



# Music Therapy Techniques to Improve Communication Skills in Persons with Autism

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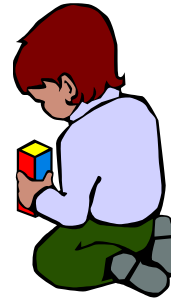
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## Children with autism experience the following impairments

- Difficulty in social relationships and social interactions
- Difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior



## Intentional communication

- Involves coordinated attention to object, action or person
- Coordinated attention is an early indicator of understanding others intentions and is a precursor to linguistic communication
- Includes use of gestures, eye gaze, verbal and non-verbal actions





## Session concepts

- In order to improve intentional communication skills, the child with autism needs to gain understanding in...
  - Theory of Mind
  - Joint Attention
- Structured, yet Functional method
  - Therapeutic techniques to help establish intentional communication



## Theory of Mind

- Ability to attribute mental status to self and others in order to understand and predict behavior
- Understanding that seeing, hearing and feeling can be directed selectively as attention
- Attention can be directed and shared by the act of pointing
- Directed attention and interests of another is an underlying motive behind all human communication





## Joint Attention

- Is a precursor to understanding “Theory of Mind”
- Refers to the process of sharing one’s experience of observing an object or event, by following gaze or pointing gestures
- It is critical for social development, language acquisition and cognitive development



## Joint Attention (JA)

- Requires the child to coordinate attention between others and objects
- When the child understands that a partner’s focus of attention is different from one’s own, the child can act intentionally to establish a shared focus of attention
- Achieving a shared focus creates the potential for reciprocal interaction and increases probability of intentional communication





## Two types of Joint Attention are Important for Language Learning

### RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION

#### Responding to Joint Attention (RJA)

- Modify one's own attentional focus
- The child follows the adults focus of attention who then labels the shared focus
- Adult looks/points and says "There's the phone."

### EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

#### Initiating Joint Attention (IJA)


- Modify the attentional focus of the other person
- It elicits verbal labels from the other person for the focus of shared attention
- Child looks/points and says "What's this?"



## Techniques to encourage natural JA

- Follow the child's lead
- Talk about what the child is doing
- Imitate the child's utterances and actions
- Expand on the child's utterances
- Manipulate the environment to engage the child





## Structured Yet Functional: A Treatment for Communication Impairment in Autism

Ogletree, B. & Oren, T (1998), *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*

- Structure – the degree to which the therapist controls stimuli, response acceptability and response consequences
- Functionality – the degree to which the therapist uses natural events, objects and consequences in the pursuit of practical goals within typical session routines



## Basic Principles of Structured, Yet Functional Method

- Activities that the child enjoys reinforce participation which increases the potential for language learning
- Interactive experiences should occur within predictable routines
- Nonlinguistic concepts are a prerequisite to functional language development
- Play provides a foundation for learning language





## To provide Structured, yet Functional treatment

The therapists needs to...

- Create interactive interventions that occur within predictable routines
- Apply techniques of varied directiveness
- Pursue practical communication and language goals



## Routines

- Defined as ritualized interaction patterns that occur in arranged environments
- Should have identified start and end points
- Should have shared focus on objects and events
- Should have opportunities for turn-taking between therapist and client
- Should incorporate natural events, objects and consequences





## During predictable routines

- Memory and processing demands are reduced
- Opportunities for specific language learning is available



## During less predictable routines

- The child is exposed to more varied language use
- Boundaries are expanded which helps the child achieve greater flexibility







## Turn Taking

(to establish a predictable routine & establish Joint Attention)

- Music interventions to help establish understanding and expectation of turn-taking
  - Pentatonic bell improvisation
    - Call and response experience
    - Echo song (imitate child's actions)
  - Down By the Bay
    - Echo song (turn taking)



## Techniques using Structured, yet Functional method

Once a child begins to anticipate turn-taking, the therapist can ...

1. Delay with expectant waiting
2. Use novel objects or actions
3. Omit or forget a critical object needed
4. Sabotage materials so they do not work as expected





## Examples

- Four in a Boat
  - *use of novel actions*
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
- Leader of the Band
  - *turn taking and imitate the child's actions*
- Jump Down, Turn Around
  - *use of novel actions*
  - *manipulate the environment to engage the child,*
  - *omit a critical object*
  - *sabotage materials so they don't work as expected*



## Examples

- What Do You Do
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
  - *expand on the child's utterances*
- I Have a Dinosaur
  - *talk about what the child is doing*





## Examples

- I Have a Word and I Can Spell
  - *expand on child's utterances*
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
- Limber Louie
  - *use of novel objects and actions*



## Review of session concepts

In order to improve intentional communication skills, the child with autism needs to gain understanding in the following areas...

- Theory of Mind
- Joint Attention
- Structured, yet Functional method
  - Therapeutic techniques to help establish intentional communication





## REVIEW: To encourage intentional communication

### RECEPTIVE: Responding to Joint Attention

- Establish a routine
- Create turn taking opportunities

### EXPRESSIVE: Initiate Joint Attention

1. Delay with expectant waiting
2. Use novel objects or actions
3. Omit or forget a critical object needed
4. Sabotage materials so they do not work as expected



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## References

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