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BUILDING FLEXIBILITY INTO SCHEDULES DURING SPEECH THERAPY

One of the first lessons speech-language pathologists learn is how to be flexible during sessions. This is particularly true for clinicians who work with pediatric populations. You might create the perfect activities and goals for a session, but this does not always mean the child will be engaged or interested in the activities. This is even more likely to occur when working with children who have difficulty attending or frequently demonstrate challenging behaviors.



Creating visual schedules is an incredibly helpful tool for many children, as they are able to anticipate the events of the session and more easily transition between tasks. Children might use visual schedules to walk through various routines during the day, such as a visual schedule for speech therapy and another for getting ready for school in the morning. Since visual schedules can be used for any routine, parents, speech therapists, and teachers can all use this strategy to ensure consistency and build important transition skills.

While it is highly important for children to build strong transition skills, flexibility is an essential part of speech therapy. For example, if one activity is not going well, the speech therapist may make the decision to move onto the next activity on the visual schedule. Speech therapists may also provide children with choices when building the visual schedule for the day. For example, the speech therapist might present the child with the choice to either play with play-doh or play with animals. As long as you are keeping the child's goals in mind, it is okay if a session does not go exactly according to plan!



PRECURSORS OF LANGUAGE: STAGES OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

As a parent, it is fascinating to see your child move through the many developmental milestones, from crawling and walking to babbling and speaking. Even before children say their first words and begin using conventional language, there are many precursors of language to look for.

You might not realize it, but your child begins using intentional communication from a very early age. Just moments after birth, newborns will make eye contact with their mothers and share an interpersonal gaze.

As children grow, they continue to develop skills to communicate when they are hungry, thirsty, tired, and other basic needs. These precursors of language fall into three categories: content, form, and use.

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ASK A THERAPIST



INTRODUCING TOKEN SYSTEMS

Many children benefit from token systems when working to build positive behaviors. A token system is a method for tracking positive behaviors that results in a reward to reinforce the target behavior. Most systems consist of a physical board with velcro to attach stars or other token symbols.

For example, if a child is having difficulty staying on task when working on an articulation activity during speech therapy, the speech-language pathologist might implement a token system to reinforce the target behavior. In this example, the target behaviors are staying on task and putting on "listening ears."

Each time the child successfully stays on task and follows directions, they will earn a token. Once they earn a certain number of tokens, they will be able to turn in the tokens for a prize (e.g., two minutes watching a video on the iPad or five minutes playing their favorite game).

Token systems are effective because they provide a visual representation for the child to see the reinforcement for their positive behaviors. The system also makes the lessons more interactive for children!

If a child seems to benefit from the token system during speech therapy, the speech-language pathologist might suggest that the parents implement the token system at home as well. This system can target a wide range of skills and behaviors (e.g., tantrums, following directions, or hitting). Using the token system both at home and during speech therapy can help a child carry over the positive behaviors to multiple environments, not just during speech therapy sessions.

APP OF THE MONTH: Bitsboard Flashcards & Games

★★★★★

Ages 4+

Target Skills
Speech



About The App

This app offers a wide range of engaging games to build many skills including receptive language, vocabulary, and more!

Precursors of Language: Stages of Speech and Language Development Continued...

Content refers to the way in which children relate to events and objects in their environment. As children begin developing language content, they will exhibit behaviors such as gazing at moving objects, separating objects (e.g., taking the top off of a toy teapot), or using an object in an expected way (e.g., using a toy phone appropriately). There are various stages of development, so some precursors of content are more advanced than others.

Form refers to how children produce vocalizations and begin to imitate adult forms of language, such as imitating a speech sound their parent produces, such as "ba ba" or "pa pa." Other precursors of form include imitating a parent's motor behavior or using a speech sound consistently, such as saying "wa wa" for water or "da da" for dog.



Use refers to how children relate to others, such as interpersonal gazing with a parent. The precursors of use are significant, as they indicate a child's cognitive development. Examples of other precursors of use include joint attention and turn-taking.

Parents can observe joint attention when engaging in play with their children. If a parent and child are playing with the same toy, the parent may be focusing his or her attention on the toy. If the child looks at the parent and notices them looking down at the toy, the child will also focus his or her attention on the toy. Turn-taking, or a back-and-forth exchange, is a skill children develop early on. A parent may turn the first page of a book, and then say, "Your turn!" to prompt the child to turn the second page. Turn-taking continues to evolve when conversation skills emerge.

It is important for parents and speech-language pathologists to track a child's precursors of language, as these behaviors show how the child is experiencing the world around them. The precursors of language demonstrate the child's level of cognitive, psychosocial, and sensorimotor skills, all of which are significant components of early childhood development.

Precursors of language often appear during play and natural interactions between parents and children. If parents are concerned that their children are not exhibiting these behaviors, a speech-language pathologist can help assess whether a child is behind in speech and language development.

References

Lahey, M. (1988). *Language disorders and language development*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

SPEECH THERAPY SPOTLIGHT

Deborah Esquivel, MA, CCC-SLP

About Deborah Esquivel

Debbie Esquivel is a Speech-Language Pathologist who received her under-graduate and Master's degrees from California State University, Fresno. Debbie has experience working in adult rehabilitation, as well as school and clinic settings.



She began working at Aspire Speech & Learning Center in 2006, and has been here ever since. Currently she enjoys working with a wide range of clients from preschoolers to adults.

Debbie has been married to her husband Ramon for 14 years and has been blessed with five wonderful grandchildren. In her free time, Debbie enjoys going to her grandchildren's baseball and basketball games, having them over for sleepovers and following their imaginations and creativity.

Three words Deborah uses to describe herself

Compassionate, Thoughtful, Organized

Why Deborah loves being a speech therapist

I love being a therapist because it gives me the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in people's lives, by making them happier and healthier.

Deborah's favorite things

My favorite things are faith, family, playing with my grandkids, trips to Morro Bay or San Francisco, playing and listening to music, and chatting over coffee with friends and family at La Boulangerie!

What people are saying about Deborah Esquivel

"Debbie has been there for me and believed in me. I will always be grateful for her help and friendship."

About Aspire Speech & Learning Center

Aspire Speech and Learning Center, formerly Center for Communication Skills, is a premier provider of speech therapy services and academic support in the greater Fresno area. Kathryn Wage and her team of experienced speech therapists have a long-standing and well-deserved reputation for providing services that improve the lives of their clients. The therapists are well known for supporting parents in improving optimum functional outcomes for their children. The practice has grown rapidly since moving to the California Learning Connection and provides services through a wide range of payer options, both public and private, and receives referrals from top pediatrician practices and elite preschools around Fresno. We offer free consultations to prospective clients to help determine the best fit for our offerings.

Contact Aspire Speech & Learning at Grow@AspireSpeech.com or call (559) 228-9100

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