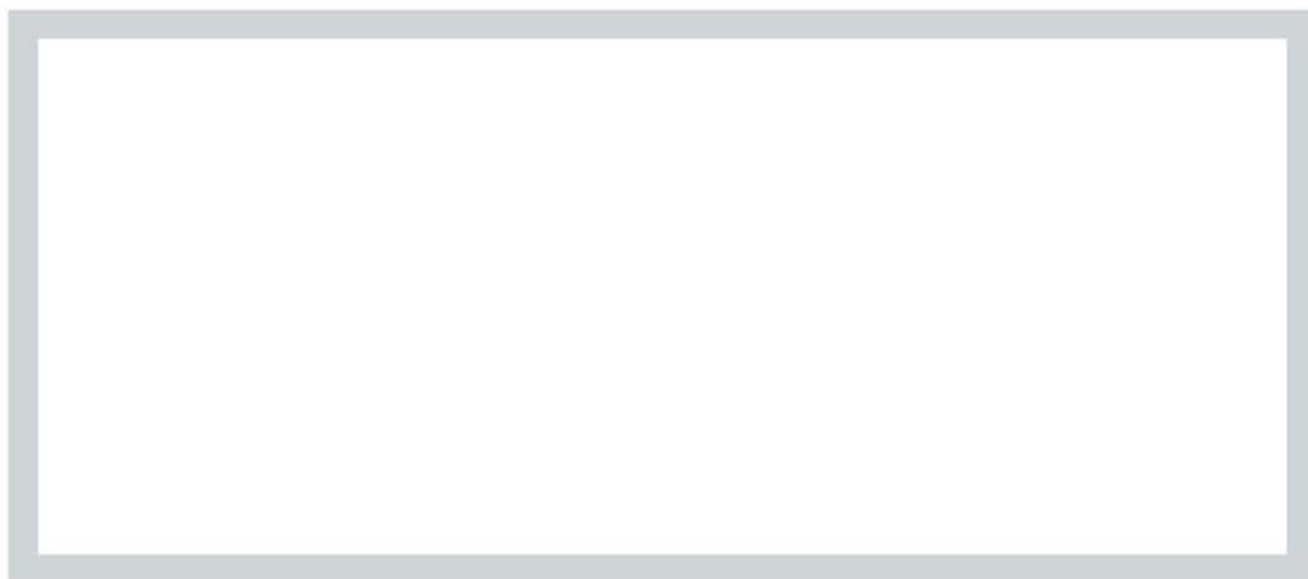
- Dim the lights 30 minutes before bed
- Use blackout curtains or white noise if needed
- Keep the room cool and quiet
- Remove or cover bright or flashing electronics
- Keep toys and distractions out of the bed

BUILD A PREDICTABLE BEDTIME ROUTINE

A simple routine helps your child feel safe and prepares their body for sleep. Repeat the same steps each night so your child learns what to expect.

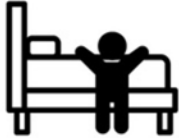
- Keep the routine short (about 20–30 minutes)
- Use the same order every night (e.g., bath, pajamas, book, bed)
- Use visuals to show the steps if helpful
- Keep activities quiet and relaxing
- Avoid screens and high-energy play before bed

What changes could you make to your child's sleep environment or routine this week?



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD THROUGH SLEEP CHALLENGES

Even with a solid bedtime routine, sleep struggles can still happen. It's important to stay calm, consistent, and responsive to your child's individual needs. This page walks through a few common challenges and what you can do to work through them.



IF YOUR CHILD GETS OUT OF BED

For some children, simply being told "stay in bed" isn't enough—especially if they don't fully understand language. In these cases, consistent redirection is key.

- Calmly return them to bed each time without giving extra attention
- Avoid eye contact or conversation during redirection
- Sit in the room if needed and gradually move closer to the door over time
- Reinforce staying in bed with quiet praise or rewards in the morning



IF YOUR CHILD CRIES OR PROTESTS AT BEDTIME

Crying at bedtime is common, especially when routines change. Make sure your child feels safe and supported, but try not to give in to demands that delay bedtime.

- Stick to the routine even if your child protests
- Offer comfort without extending the routine
- Reinforce calm behavior instead of avoidance
- Let your child know what's coming next using visuals or simple language



IF YOUR CHILD WAKES UP IN THE NIGHT

Night waking can happen for many reasons. The goal is to help your child learn to return to sleep with minimal support.

- Keep interactions brief and boring (no talking, lights, or play)
- Gently guide them back to bed if they get up
- Use a consistent strategy every time
- Talk to your BCBA about a plan if night waking becomes frequent



WHEN TO ADJUST THE PLAN

Some strategies work quickly, while others take time. Be patient, but also know when it's time to make adjustments.

- Track your child's sleep to see what's improving
- Look for patterns (Is bedtime too late? Naps too long?)
- Check in with your BCBA if you're unsure what's working
- Don't hesitate to revisit the routine or environment if needed

STAYING CONSISTENT WITHOUT THE STRESS

When your child is struggling with sleep, it can be easy to give in or feel discouraged. But staying calm and consistent is key—even when it's hard. This page will help you avoid common pitfalls while staying on track with your child's sleep goals.

Do this:

- ✓ **Stick to the plan, even when it's tough**

Consistency helps your child learn what to expect, which builds trust and understanding over time.
- ✓ **Keep your responses calm and brief**

Overreacting or engaging too much can accidentally reinforce the behaviors you're trying to change.
- ✓ **Celebrate small wins**

Even one night with fewer wake-ups is progress. Point out the positive and build from there.

Not this:

- ✗ **Don't start negotiating at bedtime**

This can turn into a nightly pattern that delays sleep and increases power struggles.
- ✗ **Don't change the routine out of frustration**

It takes time for routines to work. Frequent changes make it harder for your child to adjust.
- ✗ **Don't forget to take care of yourself**

When you're exhausted, it's harder to stay consistent. Ask for help and rest when you can.

What's one small thing you can do this week to stay calm and consistent at bedtime—even on tough nights?

PLANNING FOR PROGRESS

Sleep improvements don't always happen overnight. That's why it helps to plan ahead—not just for what you'll do tonight, but how you'll handle challenges over time. This page will help you prepare for setbacks and build long-term success.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THINGS GET OFF TRACK

Even with a solid plan, there will be nights when things don't go as expected. That's normal. What matters most is how you respond.

- ✓ Stay calm and return to the routine as soon as possible.
- ✓ Avoid adding extra attention or rewards for staying up late.
- ✓ Think about what might have disrupted sleep (illness, change in routine, stress).
- ✓ Talk to your BCBA® for support if problems continue.
- ✓ Be kind to yourself—progress is rarely perfect.

SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

To make sleep habits stick, you'll want to look beyond the first few nights. These reminders can help you stay the course:



Make routines sustainable. Choose a bedtime routine you can realistically stick with most nights.



Prepare the whole family. Let siblings and other caregivers know the plan so everyone's on the same page.



Track patterns over time. Use a sleep log or talk to your BCBA® about trends in your child's sleep.



Be flexible when needed. Life happens. If your child gets sick or there's a trip coming up, just do your best to return to the routine afterward.

Sticking with the plan—even when it's hard—helps your child feel safe, supported, and ready for sleep.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S SLEEP SUCCESS

Good sleep doesn't just depend on bedtime routines—it's also shaped by what happens during the day, how we respond to our child at night, and how we adjust over time. This page offers practical ways to support your child's sleep success from multiple angles.

DURING THE DAY: SET THE STAGE FOR SLEEP

What happens during the day can have a big impact on how easily your child falls asleep at night. These daytime habits can help:

- Get plenty of physical activity (but avoid high-energy play right before bed).
- Provide exposure to natural light in the morning.
- Keep naps consistent and age-appropriate.
- Avoid caffeine and sugary snacks late in the day.
- Stick to a predictable daily routine when possible.

AT BEDTIME: KEEP IT CALM AND PREDICTABLE


A calming and consistent bedtime routine signals to your child that it's time to wind down. Keep routines simple and manageable:

- Use a visual schedule with 3–5 steps (e.g., bath, brush teeth, story).
- Keep your tone and body language calm and steady.
- Avoid screens 1 hour before bed.
- Offer a consistent phrase like "It's time for sleep now" to end the routine.
- Use the same sleep space each night to create predictability.

WHEN THEY WAKE UP: STAY CONSISTENT

Night wakings are common. How you respond can shape future sleep habits.

- Return your child to bed calmly and quietly.
- Minimize conversation or stimulation.
- Use the same response each time to avoid confusion.
- Avoid reinforcing night wakings with snacks, play, or screen time.
- Track how often your child wakes to look for patterns or progress.



**Sleep is the golden chain
that ties health and our
bodies together.**

~Thomas Dekker

Sleep Problems Assignment

Getting better sleep takes time and small, consistent changes. Use this worksheet to think through your child's current bedtime routine and choose a few strategies to try. Focus on one or two things at a time, and don't worry about being perfect—small progress is still progress.

Pre-Bedtime Strategy

Choose 1 or 2 small changes you want to try this week: (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Set a consistent bedtime and wake-up time
- ☐ Create a calming bedtime routine
- ☐ Reduce screen time before bed
- ☐ Move bedtime earlier by 15–30 minutes
- ☐ Dim lights and reduce noise 30 minutes before bed
- ☐ Other: _____

What's Already Working in Your Routine?

List 2–3 things that help bedtime go more smoothly.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

What Challenges Are You Facing?

Write down what's making bedtime hard right now.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

After Bedtime Strategy

Choose 1–2 strategies to test this week.

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Offer a small reward for staying in bed
- ☐ Guide them back to bed calmly and quietly if they get up
- ☐ Stay in the room at first, then slowly fade your presence
- ☐ Other: _____

Sleep Problems Quiz

1. Keeping a consistent bedtime and wake-up time—even on weekends—can improve your child's sleep.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Which of the following is NOT recommended when helping a child fall asleep?
 - A. Using a consistent bedtime routine
 - B. Watching TV to unwind
 - C. Keeping the environment calm and quiet
 - D. Offering a comfort item like a favorite stuffed animal
3. If your child doesn't respond to verbal instructions, it's best to skip a bedtime routine and just put them to bed quickly.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. What should you do if your child keeps getting out of bed during the night?
 - A. Talk to them at length about staying in bed
 - B. Let them stay up until they're tired
 - c. Calmly and quietly redirect them back to bed every time
 - D. Ignore them completely
5. It's a good idea to speak with your child's pediatrician if sleep issues continue, to rule out medical causes.
 - A. True
 - B. False

FEEDING PROBLEMS

GOAL

To support parents in understanding and using gentle, evidence-based strategies to expand their child's diet while reducing stress around mealtimes.

BACKGROUND

Many children, especially those with autism or developmental differences, struggle with eating a variety of foods. They may eat only specific textures, brands, or colors—or reject entire food groups. While this is common, it can be incredibly frustrating and concerning for parents.

Feeding challenges can arise from a range of factors, including sensory sensitivities, medical conditions, anxiety, or a history of negative experiences with food. That's why it's essential to approach feeding with patience, curiosity, and care. When feeding becomes a daily battle, it can impact not only your child's nutrition but also your family's well-being.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Always check with your child's pediatrician before starting any feeding intervention. If your child isn't maintaining a healthy weight, or if you're concerned about nutritional needs, you may need to work with a BCBA® trained in feeding interventions or a feeding specialist. Some strategies in this lesson are designed for children who are eating enough to sustain growth and health.

With that support in place, you can begin using gentle, research-based strategies to build a more positive mealtime experience.

START WITH WHAT THEY ALREADY EAT

When it comes to feeding challenges, you don't have to start from scratch. One of the most effective ways to expand your child's diet is to begin with foods they already eat regularly. These familiar foods give you a foundation to work from and can guide your choices when introducing new foods.

OBSERVE AND BUILD FROM YOUR CHILD'S CURRENT DIET

Take some time to list the foods your child eats consistently. Think about the sensory characteristics of these foods—what they have in common—and how you can use that information to guide food expansion.

- Texture – Are the foods crunchy, smooth, soft, dry, or chewy?
- Temperature – Are they usually served warm, cold, or room temperature?
- Taste – Do they tend to be salty, sweet, mild, or bland?
- Color and Appearance – Do they prefer foods that are one color, no mixed textures, or a consistent shape?
- Packaging/Presentation – Do they insist on a particular brand, plate, or utensil?



Start by choosing new foods that are very similar to preferred ones. For example, if your child eats one brand of chicken nuggets, you might begin by offering a new brand that looks and smells similar. No pressure—just offer it alongside the familiar food and let your child explore at their own pace.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

It's normal for your child to reject new foods at first. This doesn't mean the strategy isn't working—it just means they need more time and opportunities to get comfortable.

PARTNER WITH YOUR BCBA®

Your BCBA® can help you analyze your child's food preferences and guide you in creating a gradual, individualized food expansion plan that fits your child's needs.

SUPPORT YOUR CHILD THROUGH THE PROCESS

Introducing new foods can feel like a big leap—for both you and your child. Rather than expecting them to eat something new right away, think of your role as guiding them through small, manageable steps. Each step is a win and builds the foundation for future progress.

BUILD COMFORT FIRST

Before your child is ready to taste a new food, they need time to feel safe and curious around it.



Start by placing the food near them without pressure to eat it.



Let them explore it on their own terms—smelling, poking, or even just looking.



Talk about the food in a casual, positive way (e.g., "That strawberry is really red!").



Show interest yourself—eat it alongside them without asking them to do the same.

BUILD ACCEPTANCE GRADUALLY

As your child gets more comfortable, you can begin encouraging more interaction—but stay flexible and go at their pace.



Move from looking to touching, and from touching to bringing the food closer to their face.



Give small, specific praise for each step (e.g., "You touched it! That's awesome!").



Let them decide when they're ready to try more.



Keep reinforcers available, but use them to celebrate effort, not force the next step

REINFORCE PROGRESS

Each step forward matters—even if it seems small. Your encouragement, patience, and praise help your child build trust in the process.

REINFORCE THE RIGHT WAY

When introducing new foods, it's important to make the entire experience as positive as possible. Reinforcement should be used to celebrate progress—not to pressure your child. The goal is to increase their willingness to engage with food by making the process feel safe, supported, and rewarding.

CHOOSE EFFECTIVE REINFORCERS

Every child is different, and what motivates one child may not work for another. Think about what truly excites or comforts your child.

- Favorite small treats (unrelated to meals)
- Access to a preferred toy or activity
- Short time using a favorite app or watching a video
- Playful interaction (e.g., silly song, high-five, dance)
- Extra time doing something they love
- Calm, encouraging praise

USE REINFORCEMENT STRATEGICALLY

Use reinforcement immediately and consistently for small steps toward the goal. This builds momentum and confidence.

- Reinforce any step your child takes in the shaping process
- Make reinforcement predictable—your child should know what to expect
- Start with frequent reinforcement, then fade as they become more comfortable
- Avoid using essential foods as reinforcers if your child depends on them nutritionally
- Offer a "menu" of reinforcers to give your child choice and control

AVOID COMMON PITFALLS

Reinforcement is powerful, but it can lose its impact if used ineffectively or inconsistently.

- Don't delay reinforcement—timing matters
- Avoid using reinforcement as a bribe ("If you eat it, THEN you get...")
- Don't remove reinforcement because progress is slow
- Don't pressure your child with reinforcement ("You don't get this unless you do that")

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU CHILD?

TAKE TIME, STAY CONSISTENT

Progress in feeding doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, patience, and a consistent approach. This page is here to help you reflect on what's working and where to go next—so you can stay steady without feeling stuck.

WHAT YOU MIGHT ALREADY BE DOING WELL

Look through these practices and check off any that feel true for you. Celebrate the progress you're already making.


- Offering a variety of foods without pressure
- Staying calm when your child refuses food
- Using small steps to introduce new foods
- Reinforcing your child's efforts—not just eating
- Giving your child time to explore food
- Keeping mealtimes low-pressure and predictable

WHAT YOU MIGHT TRY NEXT

These strategies can help keep your momentum going or give you a fresh place to start.

- Write down all the foods your child currently eats to find patterns
- Introduce a new food that's similar in texture, taste, or temperature
- Pair food exploration with a fun reinforcer
- Try a shaping approach—focus on progress, not perfection
- Talk with your BCBA® about adjusting your current plan
- Plan low-pressure exposure outside of mealtime (e.g., pretend cooking, toy food, grocery store visit)

What small step could you take this week to support your child's feeding progress?



**Success is the sum
of small efforts,
repeated day in
and day out.**

~Robert Collier

Feeding Problems Assignment

Observe and Reflect

Take time this week to track the foods your child willingly eats. Pay attention to the texture, temperature, taste, and consistency of each food—this can help you understand patterns and guide your next steps. List what you observe in the chart below.

Food	Texture	Temperature	Taste	Notes

Choose a Starting Point

Review your chart and look for patterns. Are most foods crunchy? Mild in flavor? Cold or room temperature? Based on that, choose one new food to introduce that is similar in one or more ways to what your child already eats.

What food will you try?

Make a Plan

Think about how you'll present the new food in a no-pressure, playful way. Can your child explore it with their hands? Smell it? Touch it to their lips? Plan one or two steps in the shaping process and how you'll reinforce each step.

How will you set up a successful experience?

Feeding Problems Quiz

1. If your child has a very limited diet and is not maintaining a healthy weight, it's best to try gradual exposure strategies at home before involving a specialist.

A. True
B. False
2. Which of the following best describes a shaping approach to introducing a new food?

A. Hiding new foods in your child's preferred foods
B. Requiring your child to take one bite at every meal
C. Gradually building comfort by starting with tolerating the food near them and moving toward tasting and swallowing
D. Withholding preferred foods until the new food is eaten
3. Highly processed foods may be preferred by some autistic children because they are consistent in texture and flavor.

A. True
B. False
4. When creating a food exposure plan, which of the following is the most helpful first step?

A. Try as many new foods as possible to find one your child likes
B. Create a list of foods your child already eats and analyze their texture, temperature, and consistency
C. Replace all snacks with fruits and vegetables
D. Offer rewards only if your child swallows the new food
5. Which of the following should be avoided when using reinforcement with food?

A. Offering the child a short break on a yoga ball after engaging with a non-preferred food
B. Praising the child for bringing a new food to their lips
C. Using a preferred, essential food as the only reward for eating a non-preferred food
D. Giving your child choices for non-food reinforcers like iPad time or bubbles

TRANSITION PLANNING

GOAL

To help you prepare for your child's developmental transitions—big and small—by using ABA strategies that build independence, reduce stress, and support lifelong learning.

BACKGROUND

Every child goes through transitions—starting school, moving classrooms, entering adulthood. But for autistic children, these shifts can feel overwhelming.

Changes in routine, environment, or expectations may bring uncertainty and anxiety. As a parent, you play a key role in helping your child navigate these transitions smoothly.

ABA strategies can help. Whether your child is starting preschool or preparing for adulthood, you can use simple, evidence-based tools to make each step feel more predictable and manageable. With the right support, transitions can become opportunities for growth and independence—not setbacks.

HELPING YOUR CHILD PREPARE

Big changes don't have to be scary. In this lesson, you'll learn how to:

- Use shaping to build independence gradually
- Teach communication skills that support self-advocacy
- Practice flexibility and problem-solving in everyday life
- Prepare for major life changes like starting school or learning job skills

You don't need to plan everything all at once—but taking small, steady steps now can make a big difference later. Your BCBA® can help you individualize the plan to fit your child's needs and strengths.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSITIONS

Transitions are a part of life—but they aren't always easy. Whether it's starting school, moving homes, or adjusting to a new daily routine, every change can feel big to your child. This page will help you understand the different types of transitions, why they're hard, and what you can do to support your child through them with confidence and care.

WHAT COUNTS AS A TRANSITION?

Transitions aren't just about moving from preschool to kindergarten or high school to adulthood. They happen all the time—some big, some small. Helping your child with both types builds long-term success.

Big transitions might include:

- Starting a new school or program
- Moving to a new home or city
- Preparing for adulthood or aging out of services
- A family member moving out, getting married, or passing away

Smaller—but still important—transitions include:

- A new teacher or therapist
 - Shifts in daily routines (e.g., going from summer to school schedule)
 - Moving bedrooms or rearranging furniture
 - Ending one activity and starting another
-

WHY TRANSITIONS ARE CHALLENGING

Transitions often involve more than just a change in environment—they come with new expectations, routines, and people. For children who thrive on predictability, this can feel overwhelming. Some children struggle with:

- Uncertainty or fear of the unknown
- Difficulty adjusting to new routines
- Loss of familiar supports or relationships

Recognizing these challenges helps you provide the support your child needs.

PLANNING FOR BIG CHANGES

Transitions—big or small—can feel overwhelming for both you and your child. Whether it's starting a new school, moving to a new home, or adjusting after a major life event, thoughtful planning can help reduce stress and increase success.

START EARLY AND PREVIEW THE CHANGE

The earlier you start talking about a transition, the more time your child has to understand what's happening. Children with communication or processing delays often need extra time and repetition to feel secure.

- Talk about the change in clear, concrete language. Use simple terms your child understands.
- Use visual aids. Calendars, pictures, or visual schedules can help show what will happen and when.
- Visit or explore together. If your child is changing schools or moving homes, take pictures of the new place or visit ahead of time.
- Create a social story. A personalized story about the upcoming change can reduce fear and increase familiarity.

BREAK THE TRANSITION INTO TEACHABLE STEPS

Transitions aren't just one big event—they're made up of many small skills and expectations. Break them down and teach them one at a time.

- Identify what's new. Will the routine be different? Will there be new people or rules?
- Teach one skill at a time. Focus on one part of the transition, like learning to pack a lunch or asking for a break in a new setting.
- Practice in low-pressure settings. Role-play or rehearse routines without pressure or urgency.
- Use visuals to guide the routine. A step-by-step chart can help your child remember what to do and feel more in control.

USE REINFORCEMENT TO BUILD POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Change is hard—but it can still feel safe and rewarding. Reinforcement helps your child build confidence and feel supported during the process.

- Start with what your child already enjoys. Use special interests or favorite items to reinforce new routines.
- Celebrate every step forward. Reinforce trying, even if it's not perfect.
- Use praise that describes the behavior. Say things like, "You walked into your new room so calmly," or "I love how you tried something new today."
- Be consistent. The more predictable the reinforcement, the more motivated your child will be to participate.

BUILDING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

Every child grows at their own pace, but building independence is possible—even in small steps. Whether your child is in preschool or high school, it's never too early (or too late) to teach foundational skills that support long-term independence, including future jobs or adult responsibilities.

Teach Skills with Real-Life Purpose

Think beyond worksheets and flashcards. Skills that help your child participate in everyday routines or community settings are valuable steps toward independence.

- Household chores: Matching socks, wiping a table, or helping put groceries away can build responsibility and confidence.
- Daily self-care: Dressing, brushing teeth, and packing a bag are life skills that promote autonomy.
- Community tasks: Practice ordering at a restaurant, waiting in line, or greeting familiar people.

Use Task Analysis to Break Skills into Steps

Many independent tasks can feel overwhelming at first. That's where task analysis comes in—breaking big tasks into smaller, teachable parts.

- Choose a functional skill your child will need to do regularly.
- List the steps in order, as specifically as possible.
- Teach one step at a time, using prompting and reinforcement.
- Use visual supports like picture cards or checklists if your child benefits from them.

Focus on Pre-Vocational Skills Early

Even if your child isn't ready for a job, you can teach skills that lead in that direction.

- Follow simple directions from someone other than a parent or sibling.
- Stay on task for increasing amounts of time—even just a few minutes at first.
- Accept feedback and corrections with support.
- Complete preferred and non-preferred tasks with adult guidance.

Whether it's sorting utensils or helping in the garden, the goal is to build focus, flexibility, and persistence—key skills for future opportunities.

ENCOURAGING VOICE AND CHOICE

Every child deserves a say in their own life. As your child grows, supporting their ability to express preferences, make choices, and participate in decisions builds self-advocacy—an essential life skill that supports dignity, safety, and independence.

Start with Everyday Choices

Children build self-advocacy through simple, everyday decisions. These may seem small, but they teach your child that their voice matters.

- Let your child choose between two snacks or shirts.
- Involve them in planning activities ("Do you want to go to the park or the library?").
- Allow them to say "no" safely when appropriate (e.g., during non-essential tasks).
- Validate their choices, even if you can't always say yes.

Practice Self-Advocacy in Real Life

You don't need a formal curriculum to build advocacy skills. Look for natural opportunities:

- Let your child answer for themselves when someone asks a question (with support if needed).
- Encourage them to make simple requests in public (e.g., asking for ketchup at a restaurant).
- Practice scripts or role-play situations in a calm, safe setting.

Respect Communication in All Forms

Some children express needs with words. Others use gestures, devices, or behaviors. Self-advocacy starts by listening to your child—however they communicate.

Focus on:

- Recognizing signs of discomfort or refusal (e.g., moving away, covering ears).
- Teaching simple communication skills like "all done," "help," or "stop."
- Modeling respectful communication with others.

Honor Assent and Teach Boundaries

One of the most powerful ways to teach self-advocacy is by respecting your child's "yes" and "no." When your child learns that they are allowed to say no—and that you'll respect it—they become more confident, more connected, and more willing to engage.

- Pause when your child resists or says "no," and acknowledge it respectfully.
- Use the moment to teach safe alternatives
- Model asking for permission before helping physically, when possible.

TURNING TRANSITIONS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Transitions can be overwhelming—but they also offer powerful opportunities for growth. With the right support, your child can learn new routines, build confidence, and gain independence one step at a time.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

When preparing for a change, whether big or small, these tools can help your child feel more secure:

- Visual Schedules: Show what's happening now and what's coming next.
- Social Stories: Help your child understand unfamiliar places, people, or routines.
- Countdowns: Use timers or visual countdowns to prepare for upcoming changes.
- Advance Practice: Rehearse new steps in a calm setting before they're required.
- Consistent Elements: Keep familiar routines, objects, or people nearby when possible.

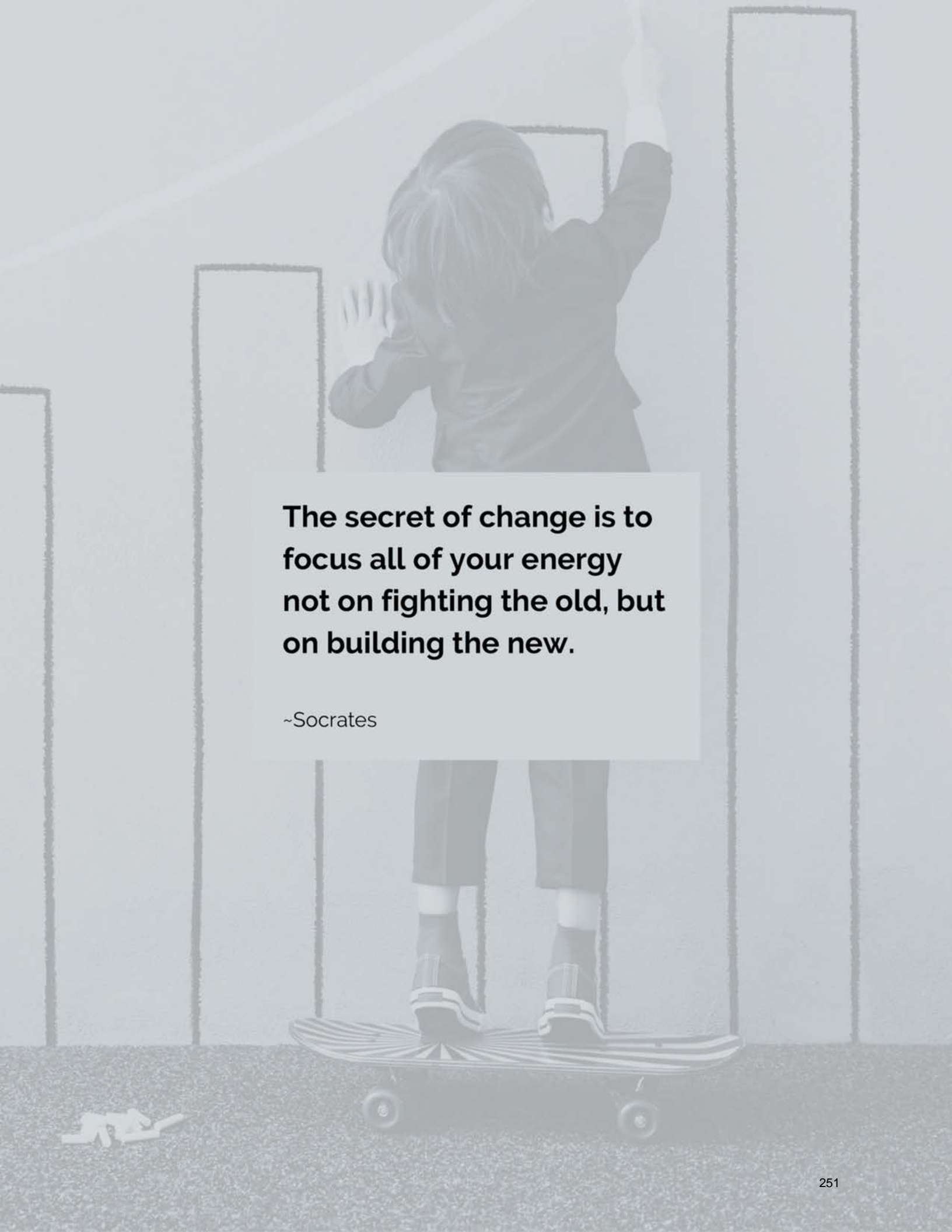
TEACH SKILLS THAT BUILD INDEPENDENCE

Some transitions require your child to learn new tasks. Use ABA strategies to break these into small, teachable parts:

- Use Task Analysis: Break down complex tasks into manageable steps.
- Provide Support, Then Fade: Offer help at first, then slowly reduce it as your child gains confidence.
- Reinforce Every Effort: Celebrate small steps, even if the task isn't yet complete.
- Use Visuals and Checklists: These can help your child remember and complete steps independently.

What's one upcoming transition your child will experience? What's one way you can begin preparing for it now?



A grayscale photograph of a person from behind, wearing a dark jacket and pants, standing on a skateboard. They are building a wall made of rectangular blocks, with one hand reaching up to place a block. The background is a plain wall with some faint lines. The overall mood is one of construction and progress.

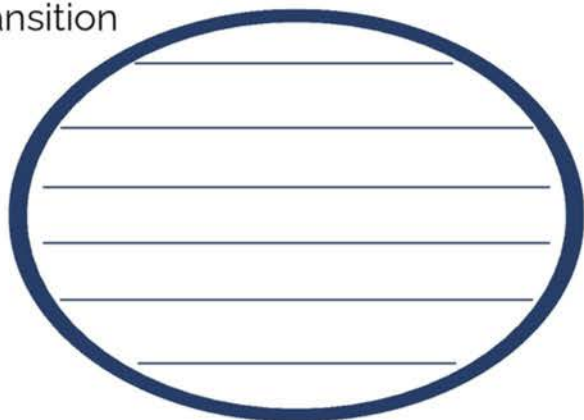
**The secret of change is to
focus all of your energy
not on fighting the old, but
on building the new.**

~Socrates

Transition Planning Assignment

Let's get started by thinking about an upcoming change your child might experience. This could be a shift in daily routine, a new school, a family move, or a longer-term transition like puberty or preparing for adulthood. Use this worksheet to reflect and make a plan.

Step 1: Identify an Upcoming Transition



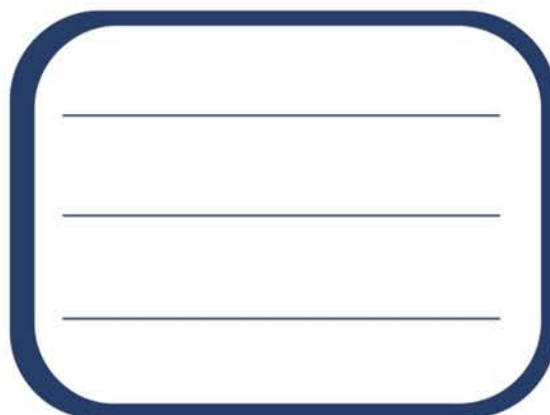
Step 2: What Might Be Hard About This Change?



Step 3: What Can You Do to Prepare?



Step 4: What Will Stay the Same?



Transition Planning Quiz

1. All transitions are school-related, such as moving from elementary to middle school.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. What is one way parents can help their child prepare for a major transition?
 - A. Avoid talking about the change until the day it happens
 - B. Use punishment to prevent resistance
 - C. Begin talking about and practicing the change early
 - D. Keep routines exactly the same, no matter the context
3. Which of the following is a pre-vocational skill?
 - A. Following multi-step directions
 - B. Solving algebra problems
 - C. Learning to drive
 - D. Practicing deep breathing
4. Which of these is a helpful way to support transitions?
 - A. Remove all supports to promote independence
 - B. Keep expectations high without flexibility
 - c. Let the child lead every decision, regardless of safety
 - D. Use visuals, practice routines, and maintain consistency where possible
5. Parents should always wait for professionals to begin teaching self-advocacy skills.
 - A. True
 - B. False

SOCIAL SKILLS

GOAL

Understand the importance of social skills and some common assumptions made about autistics and social skills. Learn the components of this complex skill

BACKGROUND

Social skills are a group of skills that help us relate to and interact with other people. These include verbal and nonverbal communication as well as other skills needed to navigate interactions such as joint attention, social play, asking for help, accepting feedback, and reacting calmly to the behavior of others.

These skills are essential for a high quality of life and success in a job as an adult. Despite this, we need to make sure that we carefully consider which social skills to teach.

FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

Many false assumptions about social skills have developed based on the experiences of neurotypical individuals. These assumptions include:

- Everyone needs a big group of friends to be happy
- All autistics are introverts
- Everyone needs the same social skills
- All autistic people are disinterested in social interactions

Remember that a lot of the assumptions we make about social skills and social interactions are based on our personal experiences.

Challenge yourself to see social interactions from a different perspective.

“

IF THERE IS ONE
SECRET TO SUCCESS
IT LIES IN THE
ABILITY TO GET THE
OTHER PERSON'S
POINT OF VIEW.

-

Dale Carnigie



Why Social Skills Matter

Social skills is a broad term used to describe skills that help us interact with those around us. These skills help us make friends and navigate our social world in school, at home, and in the community.

Later on, these skills are important to having a job and a high quality of life.

Think about times when you use social skills. How do you have a conversation with a friend? How do you handle conflict with a coworker? How do you react when your boss gives you feedback? What happens when someone cuts you off in traffic? Whether you realize it or not, these situations all require social skills.

COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills look different for everyone and change according to a variety of different factors. As children grow and mature different social behaviors become expected. These skills also vary by culture. The environment or activity also plays an important role in determining which social skills an individual needs. Although we often discuss teaching social skills to autistic children, these are skills most young children need to learn. Autistic children just might need to learn these skills a bit later or using different teaching strategies.

SELF-REGULATION AND AWARENESS

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your emotions and behavior in relation to the demands of particular situation. Self-regulation requires at least a minimal ability to adjust to changes in routine or expectations and adapt to unexpected developments.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Social communication refers to both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that include conversations, body language, and facial expressions. Social communication is both what we say and how we say it.

PERSPECTIVE TAKING

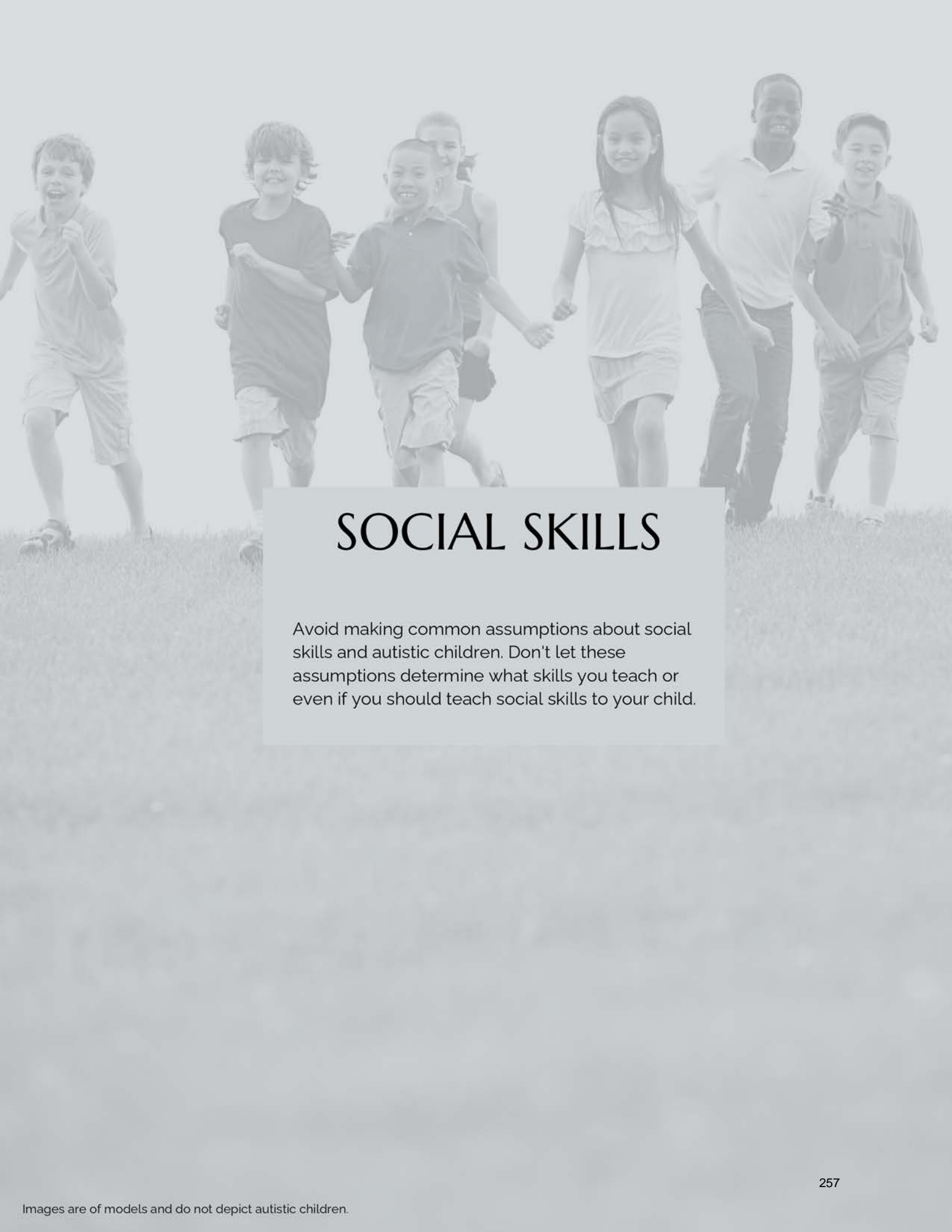
Perspective taking involves the ability to understand that someone else may have thoughts, ideas or feelings about a particular situation that are different from your own. Often this involves understanding that someone's history and past experiences are different in important ways. This helps us develop realistic expectations and respond appropriately to other people.

PROBLEM SOLVING

When interacting with those around us, we frequently encounter various problems. Problem solving involves several steps including identifying a problem, seeking different options to resolve the problem, then selecting and implementing one of the solutions.

SOCIAL PLAY AND WORK-RELATED SOCIAL SKILLS

The ages related to each of these components varies depending on the individual's skills, interests and activities. Upper elementary- or teen-aged children might be ready to learn some of the work-related social skills such as asking for help, accepting feedback, or asking for clarification. Similarly, elementary-aged children might still need to learn some social play skills.



SOCIAL SKILLS

Avoid making common assumptions about social skills and autistic children. Don't let these assumptions determine what skills you teach or even if you should teach social skills to your child.

Social Skills Assignment

Social skills are a complex group of skills that help us relate to and interact with others.

Make a list of assumptions you might have about social skills. Make another list of situations where you use social skills in your own life.

Assumptions

1	<input type="text"/>
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10	<input type="text"/>

Social Situations

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Introduction to Social Skills Quiz

1. Most autistics enjoy spending time with people who understand and accept them.

- A. True
- B. False

2. Social skills are important for a high quality of life and success in a job later in life.

- A. True
- B. False

3. Everyone wants and needs a large group of friends to feel happy and supported.

- A. True
- B. False

4. Everyone needs the same social skills.

- A. True
- B. False

5. What factors impact which social skills an individual needs?

- A. Age
- B. Culture
- C. Environment
- D. All of the above

SOCIAL SKILLS GOALS

GOAL

Choose goals specific to social skills that benefit your child in a meaningful way without changing the behaviors that make him unique and allow him to cope with the world around him.

BACKGROUND

The first step in helping your child develop social skills is to identify which skills you should teach. Choosing goals that are meaningful for your child requires viewing social interactions from his perspective.

As Laurence Peter said, "If you don't know where you're going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

While there are many different commercially available social skills assessments and curriculums on the market, the best way to begin to assess your child's need for intervention is by simply observing him. Observe how he responds in different social situations. During your observations, consider each of the main areas of social skills and make a list of your child's strengths and weaknesses in each area.

CHOOSING GOALS

Before you get started teaching skills, you must know which skills to teach. Make a list from your observations of the skills your child needs to learn in each main area:

- Self-regulation and awareness
- Social communication
- Perspective taking
- Problem solving
- Social play
- Work-related social skills

From this list, consider which skills lead to more complex skills or will have the biggest impact on his life.

Avoid trying to teach eye contact or reduce stereotypies as your child regulates sensory input through minimizing eye contact and engaging in stereotypies.

ASSESSING SOCIAL SKILLS

SELF-REGULATION AND AWARENESS

Determine how your child self-regulates. Make note of how he responds to different or difficult situations. Is he able to adapt his behavior to be appropriate to the situation? How does he handle frustration? Can he adapt to changes in his routine or schedule without engaging in challenging behavior? Does he demonstrate impulse control when there's something he really wants or something he really wants to avoid?

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

During your child's everyday interactions, observe how he communicates with others. Does your child use spoken words, sign language, a communication app or other alternative methods of communicating? Can he adjust his communication to the person he's speaking to or the situation? Does he follow the basic rules of communication such as taking turns, staying on topic or using gestures?

PERSPECTIVE TAKING

When observing your child, notice how he responds to the reactions of others. Does he demonstrate an understanding that even if he can't see you, you might be able to see him? Can he identify the emotions of others and respond with understanding and empathy? Does he predict what others will do based on how they have responded in similar situations in the past or based on his understanding of that person's experiences?

PROBLEM SOLVING

Take note of how your child responds when he encounters a problem. Is he able to identify the problem and look for alternatives? Can he choose one of the alternatives and implement it to solve the problem? He doesn't need to explain what he's doing. You can watch his behavior to see how he responds when encountering a problem. For example, if he tries to turn the iPad on but it doesn't come on, does he try to plug it in or find another way to solve the problem?

SOCIAL PLAY AND WORK-RELATED SOCIAL SKILLS

Social play includes at least 2 people. How does your child play with his peers? Does he take turns when needed? Can he join peers that are already engaged in play without disrupting the activity? Watch your child to see how he responds in situations he might encounter in a job. How does he respond to feedback? Does he ask for specific help when needed? Can he ask you to clarify instructions if he doesn't understand what you want him to do?

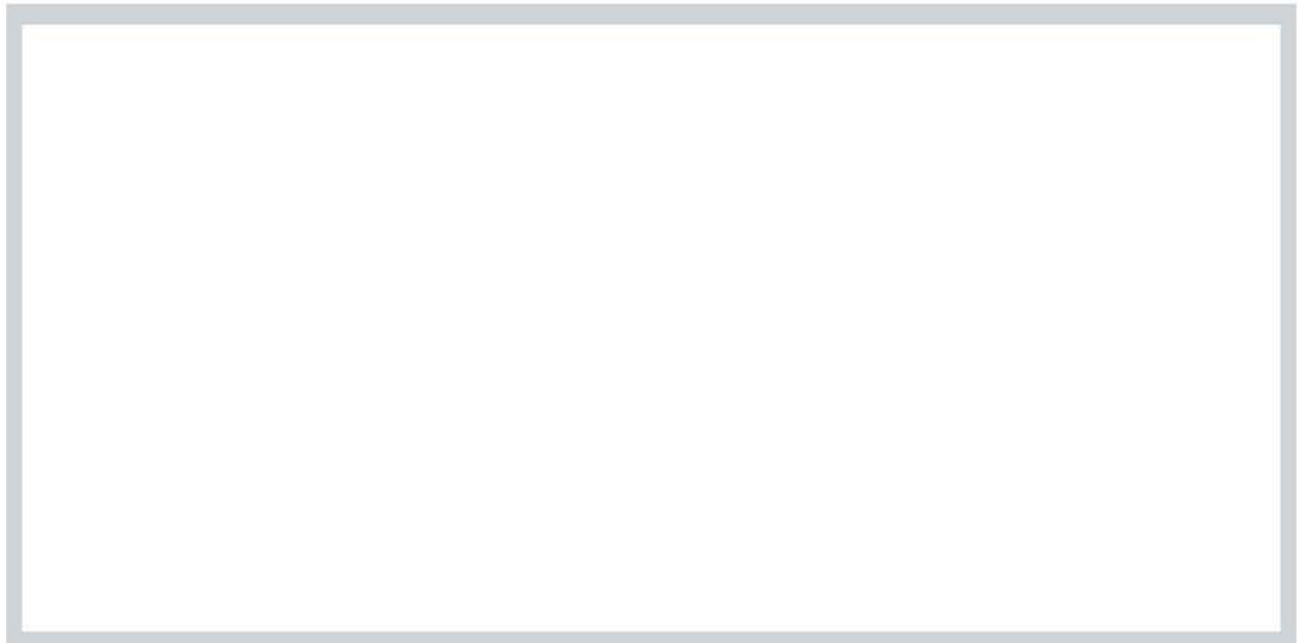
CHOOSING GOALS

Make a list from your observations of the skills your child needs to learn. From this list, consider which skills lead to more complex skills or will have the biggest impact on his life.

Next consider which of these skills you're likely to be most effective in teaching. If your child communicates well, ask him to help decide which skills he thinks are most important to him. Which skills does he want to learn?

Your child likely doesn't know which skills are important, but you can offer choices. For example, if your child is likely to be able to participate in a conversation about social skills, you can say something like "the other day you said you wished Johnny would play with you. I want to help you make friends. Do you want to practice talking to other kids or understanding how Johnny sees things?"

WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD NEED TO LEARN?

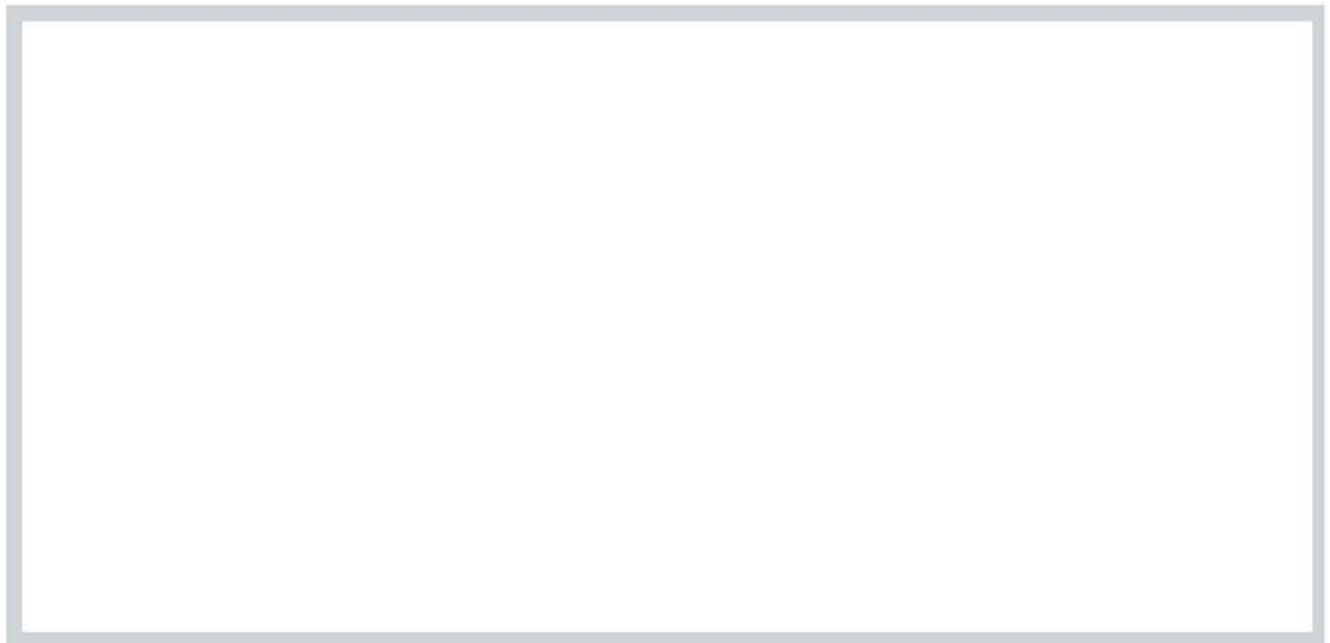


SOCIAL SKILLS GOAL IDEAS

Below are some ideas for social goals that address common areas of challenges for many autistic children. Not all children have the same challenges so make sure to choose goals that are specific for your child and use this list to brainstorm relevant goals.

- uses on topic language
- responds to peer initiations
- initiates conversations with peers
- initiates activities with peers
- keeps conversations with peers going
- joins group activities
- terminates interactions appropriately
- compliments others
- provides assistance to peers
- follows rules when playing games with others
- compromises with peers
- responds to teasing
- accepts constructive criticism/correction from others
- appropriately stands up for rights/expresses feelings
- appropriately questions rules that may be unfair

WHAT SOCIAL SKILLS DO YOU WANT TO TARGET?



GOALS SHOULD BENEFIT YOUR CHILD

Avoid targeting eye contact and stereotypies

Whatever goals you choose, make sure they benefit your child, not anyone else. There are several behaviors that parents and professionals have routinely attempted to change in the past that we now recognize as simply a part of the individual and not actually a problem. As we are learning more about autism, we need to make sure the goals we choose are in the child's best interests. Early on, social skills training focused on eye contact. Now, many autistic adults speak out against teaching autistics to maintain eye contact.

Many autistic children and adults engage in stereotypies as a means of self-regulation. Stereotypies are the repetitive movements or vocalizations that are commonly associated with autism. This might include hand flapping, rocking, humming or a wide variety of other behaviors.

Avoid targeting these behaviors as part of teaching social skills. Remember that your child may avoid eye contact and engage in stereotypies as a way of managing sensory input from the world around him. If his peers don't understand or are bothered by this, educate them about why they are important. Most children, once they understand the behavior are quite accepting and will even join the autistic child as a part of play.



SOCIAL SKILLS GOALS

Choose meaningful goals for your child.

Whenever possible, have him help choose the goals he wants to work on. This helps him feel empowered to learn new skills.

Social Skills Goals Assignment

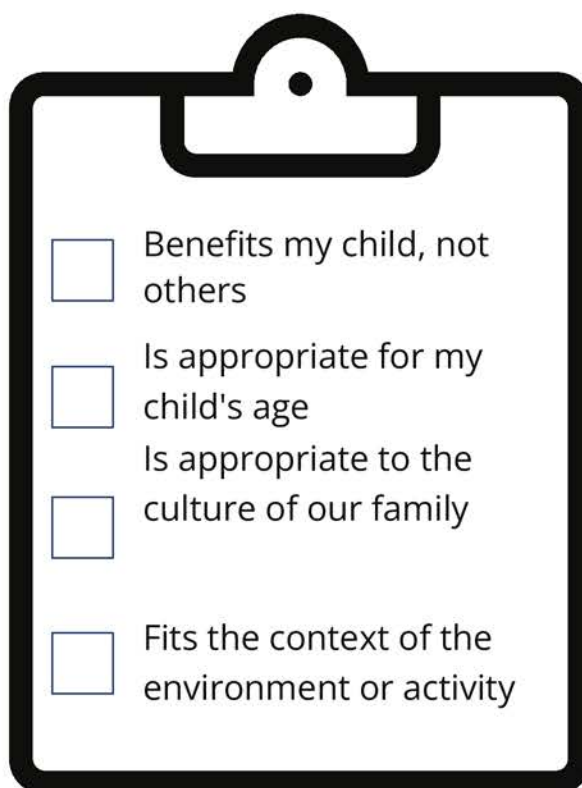
Observe your child's interactions with both peers and adults. Observe his skills in the following areas:

- Self-regulation and awareness
- Social communication
- Perspective taking
- Problem solving
- Social play
- Work-related social skills

Now choose some possible targets based on your observations. Make sure the targets meet the requirements in the checklist below.

Targets

- 1 ☐
- 2 ☐
- 3 ☐
- 4 ☐
- 5 ☐
- 6 ☐
- 7 ☐
- 8 ☐
- 9 ☐
- 10 ☐



- ☐ Benefits my child, not others
- ☐ Is appropriate for my child's age
- ☐ Is appropriate to the culture of our family
- ☐ Fits the context of the environment or activity

Social Skills Goals Quiz

1. Which of the following skills should you avoid targeting?
 - A. Eye contact
 - B. Turn taking
 - C. Standing up for his rights
 - D. Expressing his feelings

2. You should target stereotypes if they make your child look different from his peers so he can fit in better.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Two components of social skills are more age-related than others. These are (select all that apply):
 - A. Social play
 - B. Personal care
 - C. Work-related social skills
 - D. Imaginative play

4. You should have your child help choose goals if he's able to participate.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Components of social skills include all of the following except:
 - A. Perspective taking
 - B. Self-regulation
 - C. Problem solving
 - D. Speaking

TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

GOAL

Understand the 5 steps to teaching social skills and ways to incorporate teaching into play.

BACKGROUND

Teaching social skills should be fun and motivating for both you and your child. Let your child take the lead by watching how he reacts to the activities you suggest. Social interactions are sometimes difficult for autistic children and you want your child as relaxed and happy as possible through the process of learning.

Avoid pressuring your child or requiring that he participate in activities for long periods of time. Some children enjoy these activities and will ask to participate. Allow him to choose how long an activity lasts. He doesn't need to play the game to the end to benefit from it.

TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

Once you know what you want to teach, it's time to start teaching, right? Well, sort of. You actually need to start with a plan for how you're going to teach the skills. Follow these steps.

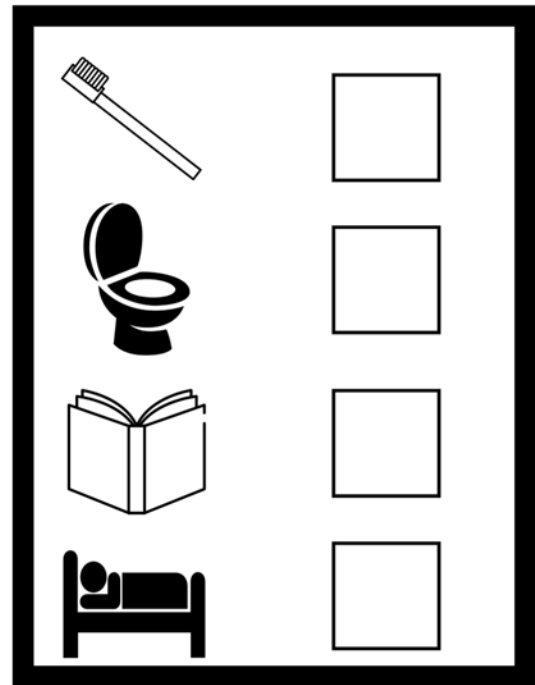
- Break the skill down into its smallest parts or steps
- Design an activity that requires your child to use the skill
- Prepare any visuals or materials
- Prepare your child for the activity depending on what works best for your child
- Prompt your child to use the skill and provide reinforcement when he does

SELF-REGULATION

Schedules

Self-regulation skills often fluctuate by situation or even by day. We all experience days when it's easier to respond appropriately to difficulties than other days. To help your child respond to changes in his schedule or routines, you can teach him to use a schedule or calendar.

These tools provide a way for him to see changes and predict what tasks or activities are coming next. The ultimate goal should be for him to create and update his own schedule or calendar.



Hard Times Board

Triggers:
Sometimes I get upset when I hear loud noises such as my friend crying or a vacuum cleaner.

Can't Dos:
When I'm upset, I can't throw things or hurt other people.

Can Dos:
When I'm upset, I can:
Ask for headphones or Take a walk



Social Stories®

Social stories®, created by Carol Gray, are quick stories that explain different situations to help prepare someone to encounter that situation. They can be a valuable tool for teaching social skills, especially for teaching self-regulation.

The story should include information that is specific for your child and be written from his perspective.

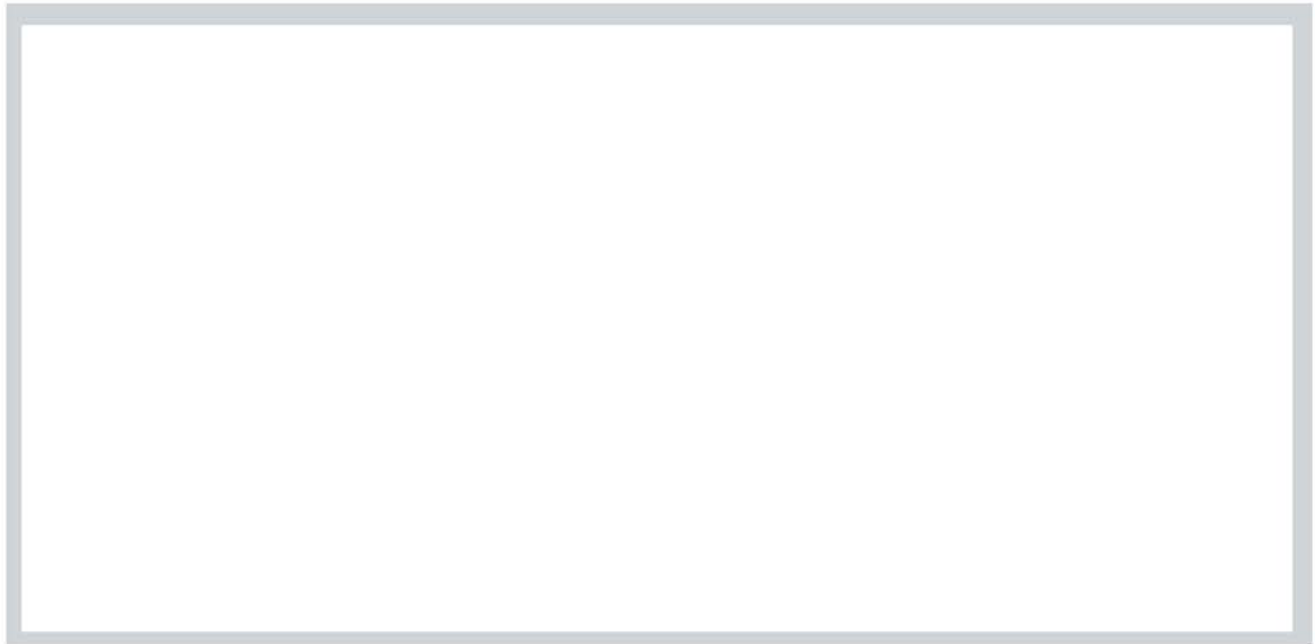
SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Use games to teach and practice social communication

Teach social communication skills through a variety of games and activities. Games such as This or That (similar to Would You Rather but with more common items and activities) or commercially available games like Hedbanz or Guess Who? teach communication and even require some basic perspective-taking skills.

Make learning social communication skills fun for your child so he's motivated to communicate.

WHAT COMMUNICATION GAMES CAN YOU PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD?



PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Perspective taking requires the understanding that other people view the world differently and have different experiences. There are a lot of fun ways to teach perspective taking.

FOR BEGINNERS

For beginners, create opportunities for your child to figure out who can see different objects. For example, at meal time, hold a plate between your child and some of the food. Then say, "who can see the muffin?" Make it fun and mix it up so that sometimes she's the one who can see the item.

FOR INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS

How about a fun twist on the classic hide and seek? Take turns hiding a favorite toy. This is a great opportunity to talk about how the person who hides the toy is the only one who knows where it is.

FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS

For learners who have some basic perspective taking skills, you can focus on more advanced perspective taking by playing emotions charades. Take turns choosing a picture card. That person makes the same face as the one on the card and the other person must guess what emotion they are showing. You can have a list of included emotions to make it a bit easier.

WHAT PERSPECTIVE GAMES CAN YOU PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD?



PROBLEM SOLVING

Many games teach problem solving including simple mazes, board games, or pictures with hidden objects. Do these activities with your child and help him through the steps of problem solving process. These steps include identifying the problem, seeking alternatives or options and then choosing one of those options. When you encounter a problem or a decision that needs to be made during an activity, talk through the your own problem solving process.

WHAT PROBLEM SOLVING GAMES CAN YOU PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD?



SOCIAL PLAY

Include Special Interests

When teaching social play, think about your child's special interests and find ways to incorporate those items into play that can include other children. For example, if your child is fascinated by numbers, invite other children to join in playing with Playdoh while you help your child shape the dough into numbers or start a game of hop scotch at the playground.

At first, be available to mediate between your child and his peers. Join in the play so you can model skills such as turn taking and sharing without requiring him to do the same until he's ready.

Incorporate Social Stories® like the one below if this strategy works well for your child.

Playing with Friends at the Park

First, I should choose someone I know or who is about my size.




Second, I should choose an activity we can play together. Some activities I can choose are tag, swing, and hop scotch.



Third, I should go up to the person I chose and ask if they want to play the activity.



If they say yes, I will be happy and we can play. If they say no, I might feel sad but I can play with someone else or alone.

A young child with light hair is smiling and looking towards the camera. They are wearing a dark-colored pilot's hat with goggles resting on their forehead. They are also wearing a long-sleeved shirt with horizontal stripes. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting, possibly a field or park.

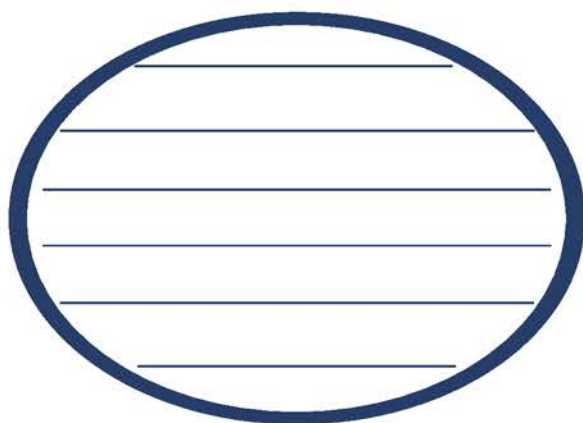
Be so happy that
when others look at
you they can't help
but be happy too!

~AA Milne, The Adventures of Winnie the Pooh

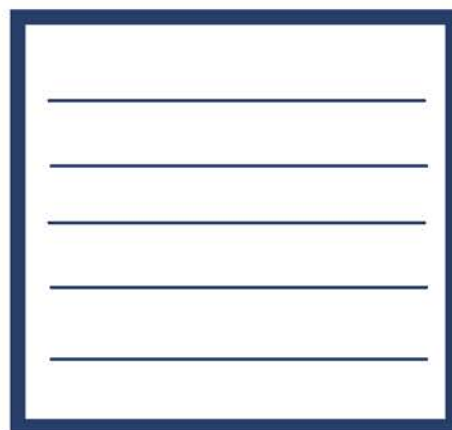
Teaching Social Skills Assignment

Choose 4 goals from your observation and assessment that would most benefit your child.
Brainstorm ideas for teaching those skills.

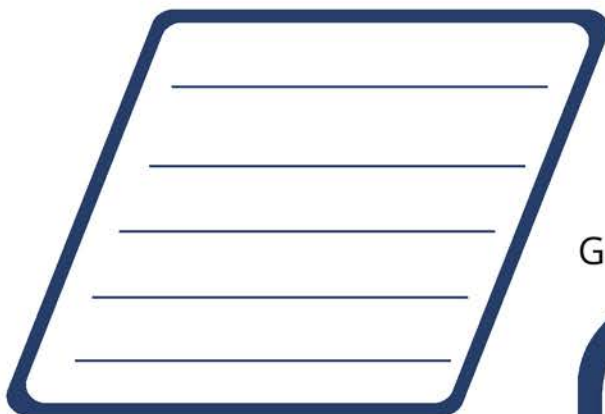
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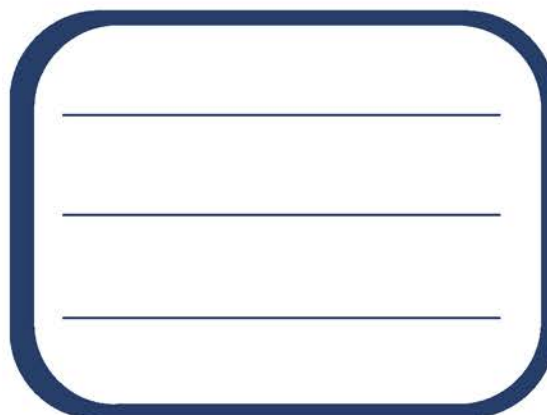
Goal:



Goal:



Goal:



Teaching Social Skills Quiz

1. Which of the following games teaches social communication and perspective taking?

- A. Tag
- B. Monopoly
- C. Candyland
- D. Hide and seek

2. When teaching problem solving, you should avoid using too much language and refrain from talking through your decision-making process.

- A. True
- B. False

3. A tool used to help children identify alternative ways to respond to triggers is a:

- A. Schedule
- B. Social story
- C. Picture cue
- D. All of the above

4. Games make learning social skills fun and rewarding.

- A. True
- B. False

5. When teaching social play, you should:

- A. Get your child involved in a lot of social activities so he has lots of opportunities to practice
- B. Avoid activities that are your child's special interest because they are too restrictive
- C. Include activities of special interest to your child
- D. Spend at least 2 hours per day practicing social play

NAVIGATING SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

GOAL

To support you in fostering positive sibling relationships through structure, reinforcement, and empathy—while helping your children build connection, cooperation, and conflict-resolution skills.

BACKGROUND

Siblings don't always get along—and that's normal. But when one child has developmental delays or support needs, the sibling dynamic can be even more challenging. Jealousy, misunderstandings, and frequent conflict may leave you feeling overwhelmed or stuck in referee mode.

Sibling relationships take time, structure, and guidance to grow. By setting clear expectations, teaching cooperative behaviors, and reinforcing small wins, you can help your children build a foundation of trust, empathy, and teamwork.

WHAT'S "NORMAL" ANYWAY?

It's completely normal for siblings to argue, compete, and push each other's buttons—especially when one child has extra support needs. You're not doing anything wrong if they bicker or if things feel unfair sometimes.

Here are a few reminders that might take some pressure off:

- Perfect harmony isn't the goal.
- Small wins matter.
- You can't force a bond—but you can create the conditions for one to grow.

This lesson isn't about making your children best friends. It's about giving them the tools they need to live, grow, and play together with as much respect—and as little chaos—as possible.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Sibling relationships don't improve overnight—but with a little planning and structure, you can set the stage for more peaceful, positive interactions. This page will help you create the right conditions for connection, while also giving your children space to grow as individuals.

START SMALL & STRUCTURE SUCCESS

Siblings don't need to spend all day together to build a bond. Start with short, structured interactions—just 5 or 10 minutes at a time. Choose activities that both children can enjoy and succeed at. These positive moments create a foundation for trust and connection. Helpful activities include:

- Building with blocks or Legos
- Drawing or coloring side-by-side
- Completing a shared puzzle
- Taking turns adding pieces to a tower or project
- Playing with sensory bins or water toys

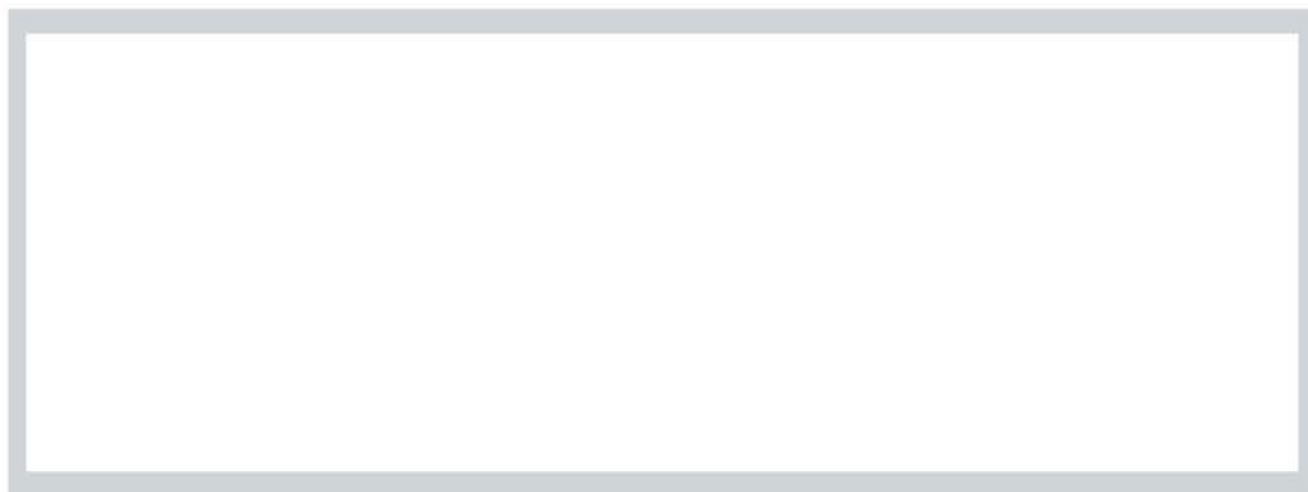
CREATE PERSONAL SPACE

When siblings share space all the time, tension can build—especially if one child feels overwhelmed or invaded. Every child needs a place where they can take a break, be alone, or play without interruption. This doesn't require a separate room. It could be:

- A pop-up tent in a shared bedroom
- A cozy chair with a blanket fort
- A bin of "my toys only" items
- A corner with noise-canceling headphones and fidget tools

Teaching both kids to respect this space helps reduce conflict and builds emotional awareness.

What activities do your children enjoy together?



ENCOURAGING COOPERATION

Sibling cooperation doesn't just happen—it's something you can teach and encourage with the right tools. These strategies help shift the focus from constant conflict to shared goals, mutual respect, and a little more teamwork in your daily routines.



SET SHARED GOALS

Kids love a challenge—especially when there's something fun at the end. Use simple, shared goals like:

"If you both play without arguing for 10 minutes, we'll have a dance party!"

This creates a team mentality. Keep goals short, clear, and achievable, then celebrate success.



COACH, DON'T REFEREE

When conflict comes up, resist the urge to jump in and pick a side. Instead, guide both kids toward the solution. You might say:

"Let's pause. What do we need to fix this?"

Teach scripts like, "Can I have a turn?" or "I'm not done yet." These phrases help kids navigate future disagreements without adult intervention.



REINFORCE THE RIGHT MOMENTS

Catch your kids being kind. Even small things—waiting their turn, offering a toy, or helping clean up—deserve attention. Use specific praise like:

"I noticed you helped your brother with his game. That was so thoughtful."

Over time, this positive attention builds better habits than focusing only on what's going wrong.



USE VISUAL TOOLS

Visual supports help keep things clear and fair. Try:

- A simple timer to show when it's time to switch turns
- A "sharing schedule" that rotates favorite toys
- A sticker chart where they earn rewards together

These tools help reduce arguments and give structure to tricky moments.

FOSTER COOPERATION, NOT COMPETITION

Sibling relationships can quickly shift into rivalry if children feel like they're constantly being compared. Instead, we want to create an environment where teamwork is encouraged and children can feel proud of each other's success—not threatened by it. These simple shifts in language and structure can reduce conflict and promote cooperation.

Do this:

- ✓ **Use Group Goals**
 - Create opportunities where siblings work together to earn something fun.
 - Reinforce teamwork and shared efforts, not just individual accomplishments.
- ✓ **Praise Cooperation Out Loud**
 - Let your children hear you notice and celebrate when they help each other.
 - Be specific: "I love how you waited for your brother so he could catch up!"
- ✓ **Be Mindful of Comparisons**
 - Focus on each child's progress.
 - Encourage each child's strengths individually.

Not this:

- ✗ **Don't Pit Them Against Each Other**
 - Avoid competition-based systems where one child wins and the other loses.
 - This can create resentment or discourage effort from the "losing" child.
- ✗ **Don't Ignore Positive Moments**
 - When you're busy, it's easy to miss the good stuff.
 - Make a habit of noticing and reinforcing even small moments of sibling kindness or patience.
- ✗ **Don't Assume Fair Means Equal**
 - Your children might need different types of support, and that's okay.
 - Fairness means meeting each child's needs—not giving them the exact same thing.

What's one small way you could encourage teamwork between your children this week?

WHAT TO DO WHEN SIBLING CONFLICT HAPPENS

Even with strong routines and positive reinforcement, sibling conflict is bound to happen. It's part of growing up and learning how to navigate relationships. The goal isn't to eliminate all conflict—but to help your children handle it more constructively.

STAY GROUNDED IN THE MOMENT

When conflict happens, your calm presence can make a big difference. Instead of jumping in right away to solve it, try to slow things down and guide your children through the process.

- ✓ Take a breath before stepping in.
- ✓ Separate the children if emotions are running high.
- ✓ Use a calm voice and neutral tone.
- ✓ Focus on what needs to happen next, not just what went wrong.
- ✓ Give each child a chance to share, even if they're upset.
- ✓ Model how to problem-solve instead of assigning blame.

TEACH SKILLS THROUGH REPAIR

Conflict is an opportunity to teach important social skills. Once everyone is calm, help your children think about what they could do differently next time.



Offer Repair Phrases-Teach simple phrases like "Can we try again?" or "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."



Model and Practice- Role-play similar situations to practice better responses outside of heightened situations.



Reinforce the Effort-Praise attempts at resolving conflict, even if it's not perfect. Recognize how difficult the situation is for all involved.



Use Visual or Written Supports-Some children benefit from visuals or social stories that outline what to say or do during conflict. These can serve as helpful reminders in the moment.

Every moment won't be a teachable one—and that's okay. Sometimes, just being present, calm, and consistent is enough to plant the seeds for better interactions tomorrow.

FOSTERING LASTING CONNECTIONS

Sibling relationships will grow and change over time. As a parent, you can help build a foundation for a healthy, respectful connection between your children—one rooted in empathy, trust, and shared experiences. These strategies can help support that connection even through the ups

MODEL POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Your children are always watching. The way you handle conflict, show empathy, and repair relationships sets the tone for how they treat each other. Modeling kindness and communication helps them build those same habits. Use these strategies:

- Narrate your own calm problem-solving out loud.
- Apologize when you make mistakes and show how to make it right.
- Treat both children with respect, even in stressful moments.
- Show appreciation when they treat each other with care.

PRAISE COOPERATION AND KINDNESS

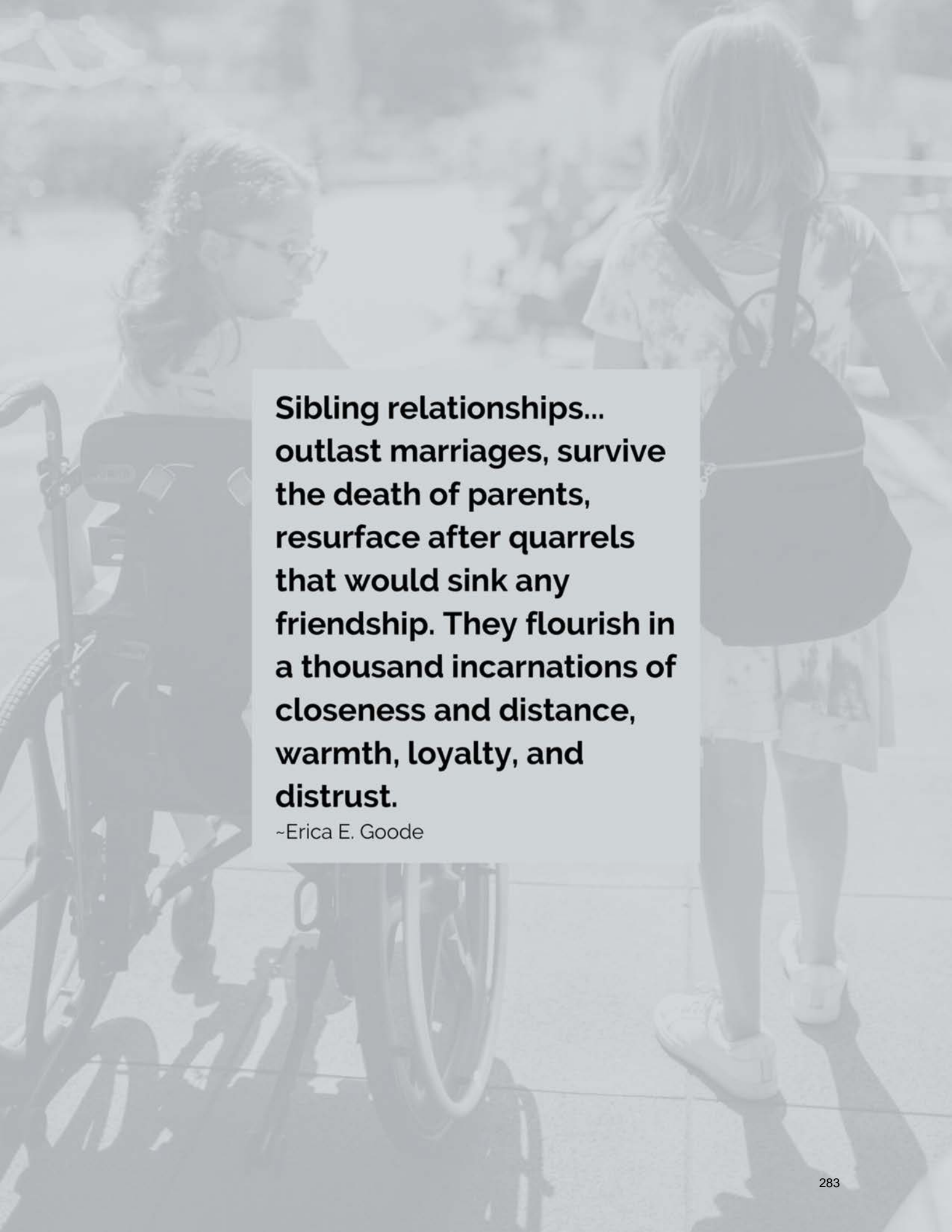
It's easy to focus on problem behavior, but positive moments need attention too. Praise is more powerful when it's specific, timely, and authentic. Use phrases like:

- "You waited so patiently while your sister finished her turn."
- "That was kind of you to help him clean up."
- "I saw you give her space when she needed it—that was really thoughtful."
- "You're working so well together today. I love seeing that."

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

Sibling connection can grow through shared experiences. You don't have to force togetherness, but intentionally creating space for positive interaction can lead to stronger bonds.

- Schedule low-stress activities they can enjoy together (e.g., baking, building, crafts).
- Encourage turn-taking games that highlight teamwork.
- Share special "sibling rituals" like a weekly movie night or storytime.



**Sibling relationships...
outlast marriages, survive
the death of parents,
resurface after quarrels
that would sink any
friendship. They flourish in
a thousand incarnations of
closeness and distance,
warmth, loyalty, and
distrust.**

~Erica E. Goode

Navigating Sibling Relationships Assignment

Observe and Reflect

Take time this week to notice how your children interact—both the positive moments and the challenges. Record what you see below.

What happened?	How did they interact?	What did you do to support it?	What worked or didn't work?

Plan a Positive Interaction

Choose one activity this week that encourages teamwork or connection between siblings. It can be something simple like building with blocks, cooking together, or playing a game.

What activity will you plan?

Prepare the Environment

Think about how you'll set the stage for success. Write one way you'll support a positive sibling experience:

- How will you model or prompt kindness?
- Will you set rules or reminders before the activity?
- How will you reinforce cooperation?

Navigating the Sibling Relationship Quiz

1. Setting aside time for siblings to play together with shared activities can help build positive relationships.

A. True
B. False
2. Which of the following is a helpful strategy to reduce sibling conflict?

A. Expect siblings to resolve all disagreements independently
B. Use group reinforcement systems to encourage teamwork
C. Avoid giving either child individual attention
D. Ignore minor conflicts to teach resilience
3. Each child should have access to a private space, even if they share a room.

A. True
B. False
4. Which of the following might help set the stage for positive sibling interactions?

A. Assigning joint clean-up tasks without instructions
B. Planning short, structured games both children enjoy
C. Giving one child control over all decisions
D. Ignoring one child to reduce jealousy
5. What is one benefit of using reinforcement to encourage positive sibling interactions?

A. It allows parents to use screen time as a consequence
B. It eliminates the need for adult supervision
C. It guarantees siblings won't argue again
D. It increases the likelihood of cooperation and kind behavior

WHAT IS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR?

GOAL

Differentiate between developmentally appropriate behaviors and truly challenging behaviors.

BACKGROUND

Every person engages in challenging behavior at one time or another. Think about your own behavior. Do you engage in behavior others might perceive as challenging?

While you might not like it, some oppositional and challenging behaviors are actually developmentally appropriate.

SPEEDING

Is speeding a challenging behavior? What if it's only 5 miles per hour over the speed limit? What about 10 miles per hour over the speed limit? What if you have a really good reason for speeding?

When does speeding become a challenging behavior? How about when you get stopped by the police or cause a serious accident? If this happens again and again, we would probably call this a challenging behavior.

Speeding is a behavior that many, especially those in law enforcement, consider inappropriate, but it's only a problem when it reaches a certain level or begins to seriously impact others.

WHY WE SPEED

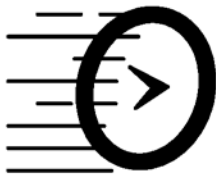
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Possible negative outcomes of speeding

We know that speeding could result in outcomes that we want to avoid. Although there could be more, the main 2 are:

- Getting a speeding ticket
- Causing an accident

The chances of these outcomes increase the more we speed, but are still not guaranteed no matter how often or how fast we speed.



POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES

Possible positive outcomes of speeding

We are much more familiar with the positive consequences associated with speeding that include:

- Getting to your destination faster
- Feeling of accomplishment or superiority from being faster than the driver next to you
- Not paying attention to your speed because you are thinking about other things

These positive consequences are more likely to occur and happen much more frequently than the potential negative consequences.

Changing behavior

If you knew that your speed was constantly monitored and there was a sufficient amount of money coming for driving under the speed limit, would you be more inclined to drive slower? This might motivate some people, but probably not everyone.

Changing challenging behavior is something that is unique to the individual. You have to understand what motivates the person to engage in the challenging behavior and what might motivate that person to engage in an alternative behavior.

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES

Super Nanny

Maybe you have tried all the traditional parenting techniques recommended by Super Nanny® and yet your child still engages in these behaviors. What Super Nanny® doesn't take into consideration is that challenging behavior is usually a form of communication. Your child doesn't engage in challenging behavior because she's a bad child or because you're a bad parent. Challenging behavior develops because a child doesn't have an effective way to communicate what she needs or wants. This is true even if your child speaks very well.



WHAT MIGHT YOUR CHILD BE TELLING YOU WITH HIS BEHAVIOR?

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION

Children learn what gets them what they want and need

Imagine you're on the phone talking to someone at the bank after being on hold for almost an hour. Your child comes up to you and says, "Dad, I need a drink, can you get me one?" You probably respond by turning your back and continuing with the call. The call is important and will be finished soon. You will help your daughter when it's done.

But this isn't your daughter's plan. She starts to cry and soon she is in a full blown tantrum. You can barely hear the person on the other end of the phone, so you walk to the kitchen and grab her cup from the refrigerator just to make it quiet enough for you to finish the call. Experiences like this one teach your child that when her words don't work, her behavior does.

Behavior develops gradually

We rarely see these behaviors as they develop over time because a single instance that isn't real intense probably goes completely unnoticed, just like a single instance of going 5 miles per hour over the speed limit. As the behavior escalates over time the problem becomes more apparent and it's at that point you decide you need to intervene. Only now, you don't know what to do.



CHANGING BEHAVIOR

DAY ONE:

Your job at this point is to become a detective. This lesson will help you understand your child's behavior and figure out what she is saying with her behavior.

Once you have this information, you can teach her to get what she wants in a better way, without challenging behavior. At the same time, you must also identify what skills your child needs to be able to better manage difficult or disappointing situations when they come up in the future.

The process to get to this understanding and effective teaching is the basics of ABA that are covered in this curriculum. If your child engages in severe, dangerous behavior, make sure you are working with a qualified BCBA® and not trying to do this on your own.





BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION

Children, and some adults, engage in challenging behavior because it's the most effective way to get what they want. When the positive consequences are more predictable and frequent than the negative ones, the behavior continues.

What Is Challenging Behavior?

Assignment

We all engage in challenging behavior from time to time. When do some of your own behaviors become challenging? Why do you continue to engage in these behavior?

Now consider some of your child's behaviors. Are they a problem in some contexts but not others?

What behaviors have become
challenging?

What makes these
behaviors challenging?

What do you think your child is saying with these behaviors?

What is Challenging Behavior?

Quiz

1. When does a behavior become challenging and need to be addressed?
 - A. Immediately as soon as it occurs
 - B. Children should be allowed to express themselves however they feel so you shouldn't address challenging behavior
 - C. If it appears to be escalating or persistent and will impact the child's independence
 - D. After it occurs for 6-12 months consistently

2. Everyone engages in behavior that someone else would consider challenging at some point.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Challenging behavior can be which of the following?
 - A. Potentially dangerous
 - B. Disruptive
 - C. Problematic in the community
 - D. All of the above

4. Challenging behavior often develops quickly and out of the blue so parents are not prepared to address them.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Challenging behavior is most often a form of communication. Your goal is to figure out what your child is telling you with her behavior.
 - A. True
 - B. False

CONTEXT OF BEHAVIOR

GOAL

Begin to understand how the context of a behavior, the events directly surrounding it, can make a behavior more or less likely to occur.

BACKGROUND

Children, and many adults, can't tell us why they do something, and often the reason a behavior continues isn't obvious. To understand why behavior occurs, we look at the context that surrounds the behavior.

In ABA, we call this the ABCs.. This stands for antecedent, behavior and consequence.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DATA

Often the individuals who benefit from the support of ABA therapy experience the world differently. It can be difficult to understand why they engage in a behavior because their perception of their environment is different from ours.

For this reason, ABA professionals use data to make decisions about treatment. By collecting data, practitioners can view behavior objectively, without the bias of their own experiences and perceptions.

As a parent or caregiver, you can use these same strategies. It can feel cumbersome at first but it's worth the effort. We'll even show you some tricks along the way!

THE CONTEXT

ANTECEDENT

Happens +/- 30 seconds BEFORE a behavior.

Often referred to as the trigger. The antecedent is observable, but it may not be obvious.

Common antecedents include:

- Giving a demand
- Restricted attention
- Restricted access to desired items
- Unstructured time
- Transitions



BEHAVIOR

The behavior you want to learn more about.

It may be desired, as in a behavior you want to occur more frequently; or undesired, as in a behavior you want to occur less frequently.

In ABA we are careful to define the behavior objectively, avoiding placing judgments such as emotions. For example, when defining a tantrum or an outburst, we avoid using the term "mad" such as "Rebecca gets mad." Instead we include what the behavior looks like (what you see), which could be "Rebecca throws herself on the floor and kicks her feet."

Common behaviors include:

- Tantrums
- Aggression
- Refusal
- Following directions
- Eloping
- Flopping

THE CONTEXT

CONSEQUENCE

Happens +/- 30 seconds AFTER a behavior.

When you hear the word "consequence" it might bring to mind some form of punishment, like time out. However, a consequence isn't necessarily an artificial consequence intentionally applied by someone else. It may be a natural result of an action, or something an individual does without thought, such as giving your child a hug when she appears upset. The consequence is observable, but may not be obvious.

Common consequences include:

- Offering a choice
- Reprimand
- Reward
- Remove item
- Discussion
- Ignoring behavior

SETTING EVENTS

Happens BEFORE a behavior but could be hours or even days prior.

In addition to the ABCs, we also consider setting events. A setting event sometimes impacts behavior. It's something that occurs before a behavior but more remotely than an antecedent. Some setting events are within your control but others are not.

Common setting events include:

- Change in medication
- Lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Change in routine
- Presence or absence of a specific person



HOW DOES IT WORK?

WRITE IT DOWN!

So, how can you use the context of the behavior to understand it? You'll begin by writing it down. Collecting ABC or SABC data allows you to take an objective look at the context of behavior and look for patterns.

There are many ways for you to do this. The images here depict two common options. Either write in what occurred or use a form with check boxes to more quickly record what happened.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
<input type="checkbox"/> Hungry <input type="checkbox"/> Tired <input type="checkbox"/> Person Present <input type="checkbox"/> Change Medication <input type="checkbox"/> Change in Routine <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Reduced <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>

HOW TO COLLECT DATA

The form with the empty boxes allows for a more complete documentation of events surrounding the behavior you want to learn more about. Simply write in exactly what happened before (antecedent) and after (consequence) the behavior. Also document any potential setting events that potentially impacted the behavior. This form requires more time to fill in and analyze than the form with checkboxes and may consequently result in less frequent data collection.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

The data sheet with checkboxes allows for quick documentation of behavioral events. Simply check off what happened. The limited number of choices makes analyzing the data simple. Easily count the number of occurrences for each option to determine which occurs most frequently. You'll learn more about how to use this data in a future lesson.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
<input type="checkbox"/> Hungry <input type="checkbox"/> Tired <input type="checkbox"/> Person Present <input type="checkbox"/> Change Medication <input type="checkbox"/> Change in Routine <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Reduced <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>

Context of Behavior Assignment

Practice collecting ABC data over the course of several days. Observe your child and take note of the context of your child's behavior.

- Record ABC data for 3 desirable behaviors (i.e. asking for a drink, cleaning up when asked, etc.)
- Record ABC data for 3 undesirable behaviors (i.e. screaming, throwing toys, etc.)

Desirable Behavior 1

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Desirable Behavior 2

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Desirable Behavior 3

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Undesirable Behavior 1

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Undesirable Behavior 2

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Undesirable Behavior 3

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Context of Behavior Quiz

1. Immediately follows (i.e. within 30s) the behavior you want to learn more about.
 - A. Setting event
 - B. Antecedent
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Consequence

2. Occurs well before the behavior you are interested in and makes a behavior more or less likely to occur.
 - A. Setting event
 - B. Antecedent
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Consequence

3. Anything a person does that you want to learn more about.
 - A. Setting event
 - B. Antecedent
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Consequence

4. Occurs just before (i.e. within 30s) of the behavior and is sometimes referred to as the trigger.
 - A. Setting event
 - B. Antecedent
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Consequence

5. The consequence is a traditional parenting technique such as time out.
 - A. True
 - B. False

WHY DOES MY CHILD DO THAT?

GOAL

Understand the factors that motivate each of us to engage in behaviors so that you can identify what your child is telling you with his behavior.

BACKGROUND

All behavior happens for a reason and serves some purpose. This is true for your behavior, your child's behavior and the behavior of that person who cut you off in traffic.

Understanding why your child engages in a specific behavior that has become problematic for him allows you to determine how best to help him.

BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION

We all engage in behavior because we get something good or escape something bad.

Challenging behavior continues not because you're a bad parent or your child is a bad child but because the behavior works for your child.

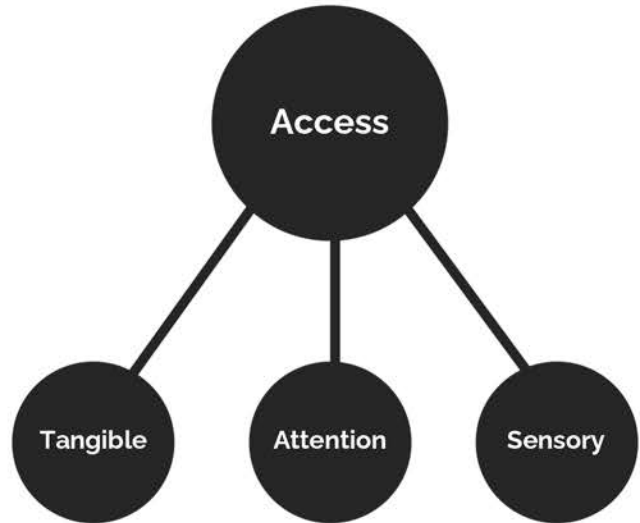
Think of behavior as a form of communication and your job is to figure out what he is telling you. What are those things your child wants? What are the bad things, from your child's perspective, that he's trying to avoid or escape?

Keep in mind that behavior is neither good nor bad. The context and your perspective determines how desirable a behavior might be.

ACCESS

Get something good

Think of some of the things you and your child access using behavior. You might access something tangible such as a glass of water when you walk to the sink or your child might access a favorite toy when he asks for a turn. You might access attention by telling your friend something funny or your child might access your attention by pulling your sleeve when you're on the phone. You might access a sensory experience by lighting a candle or your child might access a sensory experience by spinning in a circle.

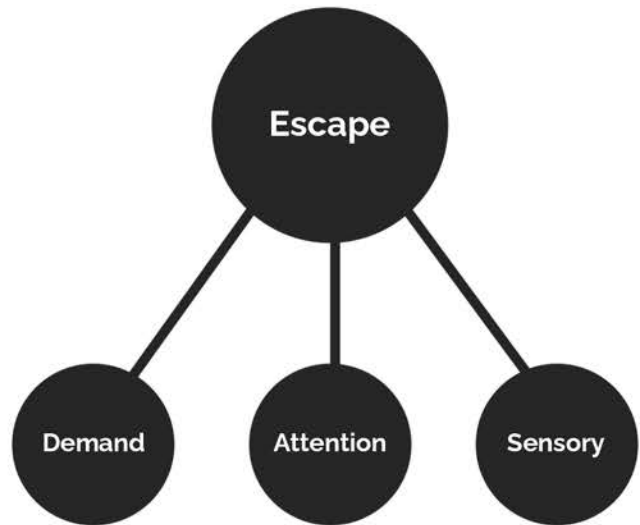


WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR CHILD ACCESS USING BEHAVIOR?

ESCAPE

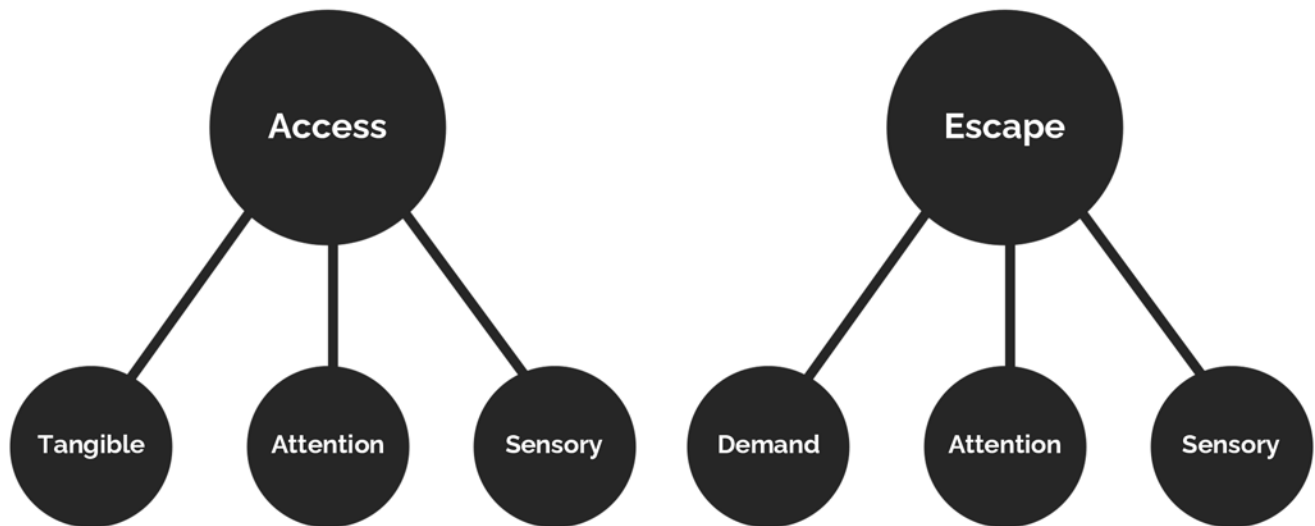
Avoid something bad

Now think about some things you and your child might escape or avoid with your behavior. You might escape a demand such as your boss asking you to complete a report by calling in sick or your child might escape a demand by ignoring you when you ask him to pick up his toys. You might escape attention when you sit quietly at the back of a large meeting or your child might escape attention when he hides under a blanket. You might escape a sensory experience when you change your shirt that has a scratchy tag on it or your child might escape a sensory experience when he covers his ears to block out a loud noise.



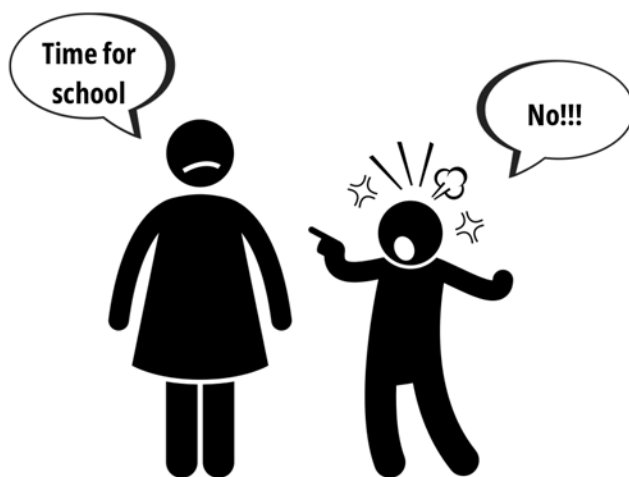
WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR CHILD ESCAPE USING BEHAVIOR?

UNDERLYING CAUSE OF BEHAVIOR



Understanding motivation

It's not always as simple as the previous examples. Sometimes, individuals might engage in a behavior to access something that doesn't fall neatly into one of these categories, like control or a feeling of accomplishment. Similarly, an individual might engage in a behavior to escape a feeling of inadequacy or a situation that evokes fear. These categories are just to get you started thinking about behavior from a more objective viewpoint so we can understand the underlying motivation.



Context of Behavior

Look at the context within which the behavior occurs to identify why the behavior continues. What happens just before the behavior? What happens right after it? Let's look at an example. Jake is playing with his favorite airplane one morning when his mother Debra walks in and tells him it's time for school. Jake throws his airplane and screams, "No!"

What did Jake access or escape with this behavior? How can you know?

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Debra said it was time for school	Jake yelled no and threw his toy toward Debra	Debra gasped and Jake delayed going to school, missing the bus

ABC DATA

Data helps you understand the context of the behavior to identify what your child is trying to tell you.

On an ABC data sheet it looks like this. In the antecedent column, you write what happened just before the behavior. In this example, Debra said it was time for school. In the behavior column, you write Jake yelled no and threw his toy toward Debra. And in the consequence column you write what happened right after the behavior, Debra gasped and Jake delayed going to school.

There might be other antecedents and consequences that also influence the behavior that you could make note of. Maybe Debra forgot to bring Jake's lunchbox into the room or it's already in his backpack and he doesn't know it. Maybe the airplane made a cool noise when it hit the floor. You don't need to write down everything. You know your child best. Which factors might be impacting his behavior?

The act of writing this out will help you be more aware when the behavior comes up again. Look at the information you have and ask yourself, "what is he telling me with his behavior?" What is he accessing or avoiding with the behavior? He gets a small reaction from Debra and he delays going to school. Maybe he's saying, "I don't want to stop playing. I would rather stay with you."

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Debra said it was time for school	Jake yelled no and threw his toy toward Debra	Debra gasped and Jake delayed going to school, missing the bus
Debra gasped and Jake delayed going to school, missing the bus	Jake cries, stomps his feet and then pushes Debra	Debra says, "we have to go now, I'm going to be late for work."
Debra says, "we have to go now, I'm going to be late for work."	Jake hits Debra and runs to his room	Debra follows him and offers to stop to get a donut on the way to school

EXTEND ABC DATA

Behavior is complex and one behavioral event often includes multiple distinct behaviors.

Often behavior is more complex than the last example and a series of challenges build on each other. If we keep going with the last example, the consequence for the first behavior might become the antecedent for the next behavior.

Jake might be upset that his routine was disrupted by missing the bus and that could trigger another behavior. Here we write down what behavior Jake engages in, he cries, stomps his feet and then pushes Debra. The consequence of this behavior is Debra says, "We have to go now. I'm going to be late for work." This consequence becomes the antecedent for the next behavior which is Jake hitting Debra and then running to his room. The consequence to this behavior is that Debra follows him and offers to stop to get a doughnut on the way to school.

We can see through this example that Jake's behavior escalated pretty quickly and Debra was doing whatever she could just to get him out the door. What is Jake saying with his behavior? How about, "I don't know how to handle sudden changes in my routine and I want you to help me." He also gets a doughnut out of the deal.

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
Jake yelled no and threw his toy toward Debra	Debra gasped	Jake cries, stomps his feet and then pushes Debra
Jake cries, stomps his feet and then pushes Debra	Debra says, "we have to go now, I'm going to be late for work."	Jake hits Debra and runs to his room
Jake hits Debra and runs to his room	Debra follows him and offers to stop to get a donut on the way to school	Jake gets his backpack and goes to the car

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR

Your own behavior follows the same rules as your child's behavior. What are you saying with your behavior?

We can look at Debra's behavior in much the same way. The first antecedent in this scenario might be Jake yelling and throwing the toy. Debra gasped. The consequence to that behavior is Jake crying, stomping his feet and pushing Debra. This becomes the antecedent for Debra's next behavior. It proceeds in this way until the final consequence is Jake getting his backpack and going to the car.

Does Debra get something good or escape something bad through her behavior? Sure, she gets cooperation from Jake and avoids being late for work.

Similar scenes play out many mornings in households across the world. Although it takes some practice, taking time to identify what your child is saying with his behavior and what he gets or avoids by engaging in it, you can then intentionally determine how best to help him.

A grayscale photograph of a man and a woman smiling warmly at the camera. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a patterned top. They are in a kitchen setting, with a tiled wall and a sink visible in the background. A semi-transparent white box containing text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

TAKE TIME TO JUST OBSERVE

The best part is that you don't have to change anything yet. Just go through your normal routine and simply observe what happens. The next lesson will focus on deciding how best to intervene based on the information you collect about why the behavior continues.

Why Does My Child Do That?

Assignment

Collect ABC data for one behavioral event (it might include multiple behaviors as seen in the example). Then use that information to guess what your child might be trying to say to you with his behavior.

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

What is he saying?

Why Does My Child Do That? Quiz

1. The ABCs of behavior only apply to children's behavior.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. What are categories of things a person can access with their behavior?
 - A. Tangible
 - B. Attention
 - C. Sensory
 - D. All of the above

3. Putting on sunglasses because the bright sun is hurting your eyes is most likely maintained by access to a tangible.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. You collect ABC data to help you understand the context within which the behavior occurs so you can identify what your child "gets" out of the behavior.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. Behavior is communication. Your job is to figure out what your child is telling you.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DECIDING HOW TO INTERVENE

GOAL

Choose interventions that will help your child get what he wants without relying on challenging behavior and develop a plan for supporting his development of important skills.

BACKGROUND

Remember that behavior is usually communication. Your child might be telling you "I want that item, activity or attention" or "I don't want to do what you asked me to" or "I have a sensory need that's not being met."

Your BCBA® has a wealth of knowledge and will recommend interventions, but there is often more than one way to get to the outcome everyone wants to achieve. Developing a plan together improves the effectiveness of the plan because as the parent, you will need to do some of the work in the plan. Let's make sure it fits your family.

COMPETING BEHAVIOR PATHWAY

One of the best ways to begin to develop an intervention plan is to work through the competing behavior pathway.

This tool helps us think about the context within which the behavior commonly occurs and what we can do to support your child in making better choices.

Begin by looking at the context of the existing challenging behavior then identify:

- Replacement behavior that gets your child what he wants
- Setting event accommodations
- Antecedent interventions
- Ultimate desired behavior
- Consequence interventions

Let's look at how this works.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOR

Choose a replacement behavior that gets your child the same thing that the challenging behavior gets him. This might not be the behavior you ultimately want him to engage in . You will work on developing a plan to teach that behavior later. First, he must find a better way to get the thing he wants or escape from the thing he wants to avoid.

DESIRED BEHAVIOR

This is the ultimate behavior you want him to engage in when the common antecedents come up. You need to identify this behavior so you can think about how to support him in engaging in it.

SETTING EVENT ACCOMMODATIONS

When common setting events come up, what can you do to make him less likely to engage in the challenging behavior? How can you make some adjustments to the things that most often trigger challenging behavior when the common setting events come up?

ANTECEDENT INTERVENTIONS

What can you do before challenging behavior occurs to make him more likely to engage in your desired behavior? What tools can you give him? What skills can you teach him? Antecedent interventions reduce the impact of common antecedents and provide support. Which ones will you use?

CONSEQUENCE (REINFORCEMENT) INTERVENTIONS

Consequence interventions provide reinforcement for engaging in the desired behavior. Will you use social reinforcers such as praise, high-fives, or thumbs up or does your child respond better to something more tangible?

COMPLETING THE COMPETING BEHAVIOR PATHWAY

Go through the competing behavior pathway one step at a time, keeping in mind why your child engages in the challenging behavior. Decide on the replacement behavior, desired behavior, setting event accommodations, antecedent interventions and consequence (reinforcement) interventions.

Setting Event	Antecedent	Challenging Behavior	Consequence

Replacement Behavior

Setting Event Accommodations	Antecedent Interventions	Desired Behavior	Consequence Interventions

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Follow this process with your BCBA® to identify effective interventions that fit your unique family.

Interventions may change over time as your child and family changes or as you and your BCBA® learn more about your child's behavior. Stay flexible and adjust to these changes but don't be afraid to ask for help or support from your BCBA®.

If you find an intervention doesn't fit with your family's values or lifestyle, do some problem solving with your BCBA®. Don't give up!

Revisit the competing behavior pathway to see if there are other interventions that might fit your family better. Consistently using the strategies in the plan is important so those interventions must be right for your child and your family.

WHAT QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the user to write down any questions or concerns they have.



DEVELOPING A PLAN

Behavior is communication. Figure out what your child is communicating and help him find a better way to get what he wants or needs.

Deciding How to Intervene

Assignment

Take some time to work through the competing behavior pathway with one of your child's challenging behaviors. Fill in each of the squares, identifying a replacement behavior that helps him get what he wants and what behavior you ultimately want him to engage in. What interventions will support your child in engaging in this behavior?

Setting Event	Antecedent	Challenging Behavior	Consequence

Replacement Behavior	

Setting Event Accommodations	Antecedent Interventions	Desired Behavior	Consequence Interventions

Deciding How to Intervene Quiz

1. The behavior you will accept temporarily instead of the challenging behavior is a(n):
 - A. Setting event accommodation
 - B. Antecedent intervention
 - C. Replacement behavior
 - D. Consequence intervention

2. What you will do after your child engages in a desired behavior is a(n):
 - A. Setting event accommodation
 - B. Antecedent intervention
 - C. Replacement behavior
 - D. Consequence intervention

3. What you will change when situations come up that usually make challenging behavior more common is a(n):
 - A. Setting event accommodation
 - B. Antecedent intervention
 - C. Replacement behavior
 - D. Consequence intervention

4. What you will do before a challenging behavior begins to make your child more likely to respond to triggers by engaging in a desired behavior is a(n):
 - A. Setting event accommodation
 - B. Antecedent intervention
 - C. Replacement behavior
 - D. Consequence intervention

5. The replacement behavior you choose should get your child the same thing he gets with the challenging behavior, even if it's not what you ultimately want him to do.
 - A. True
 - B. False

RESPONDING WITH COMPASSION

GOAL

To help you navigate challenging moments with your child using a compassionate care approach. By prioritizing safety, understanding the purpose behind behaviors, and teaching new skills, you can respond effectively while strengthening your bond with your child.

BACKGROUND

When your child is upset—crying, hitting, or screaming—it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Conflicting advice may rush through your mind, leaving you unsure of the best way to respond. But at the heart of every behavior is a need.

Challenging behaviors are your child's way of saying, "I need help, but I don't know how to ask for it."

Compassionate care helps you:

- Prioritize Safety
- Build Trust
- Teach Skills

EVERY BEHAVIOR HAS A PURPOSE

Behavior is your child's way of communicating. Even if your child has language, behavior might be easier or more effective. Whether they're seeking attention, relief, or connection, understanding why the behavior is happening helps you respond effectively.

Examples of behavior as communication:

- Crying might mean: "I'm overwhelmed."
- Hitting might mean: "I need space."
- Throwing objects might mean: "I don't know how to handle this frustration."
- Self-injury might mean: "I need your attention and I don't know how to ask for it."

THE RISKS OF IGNORING BEHAVIOR

Ignoring challenging behavior—also called extinction—can sometimes make things worse.

Risks of ignoring behavior:

EXTINCTION BURST

The behavior escalates before it improves.

When a behavior is no longer reinforced, it often gets worse before it gets better. This escalation, called an extinction burst, happens because your child is trying harder to make the behavior work.

While temporary, extinction bursts can make situations unsafe and more stressful.

- Behaviors like hitting or throwing can escalate to more intense actions.
- Escalation increases safety risks for your child and others.
- Stress levels rise for both you and your child, making it harder to stay calm.

EMOTIONAL HARM

Ignoring your child's distress can leave them feeling unheard or unsupported.

Challenging behaviors often communicate unmet needs. When those behaviors are ignored, your child may feel frustrated, abandoned, or invalidated.

Over time, this can harm their sense of security and trust in you.

- Ignoring distress signals can lead to feelings of rejection or abandonment.
- Your child may feel they have to manage overwhelming emotions on their own.
- A lack of acknowledgment can damage trust and connection.

INCONSISTENCY

If reinforcement is given after escalation, the behavior becomes even harder to manage.

For extinction to work, reinforcement must never be given—but maintaining this level of consistency is extremely difficult in real-world settings. When reinforcement happens inconsistently, behaviors become stronger and harder to change.

- Inconsistent reinforcement teaches your child to escalate behaviors to get what they want.
- It prolongs the behavior change process and makes extinction bursts more likely.
- Over time, it creates a cycle of escalating, harder-to-manage behaviors.

WHAT COMPASSIONATE CARE LOOKS LIKE

When your child engages in challenging behavior, how you respond in the moment can make a significant difference. By focusing on what to do—like staying calm, addressing their needs, and teaching new skills later—you can turn difficult situations into opportunities for growth. Equally important is knowing what not to do, as certain responses can unintentionally escalate the behavior or harm your child's sense of safety and trust. This section provides clear guidance on how to handle these moments with confidence and compassion.

Do this:

- ✓ **De-escalate First**
 - Use a calm voice and reassuring tone.
 - Minimize overwhelming stimuli (e.g., loud noises, bright lights).
 - Focus on creating a safe environment.
- ✓ **Address the Need**
 - Identify what your child is trying to communicate.
 - Meet the immediate need (e.g., offer a break, provide comfort).
- ✓ **Teach New Skills Later**
 - Once your child is calm, teach them how to communicate their needs appropriately.
 - Reinforce positive behaviors to replace the challenging ones.

Not this:

- ✗ **Respond with Frustration**
 - Avoid raising your voice or using harsh language.
 - Don't use threats or punishment, as they can escalate the behavior further.
- ✗ **Ignore the Behavior Entirely**
 - Ignoring the behavior without addressing your child's need can lead to more intense behaviors (extinction bursts).
 - Failing to acknowledge their feelings can make them feel unsupported or unheard.
- ✗ **Try to Teach in the Heat of the Moment**
 - Avoid attempting to correct or teach while your child is upset—it's unlikely to be effective.
 - Wait until your child is calm and regulated before introducing new skills or expectations.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Scenario: Your child is working on a puzzle but becomes frustrated when the pieces don't fit together. Suddenly, they throw the puzzle piece across the room.

Step 1: De-escalate and Stay Calm

- Respond with a calm voice: "I see you're frustrated. Let's take a break."
- Pick up the puzzle piece and place it out of reach to ensure safety.

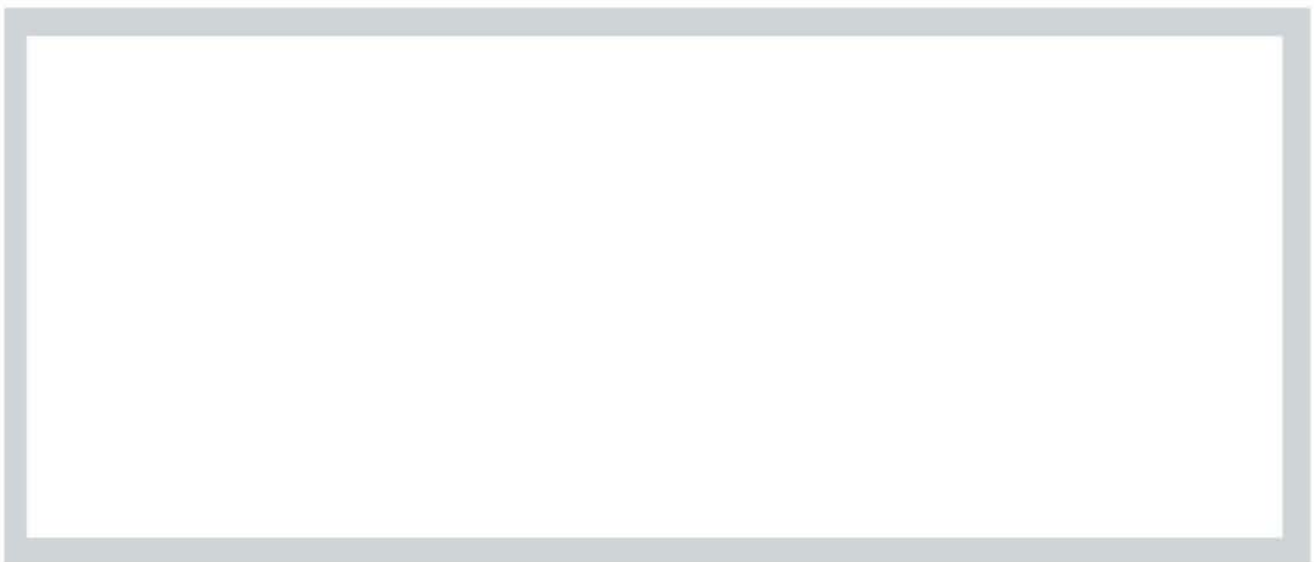
Step 2: Address Their Need

- Offer a short break to reduce stress.

Step 3: Teach Later

- Once they are calm, revisit the situation and model a replacement behavior:
- "Next time the puzzle feels hard, you can say, 'I need help.' Let's practice together!"
- Reinforce their attempt to use the replacement behavior in future situations: "Great job asking for help!"

STRATEGIES FOR YOUR CHILD



YOUR COMPASSIONATE CARE TOOLKIT

Compassionate care is easier to implement when you have the right tools at your fingertips. These strategies provide practical ways to de-escalate challenging moments, address your child's needs, and reinforce positive behaviors.

Phrases to Use in the Moment

When emotions run high, it's easy to feel unsure of what to say. The following phrases can help you stay calm, communicate your support, and guide your child toward a resolution:

"I see you're upset. Let's take a break."

- Acknowledge their emotions and offer a way to step back from the situation, reducing stress.

"It's okay to feel frustrated. I'm here to help."

- Validate their feelings and let them know they're not alone.

"Let's figure this out together."

- Shift the focus from the problem to collaboration, showing that you're on their side.

Visual Supports

For many children, especially those who struggle with verbal communication, visual aids can be powerful tools for reducing frustration and promoting understanding. Examples of effective visual supports include:

Break Cards

- A simple card with the word "Break" or a picture of a quiet space can give your child a quick, nonverbal way to ask for time away when they're overwhelmed.

Choice Boards

- Presenting visual options for activities, snacks, or other preferences can prevent frustration and help your child feel more in control.

First-Then Charts

- A visual chart showing "First (task), Then (reward)" helps your child understand what's expected and motivates them with a clear incentive.

Responding with Compassion Assignment

PART 1: PHRASES IN ACTION

Choose three common challenging moments your child experiences. For each situation, write down a compassionate phrase you will use to acknowledge their feelings and de-escalate the situation.

Challenging Moment	Compassionate Phrase
Example: Crying when frustrated	"I see you're upset. Let's take a break."

PART 2: VISUAL SUPPORTS PLAN

Identify one situation where your child could benefit from a visual support. Describe the support you will create (e.g., break card, choice board) and how you'll introduce it.

Challenging Moment	Visual Support	How to Introduce It
Example: Difficulty transitioning	First-Then Chart	Show before a task and explain reward.

PART 3: REINFORCEMENT TRACKER SETUP

Identify one replacement behavior you want to track. Outline how you will monitor progress and celebrate your child's successes.

Replacement Behavior	Tracking Method	Celebration Plan
Example: Asking for a break	Daily chart with stickers for each request	Choose a fun activity at week's end.

PART 4: ADDRESSING BARRIERS

Reflect on potential challenges you might face while implementing compassionate care. Write down plans to overcome these barriers.

Barrier	Plan to Overcome It	Celebration Plan
Forgetting to use compassionate phrases	Place sticky note reminders in key areas (e.g., fridge, door).	Choose a fun activity at week's end.
Feeling overwhelmed	Start small—focus on one strategy at a time.	
Inconsistency among caregivers	Share compassionate care tools with all caregivers.	

Responding with Compassion Quiz

1. What is the primary goal of compassionate care during challenging moments?
 - A. To ensure your child learns boundaries immediately
 - B. To meet your child where they are emotionally and address their needs
 - C. To ignore challenging behaviors until they stop
 - D. To focus on correcting the behavior as quickly as possible
2. Which of the following is an example of addressing your child's need during a challenging moment?
 - A. Ignoring their cries for attention to avoid reinforcing the behavior
 - B. Telling them to stop their behavior immediately
 - C. Offering a break when they are frustrated and overwhelmed
 - D. Removing their favorite toy as a consequence
3. What does the term "extinction burst" mean?
 - A. A moment when a child suddenly calms down after ignoring their behavior
 - B. An escalation in the intensity or frequency of a behavior after reinforcement is removed
 - C. A phase where a child no longer engages in challenging behaviors
 - D. A natural reduction in challenging behavior without intervention
4. Why is it important to avoid teaching new skills during the heat of the moment?
 - A. Your child might not listen to you
 - B. Challenging behaviors should always be ignored
 - C. Your child's ability to learn is reduced when they are upset or overwhelmed
 - D. It's more important to focus on discipline in the moment
5. Which of the following strategies aligns with compassionate care?
 - A. Using a calm voice to reassure your child and offering comfort
 - B. Ignoring their behavior to avoid reinforcing it
 - C. Punishing challenging behaviors to teach accountability
 - D. Waiting until the behavior escalates before responding

HOW DO I KNOW IF THIS IS WORKING?

GOAL

Understand ways to measure behavior and the common variability in behavior so you can make informed decisions about when it's time to try something new.

BACKGROUND

Consistently utilizing interventions that don't come naturally to you puts a strain on your time and patience. You started this journey to help your child and improve some specific challenging behavior.

Now it's time to ask yourself whether you should continue on the path you're on or change interventions? How do you know if what you're doing is actually working?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BEHAVIOR

To find out if what you're doing is actually working, you must measure the behavior both before and during your intervention. In ABA, we call this data collection. You can measure behavior in a variety of ways.

- How often does the behavior happen?
- How often does the behavior occur over a specific period of time?
- How long does the behavior last?
- How intense is the behavior?

The more information you collect, the fuller picture you have of the behavior, but you need a system that is easy for you to keep up with.

CHOOSING A DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The right data collection method measures the important aspect of behavior and is easy for you to use. Choose a method of measuring the behavior by asking these questions:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE BEHAVIOR?

Data is only useful if it measures the important aspect of the behavior you're interested in.

DOES THE BEHAVIOR FREQUENTLY START AND STOP?

Some behaviors have a clear stop and start while others seem to speed up and slow down over a period of time.

DOES THE BEHAVIOR TEND TO LAST FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

Some behaviors happen in a split second and others occur over a period of time.

WOULD THE BEHAVIOR BE MORE ACCEPTABLE IF IT WAS LESS INTENSE?

Not all challenging behaviors need to be stopped. Some are more appropriate when they are less intense.

WHAT IS YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH COLLECTING DATA?

A data collection method is only helpful in making informed decisions if you use it.

Method	Example Behaviors
Frequency	Biting, slamming doors, throwing objects, climbing on a table
Rate	Jumping from a shelf, kicking another person, interrupting someone talking
Duration	Tantrums, crying, screaming, running
Likert Scale	Screaming, rough play, hitting an arm to get someone's attention

TYPES OF DATA

Each data type measures a different aspect of behavior and can be appropriate for different types of behaviors

You might choose to collect frequency data for behaviors that don't occur throughout the entire day or that occur in spurts during the day. Rate data is better for behaviors that occur at moderate frequencies throughout the day. Both methods are good for behaviors that have a discrete start and stop. It's easy to see when they begin and end. Especially if they take a short period of time, even a fraction of a second, to complete.

Collecting duration data is useful for behaviors that don't have a discrete beginning and end. That is, it's hard to see when it actually starts and stops. These behaviors also may continue over a period of time which could be minutes or even hours. For example, when a child begins crying, you might not realize that the whining that led into it was the start of an episode of actual crying. The child might slow down or even briefly stop crying then start again in a matter of moments. It can be hard to see when the behavior will actually be finished.

A Likert scale measures the intensity of a behavior on a scale of 1-5 or even 1-10. Since this measure is somewhat subjective, meaning not everyone would assign the same intensity level, it's usually best to use this method along with one of the other methods listed. A Likert scale is best for measuring behaviors that are more acceptable when they occur at lower intensities.

FREQUENCY AND RATE

Counting behavior

For frequency or rate data, you might choose to use simple tally marks on a sheet of paper or white board. You could use a counter app on your phone or you could move coins or beads from one pocket to another. Any way that you can count the number of times the behavior happens will work for these data. To turn frequency data into rate, simply count the behavior over some period of time such as per hour or per day.

Behavior	Frequency

DURATION

Measuring how long behavior lasts

For duration data, you need access to a clock or stopwatch. Many smart watches have stopwatches built in or you can use one on your phone. Simply track how long the behavior continues each time he engages in it. You will then need to record how long the behavior lasted. Again, you can do this on paper or in an app on your phone.

Behavior	Duration

LIKERT SCALE

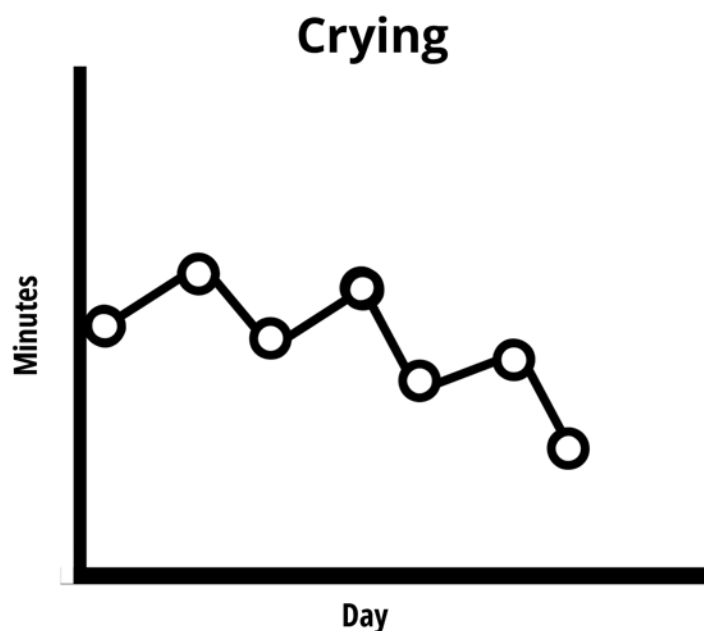
Measuring intensity of behavior

When recording the intensity of a behavior on a Likert scale, you simply need to write the behavior down and then rate the intensity on a scale of 1-5. This method also gives you a frequency of the behavior by counting the number of ratings if you rate the behavior each time it occurs.

Behavior	Likert Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Least intense				Most intense

WHICH DATA COLLECTION METHOD MAKES THE MOST SENSE TO YOU?

SEEING CHANGE IN THE DATA



Behavior changes gradually over time

Once you collect the data, the best way to see changes in your child's behavior is by graphing the data. Your BCBA® can graph it for you unless you are using a data collection app that will generate the graph automatically. Most graphing is done in apps or online programs, but spreadsheets are also easy ways to quickly see changes in behavior. This graph shows the change in the duration of crying over a 7 day period.

Variability in behavior

Your child's behavior fluctuates from day to day. Here are a few things to keep in mind.



Behavior often gets worse before it gets better. Your child might act out because you change the way you respond to his behavior. This is normal and not a sign that the plan won't work.

Also, once behavior improves, it's possible old behaviors will come back. Your child might engage in an old behavior to see if he can get the result he got in the past. Again, this is not a sign that the intervention isn't working. You just need to stick to the plan and stay consistent.

Your BCBA® will let you know if it's time to try something else.



BEHAVIOR CHANGE TAKES TIME

Behavior change happens gradually over time. Collecting and graphing data helps us see if the interventions are working and when it might be time to try a new strategy.

How Do I Know If This Is Working? Assignment

Choose a data collection method and use it to measure your child's behavior. You can also use the data collection method recommended by your BCBA.

Behavior	Frequency

Behavior	Duration

Behavior	Likert Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Least intense				Most intense

How Do I Know If This Is Working?

Quiz

1. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that has a discrete beginning and end and takes only a moment to complete?
 - A. Frequency/rate
 - B. Duration
 - C. Likert scale

2. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that occurs over varying amounts of time and doesn't have a discrete beginning and end?
 - A. Frequency/rate
 - B. Duration
 - C. Likert scale

3. Only your BCBA can graph data.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that may be more acceptable if it occurs at a lower intensity?
 - A. Frequency/rate
 - B. Duration
 - C. Likert scale

5. Data collection is hard and takes a lot of time.
 - A. True
 - B. False

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

GOAL

To help you support your child in learning how to manage emotions, handle frustration, and build self-regulation skills.

BACKGROUND

Every child experiences big emotions, but some struggle more than others to manage them. If your child has frequent meltdowns, difficulty calming down, or trouble handling frustration, you're not alone.

Children may struggle with emotional regulation because:

- Their brain is still developing – Skills like impulse control and flexibility take time.
- They lack coping strategies – Without tools to manage emotions, they may cry, hit, or shut down.
- They have trouble communicating – When they can't express their needs, frustration builds.
- They are sensitive to their environment – Loud noises, bright lights, or sudden changes can feel overwhelming.

Emotional regulation can be taught. With patience, consistency, and the right strategies, you can help your child develop the skills to manage emotions in a healthy way.

WHY TEACH EMOTIONAL REGULATION?

Emotional regulation is an essential life skill. When your child learns how to manage emotions, they can:

- Handle frustration more easily
- Express their needs in a positive way
- Feel more confident and independent
- Build stronger relationships

When children can regulate emotions, they have more positive interactions with family, teachers, and peers, and experience more independence.

Your support is the key to helping your child succeed. The following strategies will guide you in teaching emotional regulation in ways that are simple, practical, and backed by research.

CO-REGULATION

Before a child can regulate emotions on their own, they need to experience co-regulation—which means feeling safe, supported, and understood when big emotions happen.

WHAT IS CO-REGULATION?

Co-regulation is the process of helping your child manage their emotions by providing calm, supportive guidance. Young children, and even older children who struggle with self-regulation, cannot calm down on their own—they need a trusted adult to help them navigate their emotions.

Think of it this way: when a baby is crying, we don't expect them to soothe themselves immediately. Instead, we rock them, hum, and offer comfort until they settle. As children grow, they still need that external regulation before they can learn internal regulation. If a child is overwhelmed, their brain is in a fight-or-flight mode, and they are not ready to listen, process, or use coping strategies. Before they can calm down, they need to feel safe.

Do this:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Stay close and present<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let your child know you are there without forcing interaction.✓ Use a calm, steady voice<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your child will mirror your tone and body language.✓ Offer simple, reassuring words<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I see you're upset. I'm here." | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Match their energy, then guide them down<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with a firm but calm presence, then slow your breathing, soften your voice, and bring them with you.✓ Provide sensory support<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some children respond best to movement, gentle touch, or rhythmic rocking. |
|---|--|

WHAT TYPE OF INTERACTIONS DOES YOUR CHILD RESPOND BEST TO?

TEACHING COPING STRATEGIES

Once your child is calm, they need tools to manage emotions next time. But not every strategy works for every child.

BREATHING EXERCISES

Teach deep breathing by pretending to blow up a balloon slowly, then letting the air out gently. This helps slow the body's response to stress and signals the brain to calm down. Practice when your child is calm so they can use it in difficult moments.

MOVEMENT-BASED STRATEGIES

Some children need to move their bodies to regulate emotions. Activities like jumping, wall push-ups, stretching, or swinging provide sensory input that helps with calming and focus. Movement can also serve as a replacement behavior for aggression or restlessness.

SENSORY SUPPORTS

Many children find comfort in certain textures or weights. Offer a weighted blanket, a fidget toy, or a calming texture like playdough. Experiment with different sensory inputs to find what works best for your child.

PREDICTABILITY TOOLS

Sudden changes can trigger emotional dysregulation. Use visual schedules, "First-Then" boards, or timers to prepare your child for transitions and reduce anxiety. Knowing what to expect can make difficult moments easier to manage.

USE A QUIET SPACE

Overstimulation can lead to emotional overwhelm. Create a calm area where your child can go to regroup. This space should feel safe and not be used as punishment but rather as a place where they can regain control.

ENCOURAGE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Teach your child how to ask for help using words, signs, or visuals. For nonverbal children, having an easy-to-use communication method can prevent frustration. Model problem-solving by talking through your own challenges in front of them.

REINFORCING SELF-REGULATION BEHAVIORS

Helping your child build self-regulation skills requires consistent reinforcement so they can learn to use these strategies on their own. Reinforcement strengthens behaviors, making it more likely that your child will choose healthy coping skills in the future.



NOTICE THE EFFORT, NOT JUST THE OUTCOME

Praise your child for trying to regulate their emotions, even if they aren't successful every time. Saying, "I love how you took a deep breath before asking for help!" helps them recognize their progress and feel motivated to keep trying.



ENCOURAGE FLEXIBLE THINKING

When your child successfully adapts to a change, acknowledge it. "You wanted the blue cup, but you used the green one instead—that was a great choice!" This helps children learn that flexibility is a skill that makes life easier.



REINFORCE PROBLEM-SOLVING

If your child finds a way to manage frustration without an outburst, let them know you noticed. "You figured out another way to do it! I love how you didn't give up." Encouraging problem-solving builds confidence and teaches them that challenges can be worked through.

REINFORCING SELF-REGULATION BEHAVIORS



USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT STRATEGIES

Small rewards, praise, or a preferred activity can be great motivators for children learning self-regulation. Reinforcement doesn't always have to be tangible—a high-five, a hug, or words of encouragement can be just as effective.



CREATE SELF-MONITORING OPPORTUNITIES

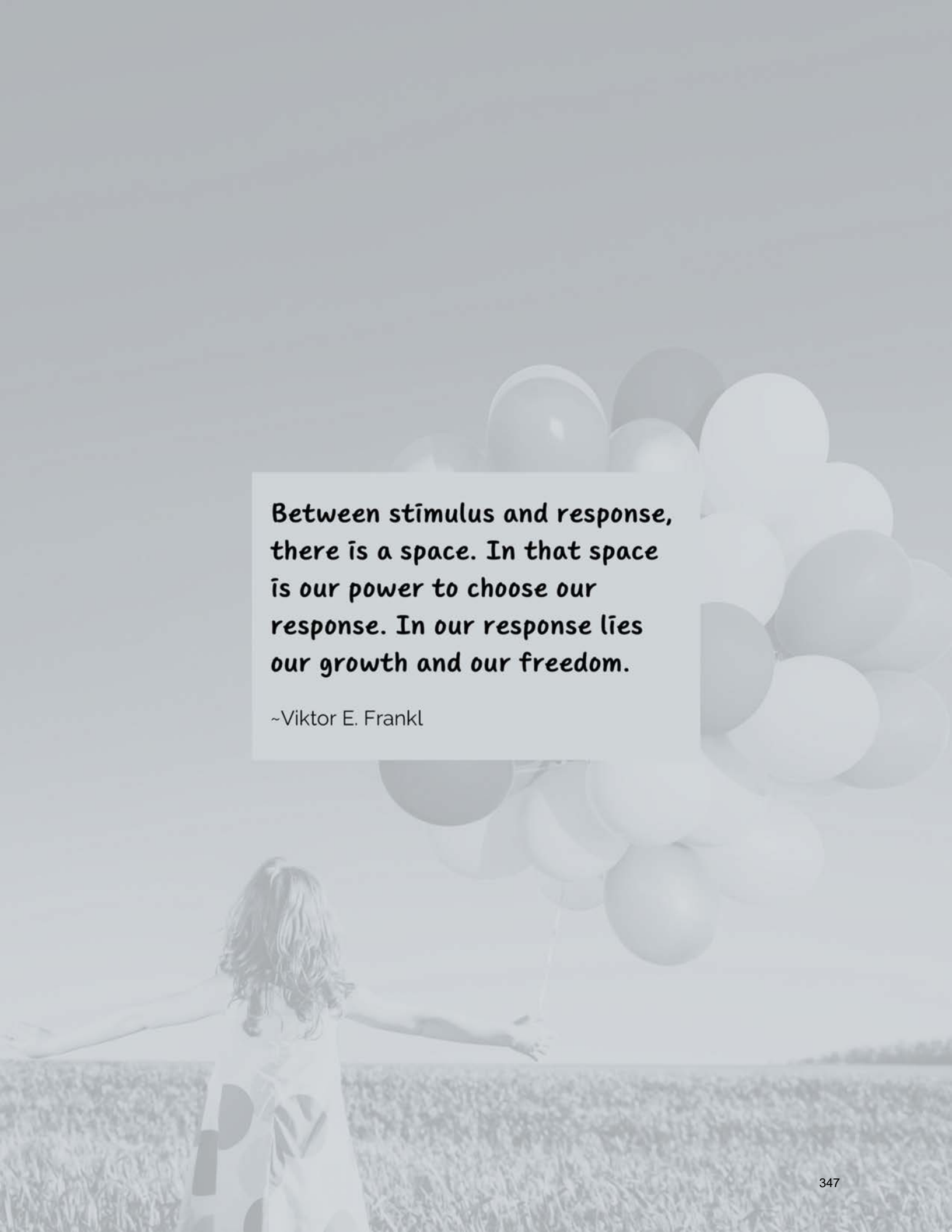
As your child develops regulation skills, encourage them to recognize their own progress. "How did you feel when you took a deep breath before answering?" This reflection helps them become more aware of what strategies work best for them.



MODEL SELF-REGULATION YOURSELF

Children learn best by watching the adults around them. If you're feeling frustrated, model self-regulation strategies: "I'm feeling overwhelmed, so I'm going to take a deep breath before I respond." When children see self-regulation in action, they are more likely to use those skills themselves.

The more you reinforce positive self-regulation behaviors, the more your child will use them. Over time, these skills will become a natural part of how they manage emotions, building confidence, independence, and resilience.

A young girl with long, wavy hair, seen from behind, stands in a grassy field. She is wearing a light-colored dress with large dark polka dots. She holds a large cluster of balloons in her right hand, with her left arm extended outwards. The balloons are in various shades of grey and white. The background is a soft-focus landscape with a clear sky.

**Between stimulus and response,
there is a space. In that space
is our power to choose our
response. In our response lies
our growth and our freedom.**

~Viktor E. Frankl

Emotional Regulation Assignment

Observe and Support

Pay attention to a moment when your child experiences a big emotion. Try to stay calm and supportive as they work through it.

What happened?	How did your child react?	What did you do to help?	What worked or didn't work?

Teach a Coping Skill

When your child is calm, introduce one simple strategy they can use when they feel upset. Choose one below:

- ☐ Take a deep breath together
- ☐ Offer a fidget toy or sensory tool
- ☐ Use a calm-down space
- ☐ Show them how to ask for help
- ☐ Use a visual schedule or timer

Celebrate Progress

Notice and encourage your child's efforts, even small ones. Try saying:

- "I noticed how you..."
- "That was a great way to handle..."
- "You worked so hard to..."
- "I love how you..."
- "You did a great job..."
- "I saw you stop and think before..."
- "You handled that situation really well by..."
- "That was a smart choice to..."
- "You are getting so good at..."

Emotional Regulation Quiz

1. What is emotional regulation?
 - A. The ability to ignore emotions and stay focused
 - B. The skill of recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions in a healthy way
 - C. A behavior that children develop automatically without guidance
 - D. A strategy used only for children with special needs

2. Why do some children struggle with emotional regulation?
 - A. Their brain is still developing, and self-regulation skills take time to grow
 - B. They choose to have meltdowns to get attention
 - C. They need more discipline and strict rules
 - D. Emotional regulation is a skill that cannot be taught

3. Which of the following is an example of co-regulation?
 - A. Ignoring your child's emotions so they learn to manage them on their own
 - B. Telling your child to stop crying immediately when they get upset
 - C. Staying calm, using a soothing voice, and modeling deep breaths when your child is overwhelmed
 - D. Letting your child experience frustration without any support or guidance

4. What is the best way to teach emotional regulation skills?
 - A. Correcting the child only when they are upset
 - B. Practicing coping skills when the child is already calm
 - C. Using punishment when a child displays big emotions
 - D. Avoiding situations that might upset the child

5. Which of these strategies can help a child develop emotional regulation?
 - A. Encouraging deep breathing and using sensory tools
 - B. Avoiding all frustrating situations so they never get upset
 - C. Forcing a child to calm down quickly without support
 - D. Ignoring emotional outbursts completely

FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING (FCT)

GOAL

To help you teach your child to communicate effectively using Functional Communication Training (FCT), a strategy that replaces challenging behaviors with meaningful communication.

BACKGROUND

When your child is crying, jumping, or yelling, you may feel confused and unsure how to respond. These behaviors can feel overwhelming, especially when they happen frequently.

But here's the key:

- Challenging behaviors are not random—they are your child's way of communicating.
- If your child knew how to express their needs differently, they would.
- FCT provides them with a clear, effective alternative to express what they need.

By using FCT, you bridge the gap between frustration and understanding. You help your child replace challenging behaviors with meaningful, appropriate ways to express themselves.

WHY USE FCT?

Every behavior serves a purpose—it helps a child get something they want or avoid something they don't. Instead of seeing behaviors as "good" or "bad," we focus on understanding what the child is trying to say.

Using FCT recognizes:

- All behavior is communication—your child's actions are a way of expressing needs.
- FCT replaces frustration with understanding
- Teaching communication builds trust

By implementing FCT, you empower your child with a voice, reduce stress, and create a stronger, more connected relationship.

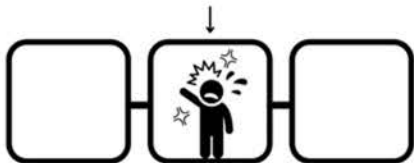
IDENTIFY THE FUNCTION OF BEHAVIOR

Before teaching a new way to communicate, you need to understand why your child is engaging in the behavior you're interested in changing. Take time to observe your child. This will show you what your child is communicating with their behavior.



WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE?

When your child engages in a behavior you want to change, notice what happened right before the behavior started. Were they asked to do something? Were they denied access to an item?



WHAT DOES THE BEHAVIOR LOOK LIKE?

Consider what the behavior looks like. Does it look the same every time or are there different variations of it? Does it look the same or different when you're not home?



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER?

Notice what happens right after your child engages in the behavior. Do they get attention, even in the form of a reprimand? Do they avoid a task? Do they get something the like?

WHAT PATTERN CAN YOU SEE EMERGE?

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATING?

All behavior is communication.

Understanding what your child is communicating with their behavior is critical to the success of FCT. Through FCT, you will be teaching your child a better way to get what they want instead of relying on the challenging behavior, but if you don't know what they want, you won't know what to teach them.

Generally, people engage in behavior (all behavior) to get something good or to escape something they don't like. Sometimes this is more obvious than others, and sometimes it can seem a little complicated. As a baby, your child's behavior was probably pretty easy to understand. If they cried, they may have been hungry or tired. Maybe they needed a new diaper or wanted to be held.

As your child grows, their experiences with the world make their behavior gradually more complicated, but with a little practice, you can become an amazing detective. Below are some things that your child might access or escape.

ACCESS

Get something good

When a child uses behavior to "get something good," the child might access:

- Attention from an adult or peer
- A favorite toy or snack
- A fun activity
- A sensory experience

ESCAPE

Avoid something bad

When a child uses behavior to "avoid something bad," the child might escape:

- Attention from an adult or peer
- A difficult task
- A task that will take a long time to complete
- A sensory experience

Where this sometimes becomes a little complicated is that there's often more than one reason a child engages in a behavior. Your child might start crying because he wants a specific toy, but he might also want your attention or to avoid going to bed. During FCT, you will teach your child to communicate very specifically what they want. We will talk more about this in the next step.

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD COMMUNICATING?

CHOOSE A COMMUNICATION METHOD

How will your child communicate?

Once you understand why your child is engaging in a certain behavior, the next step is to decide how they can communicate what they need in a more effective way. Not all children use spoken words, and even those who do may struggle to express themselves when they are overwhelmed or upset. This is why it's important to choose a communication method that works for your child's unique abilities—one that allows them to express their needs quickly and easily, even in challenging moments.

Your child's new way of communicating should be:

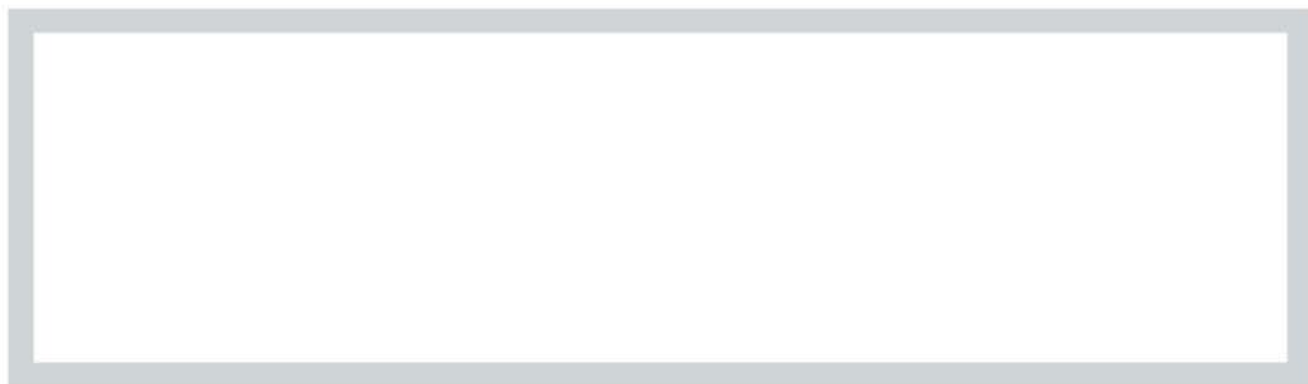
- ✓ Simple—easy for them to use.
- ✓ Effective—gets their needs met faster than the challenging behavior

Common Communication Methods

There are many ways a child can communicate their needs, and the best method depends on their current abilities. The goal is to choose an option that is simple, accessible, and effective.

- Verbal Words or Phrases – Some children can learn to use short, functional words such as "Help" or "Break" to express their needs.
- Gestures or Signs – Pointing, waving, or other hand signals can provide a nonverbal way to communicate.
- Picture Exchange or Visual Cards – A child may hand over a picture of an item they want, such as a toy or snack, instead of using behavior to request it.
- AAC Devices or Speech Buttons – For children who need additional support, an augmentative communication device or a button programmed with a specific phrase can help them express themselves.

WHAT COMMUNICATION METHOD WILL YOUR CHILD USE?



CHOOSE A COMMUNICATIVE PHRASE

You will need to choose a word or phrase that is most relevant to your child's needs. In many cases, a simple, specific word related to what they are trying to access or avoid—such as "Break" or "Cookie"—is enough.

However, some children might need to "get it all" in order to avoid the challenging behavior. For these children, a more general phrase like "I want my way" may be more effective in preventing challenging behaviors (Ghaemmaghmi et al., 2018). The goal is to select a phrase that your child can use consistently and successfully across different situations.

WHICH PHRASE WILL WORK?

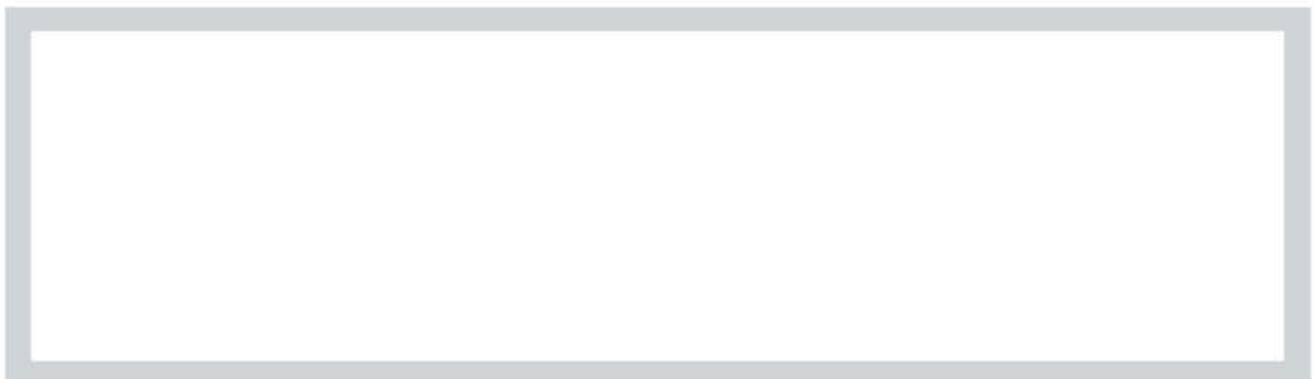
Ensure the phrase results in the same outcome as the challenging behavior.

Examples of Words or Phrases:

- If your child hits when they want to escape doing their homework, they could be taught to say "Break."
- If they throw objects to get a cookie, they could learn to say "cookie" or hand over a picture of a cookie.
- If they become overwhelmed in loud environments, they could request "All done."
- If they need to access toys and attention while also escaping the demands of homework, they might benefit from a general phrase like "I want my way" that results in them escaping the homework and accessing the toys and attention.

The phrase should be short, functional, and easy to use—especially when emotions are high. The simpler it is, the more likely your child will use it instead of engaging in challenging behavior.

WHAT COMMUNICATIVE PHRASE WILL YOU TEACH?



TEACH AND REINFORCE THE NEW SKILL

Once you've chosen a communication method, it's time to teach and reinforce it so your child learns to use it consistently.

Step 1: Set Up Practice Opportunities

- Identify moments when your child is likely to engage in a challenging behavior.
- Create low-stress opportunities to practice (e.g., placing a favorite toy just out of reach so they can ask for it).

Step 2: Prompt the New Word or Phrase

- Before your child engages in the behavior, prompt them to use the new communication method.
- Keep your prompts simple and clear (e.g., "Say 'Cookie'" or gently guide their hand to a picture).

Step 3: Reinforce Immediately

- Give your child what they asked for as soon as they use the new skill.
- Pair reinforcement with enthusiastic praise ("Great job saying 'Break!'").

EXAMPLE SCENARIO:

Your child cries when they want a snack.

- ✓ Before crying begins, prompt them: "Say 'Snack'" or point to a picture of a snack.
- ✓ When they use the new skill, immediately give them the snack.
- ✓ Praise them: "Great job asking!"

The faster and more consistently you reinforce the new skill, the more likely your child is to use it instead of a challenging behavior.

USE FCT ACROSS SITUATIONS

For Functional Communication Training to be truly effective, your child must be able to use their new communication skills across different settings, with different people, and during different activities. If they only use the skill in one specific situation, they may still rely on challenging behaviors in other environments. To help them succeed, it's important to provide plenty of opportunities for practice and ensure that everyone who interacts with your child encourages the same communication approach.


Do this:

- ✓ **Expand Practice Opportunities**
 - Teach and reinforce the new skill in different locations
 - Encourage your child to use the skill during play, transitions, and interactions with peers
- ✓ **Ensure Consistency**
 - Have teachers, caregivers, and family members respond to the new communication the same way
 - Keep responses predictable
- ✓ **Support Communication Growth**
 - Provide gentle reminders and cues
 - Acknowledge and reinforce all attempts
 - Be patient

Not this:

- ✗ **Limiting Practice to One Setting**
 - Only teaching the skill at home or during ABA sessions
 - Expecting your child to automatically use the skill in new places
- ✗ **Inconsistent Responses**
 - Only some caregivers reinforce the new communication
 - Failing to prompt the new phrase before the behavior
 - Responding differently each time
- ✗ **Expecting Immediate Mastery**
 - Withholding reinforcement if their communication attempt isn't perfect
 - Getting frustrated if progress is slow

WHERE CAN YOU PRACTICE FCT?



*The single biggest problem in
communication is the illusion
that it has taken place.*

~George Bernard Shaw

FCT Assignment

Think about how your child currently communicates and how you can introduce a new, more effective way for them to express their needs. Use the prompts below to guide your plan.

Current Communication Behaviors

List three challenging behaviors your child uses to communicate.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Identifying the Function

For each behavior, write what you think your child is trying to communicate.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Choosing a New Communication Method

What communication method will you teach your child? (Check one or more)

- ☐ Verbal Words/Phrases
- ☐ Gestures/Signs
- ☐ Picture Exchange or Visual Cards
- ☐ AAC Device

Practice Plan

Where will you practice this skill?
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Community
- ☐ School or daycare
- ☐ Other

Who will help reinforce the new communication? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Siblings
- ☐ Other Caregivers/Family

FCT Quiz

1. What is the primary goal of Functional Communication Training (FCT)?
 - A. To eliminate all challenging behaviors
 - B. To help children communicate their needs in a more effective way
 - C. To teach children to follow directions without question
 - D. To discourage children from expressing frustration
2. Before choosing a new communication method, what should you do first?
 - A. Ignore the challenging behavior
 - B. Teach a replacement skill right away
 - C. Identify the function of the behavior
 - D. Use the same communication method for all children
3. Which of the following is an example of an effective communication method in FCT?
 - A. A child hitting a sibling to get a toy
 - B. A child pointing to a picture of a toy to request it
 - C. A child screaming when they want attention
 - D. A child refusing to make eye contact
4. Why is it important to teach a communication method that is easy for the child to use?
 - A. So they can use it faster than engaging in the challenging behavior
 - B. Because all children must use verbal speech
 - C. So they don't have to practice it in different settings
 - D. To make it easier for adults to respond to them
5. What is a key strategy for ensuring a child consistently uses their new communication skill?
 - A. Only have parents encourage the new skill
 - B. Only practice it at home
 - C. Let the child figure out when to use it on their own
 - D. Reinforce the skill every time the child uses it correctly

USING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT ABA

GOAL

To help you effectively use technology as part of your child's ABA program, creating structure, supporting skill development, and enhancing motivation.

BACKGROUND

Technology can play a valuable role in supporting your child's ABA journey. When integrated thoughtfully, technology can reinforce learning, clarify routines, and encourage independence.

Technology supports ABA by:

- Creating structure
- Increasing motivation
- Supporting independence
- Improving communication

By working closely with your BCBA®, you can identify ways technology can best support your child's specific goals.

TECHNOLOGY TIPS

Using technology effectively means:

- Choosing apps that match your child's ABA goals.
- Using visual schedules to simplify routines.
- Balancing screen time to prevent overuse.
- Communicating regularly with your BCBA® about technology use.
- Adjusting technology use based on your child's progress.

Integrating technology into ABA strategies helps your child build essential skills and achieve greater success. The following steps will guide you in selecting and implementing technology effectively.

VISUAL SUPPORTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Visual supports can significantly improve your child's understanding of routines and expectations, making daily life smoother for both of you. By visually clarifying expectations, you help reduce anxiety and increase your child's independence.

STAY CALM & MODEL FLEXIBILITY

Visuals can be particularly helpful in situations where clarity, routine, or additional guidance is needed. Consider using visual supports in these common scenarios:

- **Daily Routines:** Morning routines, bedtime routines, meal times.
- **New or Difficult Tasks:** Learning to dress independently, following multi-step instructions.
- **Transitions:** Moving from one activity to another, preparing for outings.

TYPES OF VISUAL SUPPORTS

Visual supports come in many forms, and choosing the right one depends on your child's unique needs. Here are some common, effective visuals you can use to help your child understand routines, expectations, and transitions more clearly:

- **Picture Schedules:** Clearly outline the sequence of daily activities.
- **First-Then Boards:** Show your child what to complete first and the rewarding activity that follows.
- **Choice Boards:** Empower your child to make choices, enhancing their independence.
- **Timers:** Provide visual clarity for the duration of activities or transitions.

EXAMPLE

Create a simple visual schedule for your child's morning routine with clear pictures or icons like the one pictured to the right. Using this visual support each day provides structure and consistency, making mornings smoother and more positive for everyone.



Wake up



Brush teeth



Get dressed



Eat breakfast



Get backpack

REINFORCING SKILLS USING TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be a powerful tool to reinforce the skills your child is learning during ABA sessions. Apps and digital tools offer creative and interactive ways to make skill-building engaging and motivating.

WHEN TO USE TECHNOLOGY AS REINFORCEMENT

Your BCBA® may recommend technology as reinforcement to:

- ✓ Encourage practice of new or difficult skills.
- ✓ Motivate your child to complete tasks they usually avoid.
- ✓ Reward your child after successful completion of important daily routines.
- ✓ Create a sense of structure and predictability.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

Technology is most beneficial when used thoughtfully and intentionally. Choosing the right tool to support your child's specific ABA goals can boost motivation, clarify expectations, and reinforce learning. Here are several effective ways to integrate technology into your child's daily routines and skill-building activities:



Token Boards-Digital token boards visually track progress toward rewards, helping your child stay motivated. Tokens earned for specific behaviors can be exchanged for time on a preferred device or app.



Educational Games-Interactive apps and games aligned with your child's ABA goals can reinforce learning through play. Choose games focused on specific skills like counting, letter recognition, or social skills.



Video Modeling-Short videos demonstrating specific skills provide clear visual examples. Watching these videos can reinforce social interactions, self-care tasks, or communication skills.

MAKING TECHNOLOGY MEANINGFUL

Remember, technology works best when it's balanced with hands-on learning and clear limits. Work closely with your BCBA® to find tools that fit your child's individual needs, and adjust their use based on your child's progress and response.

BALANCING TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be highly motivating for children. Used strategically, screen time can encourage learning, skill-building, and positive behavior. But it's important to use it intentionally, not as an unlimited distraction.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

Select technology that aligns with your child's interests and goals. The right choice makes learning feel fun and rewarding:

- Educational Games – Reinforce academic and problem-solving skills.
- Interactive Books – Foster early literacy and language skills.
- Music and Videos – Support learning through songs, dances, or movement.
- Leisure Games – Games designed for fun and interest.

SETTING LIMITS

Setting clear boundaries around technology helps your child develop healthy habits:

- Define clear rules – Specify when, where, and for how long technology can be used.
- Set visual timers – Clearly show how much time remains to reduce frustration.
- Consistent reinforcement – Reward your child for following technology rules.

BALANCING SCREEN TIME

Balance technology use with physical activity, family interactions, and hands-on learning:

- Schedule screen-free time – Set aside daily periods for creative play or outdoor activities.
- Encourage social interactions – Combine technology use with interactive family activities.
- Rotate activities – Alternate screen activities with active, hands-on tasks.

How can technology support your child's learning without becoming overwhelming?



PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Your BCBA® plays an essential role in helping you integrate technology successfully into your child's ABA program. By collaborating closely, you can ensure technology supports your child's growth without becoming overwhelming.

HOW YOUR BCBA® CAN HELP

Your BCBA® has specialized knowledge and experience to guide you effectively.

- **Personalized Recommendations:** Help identify the best technology tools that align with your child's ABA goals.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Offer strategies for establishing clear limits on screen time and tech usage.
- **Fade Technology Supports:** Provide guidance on reducing technology prompts and reinforcers gradually.
- **Problem-Solving:** Assist you when technology tools or strategies aren't working as expected.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Open communication strengthens your partnership with your BCBA®. Be sure to regularly share what's working well and where you're running into challenges. Use your meetings as a chance to review how technology is being used and whether it's helping support your child's goals. And if you're ever unsure about how to implement a recommendation or use a particular tool, don't hesitate to ask questions—your BCBA® is there to help.

KEEP IT CONSISTENT

Consistency is key when using technology to support ABA. Work with your BCBA® to ensure that the strategies you're using at home align with what's happening during sessions. When everyone is on the same page, your child is more likely to succeed.

TECHNOLOGY TOOLKIT CHECKLIST

Ready to get started? Use this quick checklist to confidently and effectively support your ABA strategies with technology. You don't need to do everything at once—just take it one step at a time.

GETTING STARTED

Before jumping into new tools, it's helpful to have a clear plan. Focus on just one or two areas where technology can truly make a difference for your child.

- Identify one or two areas to support, such as visual schedules, timers, or reinforcement tools.
- Collaborate with your BCBA® to select tools that are appropriate for your child's developmental level and goals.
- Explore the app or tool yourself to understand how it works before introducing it to your child.

PREPARE FOR USING TECHNOLOGY WELL


How you introduce and use technology matters. Support your child's success by using it during calm, predictable moments and setting your child up for success.

- Establish clear rules and routines for how and when technology will be used.
- Practice new tools when your child is calm and not already overwhelmed.
- Watch closely to see how your child responds—adjust the timing, support, or tool if needed.

KEEPING BALANCE

While technology can support learning and behavior, too much of it can get in the way. Creating balance ensures your child continues to develop important real-world skills.

- Set aside daily time for non-tech play, movement, and face-to-face interaction.
- Use visual schedules, first-then boards, or timers to clearly show when tech time begins and ends.
- Reinforce participation in offline activities to encourage a healthy balance between screen time and skill-building.

A faded, light-colored background image of a wedding scene. A bride in a white dress is visible, and a groom is partially seen wearing a lei made of white flowers. The image is soft and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.

~Bill Gates

Using Technology to Support ABA Assignment

Try It Out

Choose one technology tool (such as a visual schedule app, timer, or reinforcement tracker) to support your child this week. Use it during a routine, transition, or skill-building activity.

What did you try?	When did you use it?	How did your child respond?	What might you change next time?

Choose a Focus

What skill or routine do you want to support with technology? Choose one:

- ☐ Morning routine
- ☐ Bedtime routine
- ☐ Transitions between activities
- ☐ Waiting or turn-taking
- ☐ Task completion (e.g., chores, schoolwork)

Tech-Free Time Planning

Plan at least one tech-free activity you and your child can enjoy together this week.

Here are some examples:

- Go for a walk
- Build with blocks or Legos
- Read a book
- Cook or bake something simple
- Do a puzzle

Using Technology To Support ABA Quiz

1. Visual schedules, timers, and choice boards are examples of technology that can support your child's independence and daily routines.

A. True
B. False

2. Which of the following is a sign that technology use may be interfering with your child's progress?

A. Your child transitions easily away from screens
B. Your child chooses a tech-free activity without prompting
C. Your child has frequent tantrums when technology is removed
D. Your child uses a visual timer to end screen time independently

3. Using technology as a reinforcer should be avoided in ABA-based programs.

A. True
B. False

4. What is one way your BCBA® can support the use of technology in your child's ABA plan?

A. Set screen time limits for all children
B. Recommend devices based on brand popularity
C. Help match technology tools to your child's goals
D. Remove all technology from your child's day

5. It's important to build in tech-free time each day to encourage social interaction and other types of play.

A. True
B. False

TROUBLESHOOTING ABA STRATEGIES

GOAL

To help you analyze and adjust ABA strategies when they don't seem to be working, so you can better support your child's progress and problem-solve effectively.

BACKGROUND

As a parent, you've worked hard to implement ABA strategies to support your child's learning and behavior. But sometimes, despite your best efforts, a strategy doesn't seem to be working. More often than not, small adjustments can make a big difference.

Children may struggle with ABA strategies because:

- They don't fully understand what's expected
- They need a different approach
- The strategy itself needs modification
- Their needs or environment have changed

Problem-solving is a skill that parents can develop, and with a few simple troubleshooting steps, you can refine strategies and help your child succeed.

TROUBLESHOOTING ESSENTIALS

Troubleshooting is an integral part of ABA services. It's how we learn what works for each individual child. Making changes doesn't mean you did something wrong, it means that your getting closer to making things better.

Keep in mind:

- Small adjustments can make a big difference.
- Behavior might temporarily get worse before improving.
- Look for patterns.
- Your approach matters.
- Know when to ask for help.

Understanding how to analyze and adjust ABA strategies allows you to problem-solve effectively instead of abandoning interventions prematurely. The following steps will guide you in troubleshooting, adjusting, and finding what works best for your child.

STEP 1: CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Use this checklist to ensure you're giving the strategy enough time and assessing progress accurately:

Have I given the strategy enough time to work? Some changes take days or even weeks to show results.

Is my child's resistance part of an extinction burst? Behavior may temporarily get worse before improving.

Am I expecting progress too quickly? Learning new behaviors takes time and consistency.

Have I looked for small signs of improvement? Progress isn't always immediate but may show in subtle ways.

Am I focusing only on the final outcome? Celebrate small steps in the right direction.

Have I considered outside factors? Fatigue, hunger, or sensory sensitivities can impact behavior and response to strategies.

Am I adjusting too quickly? Changing strategies too soon can prevent the child from fully learning the new behavior.

Do I need to check in with my BCBA®? If you're unsure whether to continue or modify an approach, seeking guidance can help.

One of the most frustrating things for parents is when things seem to get worse before they get better. But here's the thing—that can actually be a sign that the strategy is working!

For example, let's say your child is used to getting what they want by crying or yelling. Now, you're teaching them to ask instead. At first, they may cry even more because they're realizing their old way doesn't work anymore. This is called an extinction burst—it's your child's subconscious way of testing if you really mean it.

Ensuring that your expectations are reasonable can reduce frustration for both you and your child.

STEP 2: DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Before making any changes, you need to clearly identify what isn't working. Is the strategy itself ineffective, or is there something about how it's being delivered that needs adjustment? Take a step back and ask yourself the following questions:



Is my child struggling to understand what's expected?



Are they getting frustrated or upset when using this strategy?



Does the intervention work sometimes but not in other situations?



Are there times when my child is more successful with this skill?

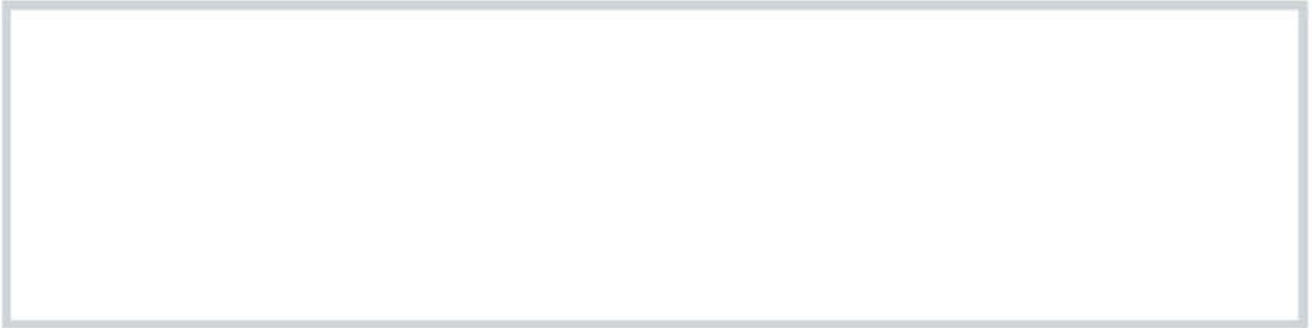


Is my child motivated to participate, or do they resist the process?

BREAK DOWN THE ISSUE

Once you've identified that something isn't working, the next step is to determine why. Make a note of what might be impacting the effectiveness of the intervention.

The strategy itself: Is it the right approach for your child? Some strategies work well for certain children but may not be the best fit for yours.



The way it's being delivered: Timing, tone, and body language all affect how a child responds to an intervention. If the delivery feels stressful or unclear, they may resist it.



Other external factors: Fatigue, hunger, sensory sensitivities, or environmental distractions can all impact whether a strategy is effective.



STEP 3: MAKE A SMALL ADJUSTMENT

Once you've identified the problem, it's time to make a small change and test whether it improves the situation. Changing too much at once can make it difficult to see what actually helps. Instead, try one of the following adjustments:

MODIFY THE WAY INSTRUCTIONS ARE GIVEN.

Try using a visual prompt, reducing verbal instructions, or modeling the action instead of simply telling your child what to do.

ADJUST REINFORCEMENT.

Make sure the reward is something meaningful to your child and delivered immediately after the desired behavior.

CHANGE THE TIMING.

If transitions are difficult, try offering extra time, a countdown, or a structured warning before a change occurs.

MODIFY THE ENVIRONMENT.

Reduce distractions, adjust lighting or noise levels, or create a more structured setting to support learning.

Example: Improving Morning Dressing

If your child resists getting dressed each morning, try choosing 1 of the following:

- Letting them choose between two outfit options to provide a sense of control.
- Using a first/then statement (e.g., "First shirt, then breakfast") to create structure.
- Offering a preferred activity after dressing to increase motivation.

By making small, targeted changes, you can assess what helps your child succeed and refine the strategy accordingly.

STEP 4: OBSERVE AND ASSESS

After making an adjustment, take time to observe how your child responds. Ask yourself:

- Is the behavior improving, staying the same, or getting worse?
- Does the strategy work better in some situations than others?
- Is my child showing small signs of progress that I might have overlooked?

GIVE IT TIME

- **Some strategies take longer to show results.** Be patient and allow your child time to adjust.
- **Watch for patterns.** If the strategy works at certain times or in specific environments, that's a clue about what's helping or hindering progress.
- **If no progress is made after a reasonable amount of time,** try another small adjustment or consult your BCBA®.

WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the user to write their next steps.

STEP 5: KNOW WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Sometimes, even with adjustments, a strategy still isn't working. If you've tried multiple small changes and are still not seeing progress, it may be time to seek additional support from your BCBA®. A professional can help:

IDENTIFY UNDERLYING FACTORS.

Sometimes a lack of progress is caused by something outside the strategy itself, such as sensory sensitivities, medical issues, or environmental stressors. Observing your child's behavior across different settings can help uncover hidden barriers.

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES.

Sometimes a child needs a different approach to support learning. A BCBA® can introduce new strategies, such as alternative reinforcement systems, modified prompts, or new skill-building techniques.

ADJUST THE STRATEGY BASED ON DATA AND OBSERVATIONS.

If a strategy isn't working, reviewing past successes and challenges can guide necessary changes. A BCBA® can help track progress and refine interventions based on measurable outcomes.


ENSURE CONSISTENCY ACROSS CAREGIVERS.

If a strategy works in one setting but not another, it may be due to inconsistent implementation. A BCBA® can help create a plan that ensures all caregivers are using the same approach to maximize effectiveness.

If you ever feel stuck or overwhelmed, remember—you're not in this alone. Seeking help is a sign of strength and an important step toward supporting your child's success.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE BCBA®



A grayscale photograph of a man and a child walking away on a path. The man is in the foreground, wearing a dark jacket and pants, walking towards the right. The child is slightly behind him, wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts, also walking towards the right. The path is surrounded by trees and foliage, and the background is a bright, hazy landscape.

**Do the best you can
until you know better.
Then when you know
better, do better.**

~Maya Angelou

Troubleshooting Assignment

Choose one ABA strategy that you're currently using with your child and go through the troubleshooting steps outlined in this lesson. Write your responses below.

Step 1: Check Your Expectations

Are your expectations of the interventions realistic?

- ☐ Have I given it enough time?
- ☐ Have I looked for small progress?
- ☐ Have I considered other factors?

Step 3: Make a Small Adjustment

What changes could you make to the strategy?

1 2 _____

3 _____

Choose 1 to implement:

Step 2: Define the Problem

Identify 3 factors that might be impacting the effectiveness of the intervention.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Step 4: Observe and Assess

How did your child respond?

Improved

☐

Stayed the same

☐

Got worse

☐

Step 5: Know When to Seek Help

Do you feel confident in continuing to adjust this strategy on your own?

☐ Yes - Keep adjusting

☐ No - Contact the BCBA®

Troubleshooting ABA Strategies Quiz

1. If an ABA strategy doesn't seem to be working right away, it means the strategy is ineffective.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. When troubleshooting an ABA strategy, what should you do first?
 - A. Try a completely different strategy right away
 - B. Check your expectations and give the strategy time to work
 - C. Remove reinforcement to see if that changes behavior
 - D. Ignore the behavior and hope it improves on its own

3. If a strategy is not working, it's best to make multiple changes at once to speed up progress.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Which of the following is NOT a possible reason why an ABA strategy may not be working?
 - A. The child does not fully understand what is expected
 - B. The strategy is not a good fit for the child
 - C. The parent is adjusting the strategy too soon
 - D. The child is purposefully trying to be difficult

5. When should you seek additional help from a BCBA®?
 - A. If you've tried small adjustments and are still not seeing progress
 - B. As soon as your child resists the strategy once
 - C. If the behavior gets slightly worse before it improves
 - D. Only if your child has a major meltdown

Answer Key

Purpose and Expectations

Answers

1. Often, ABA helps to change challenging behavior by:
C. Teaching caregivers to change their own behavior
2. ABA is medically necessary for many autistic children and should last for the individual's entire lifetime.
B. False
3. Sending your child to ABA will fix his behavior even if you don't change things at home.
B. False
4. Parent coaching is important because it helps you:
D. All of the above
5. ABA parent coaching will give you the tools you need to know how best to respond to your child's behavior at home.
A. True

Scope and Structure Answers

1. Parent coaching includes goal development, ABA principles, data review, problem solving and
C. Homework
2. ABA services should include either skill acquisition goals or behavior reduction goals, not both.
B. False
3. The BCBA will teach you everything that an RBT knows.
B. False
4. Learning ABA strategies helps you use them at home and leads to greater success for your child.
A. True
5. You should implement all the interventions used during ABA therapy at home every day.
B. False

Setting Effective Goals Answers

1. Writing a goal that thoroughly describes the behavior you want to increase or decrease is covered by which component of SMART?
A. Specific
2. Writing a goal that is meaningful to your child and will lead to a better quality of life is covered by which component of SMART?
D. Relevant
3. Writing a goal that includes a deadline of some sort is covered by which component of SMART?
E. Timely
4. Writing a goal that is likely to be effective in the given time frame is covered by which component of SMART?
C. Achievable
5. Writing a goal that includes an element that can be counted is covered by which component of SMART?
B. Measurable

ABA Strategies That Stick Answers

1. Why is building habits important when using ABA strategies?
 - A. Habits make strategies automatic, reducing stress and increasing consistency
2. What is the best way to start building new habits?
 - B. Focus on just one strategy at a time and tie it to an existing routine
3. What is a common solution to forgetting to use an ABA strategy?
 - A. Set reminders like sticky notes or phone alarms
4. How can parents reinforce themselves for using ABA strategies?
 - B. By rewarding themselves with small treats or moments of relaxation for meeting goals.
5. Which of the following statements about making ABA strategies a natural part of life is TRUE?
 - C. ABA strategies should be woven into your existing routines to feel more natural

Understanding ABA Answers

1. ABA is primarily used to target covert behaviors.
B. False
2. ABA is a way to manipulate and control your child.
B. False
3. ABA is a scientifically driven treatment that focuses on teaching skills and _____.
C. Reducing problem behavior
4. ABA is an individualized approach and the interventions will be customized to your child's unique characteristics.
A. True
5. ABA can help reduce which of the following behaviors:
A. Aggression

Sustainable Parenting Answers

1. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your child.
A. True
2. Which of the following is an example of a realistic self-care strategy for overwhelmed parents?
C. Taking a few minutes alone to breathe or stretch
3. If you don't respond perfectly in every situation, you've failed your child.
B. False
4. Which of these is one way to practice self-compassion?
B. Reminding yourself you're doing the best you can
5. Having a support network means you're weak and can't handle things on your own.
B. False

Ethical Considerations for Parents Answers

1. If an intervention is effective at changing behavior, it is always the right choice.
B. False
2. Which of the following is a reason autistic adults have criticized some ABA practices?
B. They feel their autonomy and communication needs were ignored
3. It's important to consider whether a goal benefits your child—not just whether it's easy to teach.
B. True
4. What is one ethical concern when using compliance-based strategies?
B. They can encourage blind obedience without understanding
5. Which of the following is a respectful way to address concerns about your child's ABA services?
C. Bring your concerns to the BCBA® in a calm, collaborative way

Introduction to Teaching New Skills Answers

1. Asking your child to “give me something brown that fell from a tree” is an example of what type of skill?
A. Listener skills
2. When assessing skill deficits, teaching your child to ask for the things he wants fits into which category?
B. Expressive communication
3. Skill deficits lead to (select all that apply):
A. Dependence on adults
C. Challenging behavior
4. Teaching your child to put a pot on his head and pretend it’s a drum is an example of which type of skill?
D. Play
5. Assessments help you determine which skills you should teach your child.
A. True

The Importance of Motivation When Teaching New Skills Answers

1. The money tree refers to:
A. Free access to potential reinforcers
2. When a child has unlimited access to everything they want, what happens to motivation?
B. It decreases
3. What's the one thing a child needs more than anything else when teaching new skills?
C. Motivation
4. Everyone is motivated by the same things.
B. False
5. Objects, activities and interactions that motivate someone to do something are called:
D. Reinforcers

Building a Collaborative Relationship with Your Child

Answers

1. When building a collaborative relationship with your child you should:
D. All of the above
2. You should make sure that your child's favorite items are spread around the room so he can be positively engaged when you're trying to build a collaborative relationship.
B. False
3. You should spend a few minutes engaged in some of your child's favorite activities before trying to teach him new skills.
A. True
4. Rapport, instructional control, and pairing mean:
B. Your child associates you and learning with getting the things he likes best
5. If you already have a positive, loving relationship with your child, you can immediately jump in to teaching new skills.
B. False

Prompting Answers

1. Prompts are the help you give your child to help him respond correctly.

A. True

2. What are the 3 main types of prompts?

A. Visual

B. Physical

D. Verbal

3. Verbal prompts are the easiest prompts to fade so you should use them whenever possible.

B. False

4. If you want to teach your child to finish the phrase "the wheels on the..." you could use which of the following prompts?

D. All of the above

5. You should fade prompts from the most intrusive to the least intrusive to help your child build independence.

A. True

Reinforcement Answers

1. Reinforcers include your child's favorite:
D. All of the above
2. Reinforcement strengthens behavior.
A. True
3. You will save your child's most motivating reinforcers for (select all that apply):
A. New tasks
D. Difficult tasks
4. You should provide reinforcement as soon after the behavior you want to reinforce as possible to avoid accidentally reinforcing the wrong behavior.
A. True
5. The most important things to remember about reinforcement are (select all that apply):
B. Choose reinforcers that motivate your child
C. Deliver reinforcement quickly

Motor Imitation Answers

1. The first step in teaching motor imitation is ____.
C. Choosing targets
2. Motor imitation skills help your child become more independent and develop problem solving skills.
A. True
3. When teaching your child to imitate clapping, you should clap your hands and say "clap."
B. False
4. Motor imitation is important because
A. It allows us to learn new skills without specific teaching
5. Which type of motor movements should you introduce first?
D. Gross motor

Matching Skills Answers

1. Matching skills are important because they help your child
D. All of the above
2. Once your child learns to match identical objects or pictures what should you teach next?
A. Matching nonidentical pictures or objects
3. Which play activity requires matching skills?
B. Inset puzzles
4. When teaching matching skills, you always must start by teaching your child to match pictures.
B. False
5. You should build the difficulty of matching tasks gradually so your child feels successful and doesn't become frustrated.
A. True

Introduction to Expressive Communication Answers

1. Your child has tantrums throughout the day. When he starts crying, you put on your detective hat to try to figure out what he wants. Teaching him which form of communication would reduce your need to be a detective?
C. Requesting
2. Expressive communication refers to how your child interacts verbally with those around her. this includes requesting, labeling, responding to others and
B. Imitating
3. Expressive communication includes all of the following except
A.. Listener skills
4. Teaching your child to communicate opens new doors for her.
A. True
5. Learning to communicate has no impact on challenging behavior
B. False

Teaching Requesting (Manding)

Answers

1. Teaching your child to request may reduce challenging behavior because he will have a more appropriate way to get the things he wants.
A. True
2. Why should you put items out of reach when teaching your child to request?
C. If he can reach the items himself, he does not need to ask
3. Your child must be able to speak to request an item.
B. False
4. If your child doesn't currently say the words for his favorite things, what should you do?
A. Consider introducing an alternative form of communication
5. How quickly should you give the requested item to your child after he makes a request?
D. 3 seconds
6. When teaching your child to request, it's often best to start with something tangible, something he can see and touch.
A. True

Expanding Spontaneous Vocal Behavior and Vocal Imitation (Echoics) Answers

1. You have been working on shaping the word banana. Your child has been routinely saying "nana" for banana and you have been reinforcing this. One day when you say "banana" he repeats the entire word. What do you do?

C. Provide him with more reinforcement than you usually give him, including additional praise and more time with his favorite reinforcer
2. When teaching your child to imitate your words, you should never give reinforcement unless he says the full word.

B. False
3. When teaching vocal imitation, where should you and your child be?

D. Anywhere your child enjoys being
4. If your child makes any speech sounds, it may be possible to shape those sounds into words.

A. True
5. Another term for vocal imitation is:

B. Echoic

Responding to the Communication of Others (Intraverbals) Answers

1. Verbal responses include which of the following (select all that apply):
 - A. Answering questions
 - B. Conversations
 - C. Fill-ins
2. When teaching fill-ins, you can teach your child to finish parts of familiar songs or
B. Common phrases
3. Responding to someone else's verbal communication can also be called:
D. All of the above
4. You can teach verbal responding during any activity that's fun for your child.
A. True
5. You must teach answering questions before fill-ins to make sure your child has enough language to respond correctly.
B. False

Basic Listener Skills Answers

1. Your child should be able to imitate any gross motor action you target if you can't help him physically perform the action.
A. True
2. If Sarah jumps when Gabriel says 'jump', this is an example of::
C. Basic listener skills
3. You are teaching your child to respond to "ball" by touching a picture of a ball. You put out 3 pictures then say "touch ball". You see your child reaching for the picture of the camera, what do you do?
A. Immediately guide his hand to the correct picture and provide reinforcement if he touches the picture of the ball
4. When presenting an array of pictures or objects, you should always leave the target in the same spot so your child knows where to find the correct picture.
B. False
5. Your child must be able to label and respond verbally to learn basic listener skills.
B. False

Teaching Complex Listener Skills (LRFFC) Answers

1. The goal of teaching complex listener skills is to help your child _____.
D. Both A and B
2. Teaching complex listener skills is like playing an organized game of I Spy.
A. True
3. When presenting pictures or objects for your child to choose from, you should always leave the correct answer in the same place so your child can easily find the right one.
B. False
4. Teach complex listener skills by gradually building his/her understanding of:
D. All of the above
5. You can incorporate teaching complex listener skills into your everyday activities with your child including play, chores at home, and errands in the community.
A. True

Using Task Analysis to Teach Skills

Answers

1. When a chain of behaviors is broken by performing a familiar skill in an environment that is very different, the task may require more thought and effort.
A. True
2. Which skills can be taught using task analysis? (choose all that apply)
A. Brushing teeth
B. Taking out the trash
C. Washing dishes
3. The chaining method that teaches all the steps of the task at once is called
C. Total task chaining
4. The best way to identify all the steps needed to complete a task is to perform the task yourself and then write down the steps you had to do.
A. True
5. Which type of chaining teaches the last step of the task first?
B. Backward chaining

Toilet Training Answers

1. What are the 3 most important parts of toilet training? (select all that apply)
 - A. Frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet
 - C. Wearing underwear
 - D. Reinforcement for voiding
2. You should anticipate that your child will have accidents through this process and do what you can to protect soft surfaces such as your rugs and couches.
 - A. True
3. If your child has 1 or more accidents a day after a week of toilet training you should stop and wait for him to be more ready.
 - B. False
4. How often should you take your child to the bathroom at the beginning of toilet training?
 - D. Often enough to minimize accidents and catch him ready to void, usually about every 15-30 minutes
5. The reinforcer you use for voiding in the toilet should
 - A. Not be available at any other time

Community and Life Skills Answers

1. Why is it important to break down life skills into smaller steps?
 - A. It makes skills easier to learn and practice
2. When teaching a life skill, it's best to start in a challenging environment to prepare your child for real-world situations.
 - B. False
3. Which of the following is an example of using reinforcement to encourage life skill development?
 - A. Offering praise or a small reward after your child waits in line successfully
4. When preparing your child for a new experience, which of the following strategies can help?
 - D. All of the above
5. Every child learns at the same pace, so if your child isn't mastering a life skill quickly, it means they aren't ready for it.
 - B. False

Sleep Problems Answers

1. Keeping a consistent bedtime and wake-up time—even on weekends—can improve your child's sleep.
A. True
2. Which of the following is NOT recommended when helping a child fall asleep?
B. Watching TV to unwind
3. If your child doesn't respond to verbal instructions, it's best to skip a bedtime routine and just put them to bed quickly.
B. False
4. What should you do if your child keeps getting out of bed during the night?
C. Calmly and quietly redirect them back to bed every time
5. It's a good idea to speak with your child's pediatrician if sleep issues continue, to rule out medical causes.
A. True

Feeding Problems Answers

1. If your child has a very limited diet and is not maintaining a healthy weight, it's best to try gradual exposure strategies at home before involving a specialist.
B. False
2. Which of the following best describes a shaping approach to introducing a new food?
C. Gradually building comfort by starting with tolerating the food near them and moving toward tasting and swallowing
3. Highly processed foods may be preferred by some autistic children because they are consistent in texture and flavor.
A. True
4. When creating a food exposure plan, which of the following is the most helpful first step?
B. Create a list of foods your child already eats and analyze their texture, temperature, and consistency
5. Which of the following should be avoided when using reinforcement with food?
C. Using a preferred, essential food as the only reward for eating a non-preferred food

Transition Planning Answers

1. All transitions are school-related, such as moving from elementary to middle school.

B. False

2. What is one way parents can help their child prepare for a major transition?

C. Begin talking about and practicing the change early

3. Which of the following is a pre-vocational skill?

A. Following multi-step directions

4. Which of these is a helpful way to support transitions?

D. Use visuals, practice routines, and maintain consistency where possible

5. Parents should always wait for professionals to begin teaching self-advocacy skills.

B. False

Introduction to Social Skills

Answers

1. Most autistics enjoy spending time with people who understand and accept them.
A. True
2. Social skills are important for a high quality of life and success in a job later in life.
A. True
3. Everyone wants and needs a large group of friends to feel happy and supported.
B. False
4. Everyone needs the same social skills.
B. False
5. What factors impact which social skills an individual needs?
D. All of the above

Social Skills Goals Answers

1. Which of the following skills should you avoid targeting?
A. Eye contact
2. You should target stereotypies if they make your child look different from his peers so he can fit in better.
B. False
3. Two components of social skills are more age-related than others. These are (select all that apply):
A. Social play
C. Work-related social skills
4. You should have your child help choose goals if he's able to participate.
A. True
5. Components of social skills include all of the following except:
D. Speaking

Teaching Social Skills Answers

1. Which of the following games teaches social communication and perspective taking?
D. Hide and seek
2. When teaching problem solving, you should avoid using too much language and refrain from talking through your decision-making process.
B. False
3. A tool used to help children identify alternative ways to respond to triggers is a:
B. Social story
4. Games make learning social skills fun and rewarding.
A. True
5. When teaching social play, you should:
C. Include activities of special interest to your child

Navigating the Sibling Relationship

Answers

1. Setting aside time for siblings to play together with shared activities can help build positive relationships.

A. True

2. Which of the following is a helpful strategy to reduce sibling conflict?

B. Use group reinforcement systems to encourage teamwork

3. Each child should have access to a private space, even if they share a room.

A. True

4. Which of the following might help set the stage for positive sibling interactions?

B. Planning short, structured games both children enjoy

5. What is one benefit of using reinforcement to encourage positive sibling interactions?

D. It increases the likelihood of cooperation and kind behavior

What is Challenging Behavior?

Answers

1. When does a behavior become challenging and need to be addressed?
C. If it appears to be escalating or persistent and will impact the child's independence
2. Everyone engages in behavior that someone else would consider challenging at some point.
A. True
3. Challenging behavior can be which of the following?
D. All of the above
4. Challenging behavior often develops quickly and out of the blue so parents are not prepared to address them.
B. False
5. Challenging behavior is most often a form of communication. Your goal is to figure out what your child is telling you with her behavior.
A. True

Context of Behavior Answers

1. Immediately follows (i.e. within 30s) the behavior you want to learn more about.

D. Consequence

2. Occurs well before the behavior you are interested in and makes a behavior more or less likely to occur.

A. Setting event

3. Anything a person does that you want to learn more about.

C. Behavior

4. Occurs just before (i.e. within 30s) of the behavior and is sometimes referred to as the trigger.

B. Antecedent

5. The consequence is a traditional parenting technique such as time out.

B. False

Why Does My Child Do That?

Answers

1. The ABCs of behavior only apply to children's behavior.
B. False
2. What are categories of things a person can access with their behavior?
D. All of the above
3. Putting on sunglasses because the bright sun is hurting your eyes is most likely maintained by access to a tangible.
B. False
4. You collect ABC data to help you understand the context within which the behavior occurs so you can identify what your child "gets" out of the behavior.
A. True
5. Behavior is communication. Your job is to figure out what your child is telling you.
A. True

Deciding How to Intervene

Answers

1. The behavior you will accept temporarily instead of the challenging behavior is a(n):
C. Replacement behavior
2. What you will do after your child engages in a desired behavior is a(n):
D. Consequence intervention
3. What you will change when situations come up that usually make challenging behavior more common is a(n):
A. Setting event accommodation
4. What you will do before a challenging behavior begins to make your child more likely to respond to triggers by engaging in a desired behavior is a(n):
B. Antecedent intervention
5. The replacement behavior you choose should get your child the same thing he gets with the challenging behavior, even if it's not what you ultimately want him to do.
A. True

Responding with Compassion

Answers

1. What is the primary goal of compassionate care during challenging moments?
B. To meet your child where they are emotionally and address their needs
2. Which of the following is an example of addressing your child's need during a challenging moment?
C. Offering a break when they are frustrated and overwhelmed.
3. What does the term "extinction burst" mean?
B. An escalation in the intensity or frequency of a behavior after reinforcement is removed.
4. Why is it important to avoid teaching new skills during the heat of the moment?
C. Your child's ability to learn is reduced when they are upset or overwhelmed
5. Which of the following strategies aligns with compassionate care?
A. Using a calm voice to reassure your child and offering comfort.

How Do I Know If This Is Working?

Answers

1. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that has a discrete beginning and end and takes only a moment to complete?
A. Frequency/rate
2. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that occurs over varying amounts of time and doesn't have a discrete beginning and end?
B. Duration
3. Only your BCBA can graph data.
B. False
4. What type of data collection might you choose for a behavior that may be more acceptable if it occurs at a lower intensity?
C. Likert scale
5. Data collection is hard and takes a lot of time.
B. False

Emotional Regulation Answers

1. What is emotional regulation?
 - B. The skill of recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions in a healthy way
2. Why do some children struggle with emotional regulation?
 - A. Their brain is still developing, and self-regulation skills take time to grow
3. Which of the following is an example of co-regulation?
 - C. Staying calm, using a soothing voice, and modeling deep breaths when your child is overwhelmed
4. What is the best way to teach emotional regulation skills?
 - B. Practicing coping skills when the child is already calm
5. Which of these strategies can help a child develop emotional regulation?
 - A. Encouraging deep breathing and using sensory tools

FCT Answers

1. What is the primary goal of Functional Communication Training (FCT)?

B. The skill of recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions in a healthy way
2. Before choosing a new communication method, what should you do first?

C. Identify the function of the behavior
3. Which of the following is an example of an effective communication method in FCT?

B. A child pointing to a picture of a toy to request it
4. Why is it important to teach a communication method that is easy for the child to use?

A. So they can use it faster than engaging in the challenging behavior
5. What is a key strategy for ensuring a child consistently uses their new communication skill?

D. Reinforce the skill every time the child uses it correctly

Using Technology To Support ABA Answers

1. Visual schedules, timers, and choice boards are examples of technology that can support your child's independence and daily routines.

A. True

2. Which of the following is a sign that technology use may be interfering with your child's progress?

C. Your child has frequent tantrums when technology is removed

3. Using technology as a reinforcer should be avoided in ABA-based programs.

B. False

4. What is one way your BCBA® can support the use of technology in your child's ABA plan?

C. Help match technology tools to your child's goals

5. It's important to build in tech-free time each day to encourage social interaction and other types of play.

A. True

Troubleshooting ABA Strategies

Answers

1. If an ABA strategy doesn't seem to be working right away, it means the strategy is ineffective.

B. False
2. When troubleshooting an ABA strategy, what should you do first?

B. Check your expectations and give the strategy time to work
3. If a strategy is not working, it's best to make multiple changes at once to speed up progress.

B. False
4. Which of the following is NOT a possible reason why an ABA strategy may not be working?

D. The child is purposefully trying to be difficult
5. When should you seek additional help from a BCBA®?

A. If you've tried small adjustments and are still not seeing progress

DATA COLLECTION SHEETS FOR COPYING

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence
<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Demand <input type="checkbox"/> Item Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Attention Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured Time <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Tantrum <input type="checkbox"/> Eloping <input type="checkbox"/> Flopping <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Offered Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Reprimand <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Removed Item <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/>

Frequency Data Collection

Behavior	Frequency

Duration Data Collection

Behavior	Duration

Likert Data Collection

Behavior	Likert Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Least Intense			Most Intense	
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

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ABOUT MASTER ABA

While everyone who enters the ABA field does so with the best of intentions, the application of these strategies are sometimes still used to make individuals with autism appear "normal." At Master ABA we take a different approach. We celebrate all individuals as neurodiverse and teach professionals how to use these techniques to teach critical skills while maintaining the rights of the individual.

Applied Behavior Analysis remains the best way to help those with autism. As professionals in the field, we need to acknowledge and respect those who fear ABA, while helping them understand the benefits of these strategies. Together we can ensure Applied Behavior Analysis is used in a way that is ethical and respectful of the individual. We can be the voice of change and encourage others to follow suit.

Amelia Dalphonse is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who earned her Master's in ABA from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She has been working with children since 1996, and specifically with children with autism since 2009. Her passion is helping children with autism and their families meet their full potential.

Her twin sister, Dianna Kelly, has joined her in her quest to help autistic children by changing the field of Applied Behavior Analysis. She is committed to supporting the rights of children and fighting for acceptance of all individuals.

Together Amelia and Dianna are leading a tribe of ABA Masters to advocate for the autistic community.