A Special Educator’s Toolbox: Behavioral Strategies for Teaching Students with Autism

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The Characteristics of Autism

Communication
Social-Emotional
Cognitive
Sensory

ALL CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM IMPACT BEHAVIOR
Communication

- Address behavior through effective communication programs.
- Pick an alternative communication system that will allow the child to communicate wants, needs, thoughts, and feelings across a variety of settings, persons, and tasks.
- Pick a method that is appropriate and effective based on the child’s specific needs.
- Always make it available for the child to use.
Types of Alternative Communication Systems

- Gestures and pointing
- Communication boards
- Object or picture exchange
- Synthesized speech (i.e., Wolf, Message Mate, DynaVox)
- Picture symbols with words
- Printed words or letters
- Sign language
Communication Boards & Synthesized Speech

DynaVox:
http://www.dynavoxtech.com/
Message Mates:
http://www.words-plus.com/website/products/hand/mm.htm

A list of communication apps available for your iPhone & more:
http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-apps
Object & Picture Exchange

How to:

The six phases of PECS:

Where to find icons & more:
http://www.boardmakershare.com/

Request an item  Receive the item

First
2 + 4 = 6
magnetic numbers

Then
ball bounce
Visual Strategies

- A majority of children with autism are visual learners.
- Due to the fact that educational and social interactions in society take place mostly through verbal communication, breakdowns occur as a result.
- Try supplementing verbal communication with visual tools (i.e., visual schedules, choice boards, communication strips).
Sign Language

- Although many individuals with autism respond to sign language or to sign language paired with verbal cues, it isn’t always the best choice for every child with ASD.
- Keep in mind that some children may not have the motor skills to manipulate their fingers to form signs that are recognizable to people outside their immediate family.
- Also, take caution that sign language is not universally understood.
- Consider the overall situation and the child’s skills and needs, when making decisions regarding the use of ASL.
Social-Emotional

- Improving social performance is essential to meet the child with autism's need for acceptance, love, interaction with others, and independence.

- In order for change to occur you will need to teach skills that promote effective social interactions, rather than trying to eliminate the problem behaviors that exist.

- Always remember that inappropriate social behaviors may occur because of sensory overload, the child’s preference for routine and ritual, and motor planning difficulties.

- Steer away from trying to “cure autism” or mold the child into someone else by eliminating characteristics that define who they are or their unique personality.
Strategies for Social Skills Training

- Increase the child’s repertoire of prosocial behaviors
- Use direct instruction to teach social skills
- Model the appropriate skill, while pointing out important parts
- Match skills to the situations
- Practice in real situations that are meaningful and functional with guidance and feedback
- Videotape the appropriate implementation of the skill
- Develop books that depict social situations
- [http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories](http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories)
- [http://socialthinking.com](http://socialthinking.com)
More Strategies for Social Skills Training

- Incorporate cueing procedures that maximize the development of independent functioning by the child.
- Avoid too much reliance on verbal cues or physical prompts from others.
- Provide a “social diet” by allowing for social interaction on a scheduled basis and upon appropriate request.
- Factor out social interaction when highly challenging tasks are given.
- Keep in mind that most individuals ASD desire social interaction as a basic human need.
- Be sure to use hand over hand guidance from behind when providing physical guidance.
- Give and create opportunities, along with access to age appropriate neuro-typical peers in school and within the community.

Helpful websites & resources:
- http://www.socialskillstraining.org/
- http://www.teach2talk.com/
- http://www.autismsocialskills.com/
- http://www.autismteachingtools.com/page/bbbbgt/bbbbgz
There is a wide range of brain functioning for the autism population.

Although autism is considered a neuro-developmental disorder, not all aspects of brain functioning can or will be affected in every case.

Consider academic programs and experiences that will improve particular talents and highlight the child’s relative strengths.
Educational Recommendations and Resources

- Small group vs. large group
- Play to the child’s interests.
- Family and service providers should aspire to mainstreaming into the students program.
  
  http://www.iecp.us/

- Be open to utilizing “Structured Teaching”- instructional strategies and environmental supports for individuals with ASD developed by the TEACCH program.

  **TEACCH** = Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication-handicapped Children

  http://www.brighttots.com/TEACCH_Method_autism
Sensory

Hypersensitive or hyposensitive?

- Regardless of the level of arousal, a child with either of these will have issues with responding to stimuli, attending, learning, relating to the environment, spatial awareness, and relating to other people as a result.

- Sensory difficulties associated with autism are unique and variable.

What could be affected?

*Auditory modality, oral-motor and gustatory (taste), visual information, tactile and kinesthetic abilities*
Interventions for Sensory Issues

Sensory Integrative Therapy
http://www.autism.healingthresholds.com/therapy/sensory/-intergration

Brushing Therapy
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAU9A47oy7M

Deep Pressure Therapy
http://www.grandin.com/inc/squeeze.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhktyoYBTC8

Sensory Diets
http://www.sensationalbrain.com/
http://www.superduperinc.com/Handouts/Handout.aspx
More Sensory Interventions

Oral-Motor Stimulation
http://www.nationalautismresources.com/oral-motor.html

Vestibular Stimulation

Auditory Integration Training (AIT)
http://www.auditoryintegration.net/

Irlen Lenses
http://www.irlen.com/

- A Safe Area:
  * Create a place that the child can access with reduced amounts of stimulation when he or she is are having a meltdown due to sensory overload.
The Big Picture: Behavioral Management

- Increasing desired behavior can be possible if you are willing to conduct a functional analysis. Click the link below to see what a functional analysis is. The website below will also guide you in the process, along with the printable documents you will need.

http://www.polyxo.com/fba/

- You will find that strategies function as an antecedent control when it is used as part of the child’s scheduled routine or when used before a behavior occurs.

http://www.courses.dsu.edu/sped460/Old/old chapters/chapter 4/Antecedents for classrooms.doc
Reinforcement & Types of Reinforcers

- Reinforcers will ultimately increase preferred behavior!
- When deciding which reinforcers to try, consider the child’s preferences.
- Individuals with autism who are developmentally younger or more severely challenged enjoy sensory based reinforcers.
- For higher functioning children, offer a large variety of reinforcers.
Positive Reinforcement

• Positive reinforcement is any object or action applied following a behavior that increases the behavior.
• Positive reinforcers may involve some form of sensory experience, social interaction, activity, or access to a tangible item.
Examples of Positive Reinforcement

Sensory:

Social:
eye contact, conversation, high fives, hugs, praise

Activities:
Puzzles, computer games, board games

Tangible items:
http://www.nationalautismresources.com/autism-reinforcers.html

* Note:
It is always wise to utilize a timer when activities and tangible items are being used. This eases transitions and avoids meltdowns.
Negative Reinforcement

- Negative reinforcement is not punishment!
- It is also used to increase preferred behaviors.
- Negative reinforcement is the removal or ending of something that is disliked or uncomfortable, in order to increase the desired behavior.

For further explanation & examples see:
http://www.educateautism.com/behavioural-principles/negative-reinforcement.html
http://www.educateautism.com/behavioral-principals/examples-negative-reinforcement.html
**Time Outs & Response Cost**

- How do I use a time out correctly for a child with autism?
  - Beginning & ending of time-outs are controlled by an adult.
  - No reinforcers are provided during the time out.
  - Social interaction does not occur.
  - Talking is provided only for prompts (i.e., sit in chair).

- Response cost can be a variety of negative consequences that involve a loss of a preferred object, activity, or participation in a required task as a result of misbehavior.

- Examples of response cost:
  - simple correction
  - overcorrection
  - positive reaction
  - loss of valued object or activity
  - loss of earned reinforcers

*Caution:*
When applying response cost, be logical, clarify how long it will last, and don’t over use loss of earned reinforcers.
Crisis Management

• One of the most important things is keeping your loved one safe.

• Children with autism often engage in behavior that threatens the safety of themselves or others.

• It is crucial is to know what to do and when!

• The overall goal is to de-escalate the child without physical contact.

• The following links are a few resources that will provide information and appropriate training for crisis management:
  http://www.handlewithcare.com/trainings/autism
  http://www.crisisprevention.com/knowledgebase
  http://www.abainternational.org/

* Please remember restraints are a last resort and you must be trained before implementing them!