

AUTISM NEWSLETTER

10 Critical Components for Success in the Special Education Classroom

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Summarized from Chapter 8

Component #8 - Communication Systems and Strategies

Rationale - Students increase their levels of independence when they are able to communicate their wants and needs. Their lives become richer for the social connections that are made when communication takes place. And nearly always, a student's behavior improves when communication improves. Language and communication must be addressed all day every day.

Pragmatic language, social language, refers to the use of language in social situations and the ability to understand and follow the unwritten rules of social communication. Students with adequate pragmatic language are able to do the following:

- Introduce themselves or others
- Maintain eye contact
- Understand facial expressions
- Refrain from making embarrassing comments
- Ask for assistance or clarification
- Give and accept compliments
- Take turns in conversations
- Understand jokes and idioms
- Join in play appropriately
- * Maintain appropriate distance from others
- * Use appropriate tone of voice
- * Know how and when to interrupt
- * Begin and end a conversation
- * Initiate conversations
- * Maintain topics of conversation
- * Admit a mistake

Summary - Teaching students the use of social language will increase their ability to work with others, make friends, and maintain employment. Unless our students learn how to get along with others, understand body language, and to be respectful of social norms, it really does not matter if they know all their math facts or can name all 50 states. Of all the skills your students need to acquire to help them become as independent and successful as possible, the ability to communicate is at the top of the list.



Executive Functioning Skills

The Autism Helper

Ways to adapt the Adult Communication

Direct Language - Provide consistent and clear verbal cues. Give the direction while there are no competing distractions. Keep it positive or neutral. Tell what to do, not what not to do. Repeat directions as needed and check for understanding.

Model and Fade Prompts - Use modeling to show the expected behavior. Practice ahead of time or immediately before the behavior needs to be done. Prompts are added to the situation to help someone be successful. Add in prompts as needed and fade as the learner is successful.

Verbal Scaffolding - Talk through activities as you are completing them and verbalize your thought process. Then ask questions, explain, validate feelings, and encourage self-appraisal while interacting with learners.

Problem Solving Support - Use problems as learning opportunities and provide education skill-building interactions. When a problem occurs, model, use prompt fading, and utilize verbal scaffolding.

REINFORCEMENT: WHAT IS IT?

Reinforcement is something that comes after a behavior and increases the chances the behavior will happen again. It happens all around us, all day. It's why we do what we do. Students in your class are already receiving reinforcement in many different ways. We can add reinforcement to a situation to help our students engage in more positive behaviors. For something to be reinforcement it NEEDS to come AFTER a positive behavior has already happened and it NEEDS to increase the chance that the behavior will happen again. If you are not seeing positive behaviors increase, you need to look at how you are using reinforcement and see what is going on. It could be possible that what you are using as a reinforcer (praise, sticker, iPad time) may not be a reinforcer for that student.

What is it? Continued

It may just be something they like, not something they are necessarily willing to work for.

REINFORCEMENT: WHAT IT IS NOT

Reinforcement is not the same for everyone. What's a reinforcer to you may not be a reinforcer to me. Praise, good grades, stickers, peer attention may not be reinforcers for all kids. Just like you can't force yourself to like something you don't - our students cannot force something to be reinforcing. It's up to the team (including the student) to determine what things are reinforcing for each student and provide those reinforcers when positive behaviors are seen.

Reinforcement is not bribery. Bribery and reinforcement often get confused. Reinforcement is planned ahead whereas bribery is a negotiation during the occurrence of a challenging behavior.

Reinforcement is not spoiling. Reinforcement is not indulging or spoiling a child. **It's teaching the child the missing skills.** When it comes to behavior change, you are more likely to be successful by focusing first on increasing the positive behaviors than by focusing just on decreasing the negative behaviors. Reinforcement is necessary to accomplish this.

REINFORCEMENT CHALLENGE:

Praise to Criticism ratio: 4:1

Take turns with the adults in your classroom taking data on how often you praise a student vs how often you give criticism. Choose one of your challenging students and a specific length of time - have someone take data on what you say and then switch roles. The goal is 4 praise statements for every one criticism statement. Work on everyone increasing praise statements and decreasing criticism statements. Try it once a week for a month and check for improvement.