

Working with Low-Functioning Children with Autism

[Notes taken from the DVD "One-on-One" featuring Marilyn Chassman]

The Beginning

- Figure out what you want to work on.
- Look into different programs and select what would be good for your child.

Task were too difficult

- Even very simple tasks can be too difficult.
- Most programs break tasks down but not far enough to help some kids.

Break Down Steps

- If the task is developmentally on the child's level they will not resist, and possibly enjoy, doing the task. Break the task down into sub-skills that will make the task easier to learn.

Acquiring a Photo Communication System

- Start working on sub-skills that will eventually work into what you want them to do. The skills should work toward a functional skill they can use in their life.
- For Example: Goal: 'To communicate with pictures'
- Steps needed to accomplish the goal:
 1. Must learn simple 'Matching Skills'
 2. Learn 'Picture to Picture' skills. Match pictures with pictures that are in front of the child.
 3. Learn 'Object to Picture [Photo]' skills. Learn object to Photo and photo to Object.
 4. Learn the 'Give Me' skill. Very important/Key Skill to learn! Hold out object in you hand and have them give you the picture of the object and then give the object to them. Reverse, you hold out picture and they give the object to you.

Pointing Skills

- Teach them to point at an object or picture that you are pointing at. Eventually say 'Point to the car.' They should be able to do it without prompts.

Object performance cues

- Put large photos on toy boxes and on the fridge. This will help them remember the objects. Teach them to point at the toy or food item they want from the boxes or fridge. When they point at the picture or bring a picture of an item, make sure you give the requested item to them right away.
- Some children can eventually write or type the name of the items they want.
- Putting 'Words to Pictures' is important if it is developmentally appropriate for the child.

Minimizing Aggression

- Kids with autism get frustrated with us because many of them can't talk or do not know how to communicate their feelings. They are not 'mean' kids. They bite, pinch, etc. because they are frustrated and do not know how to tell you what is bothering them.

Follow the once only rule

- Kids like to be 'DONE.' Make them do the task correctly before moving to another skill/task. As time goes on expect more out of them. For example, they need to do the task 4 out of 5 times correctly before moving on.

Use a pegboard/penny board for repetition

- It shows them how many times they must do the task before they are done.
- Once they learn the pegboard they can repeat skills more times and they master the skills faster.

If aggression-start again

- If they become aggressive let them cool down (regulate themselves) and start over. Make sure you always come back to the task and have them finish what was expected of them.
- Make sure they keep doing the task over and over until the pegs are all in their slots and the tasks were done with no aggression.
- They do not like to work over and over again. They must learn aggression is not acceptable.

Use a schedule board to ease transitions

- Once they know object and photo concepts you can use a picture schedule.
- It is a visual way to show what is expected of them. It helps with transitions and helps them know what is expected of them.
- If they get through all tasks without aggression, they get an 'additional' reward for working. They should get 'small' rewards throughout the training session. She puts the 'additional' reward behind a flap so he will not just take it off to give to her.

Use sensory items for calming effect

- Sensory items can be used to help calm them. Have sensory items on a chart for him to choose from.

Keep a communication system near by

- Wallet notebook
- Talking devices
- She lets him get up from work to watch a video or gives him whatever he requests if he uses his communication device to communicate. They return to the task after a few minutes of him using whatever he requested.

Use the 'I don't understand' symbol

- Introduce an 'I don't understand' symbol. If they can use that symbol, they can tell you that you need to make the step you are working on easier. Sometimes they need to do simple tasks to 'get done'. That is OK, just make sure they are doing tasks and not getting out of tasks easily.

Fine Motor Skills

- Goal is to write things independently.

Use stencil patterns

Make stencil lines

Trace dotted lines

Write without a stencil or dotted lines

Large Motor Skills

- Teach them as many large motor skills as possible. Family routines, such as setting the table, will help them to do jobs around the house.

Sensory Toleration

- Use sensory items to help them tolerate sensory issues. Start with small items and increase the sensory until they can tolerate it. Remember the hair-cutting task. Start at home using scissors to snip by hair to get used to the sounds and also an electric pair of clippers. As they tolerate the sounds and feels of the objects you can take them to the barber.

Conclusion

- You need an EFFECTIVE learning program, one that meets the needs of your child.
- The program must be comprehensive, make sense, and has all the skills you need to work on. If the child cannot do the tasks as that program tells you, 'break free' from it and try other things.
- Once they have the skills for a certain goal, go back to the curriculum and choose another task to accomplish. There is no point in doing all these things for the FUN of it, you use what works for your child!
- It takes dedication and commitment.

Every goal-task-skill should have an END RESULT that is FUNCTIONAL and can be GENERALIZED by the child.