STAR®
Autism Support

Teaching Functional Communication

Santa Clara Virtual Training Series January 2022

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Goals of Our Session

- Understand how behavior is communication
- Review curriculum considerations for students with autism and supports needed that help all students succeed
- Learn practical ways to help students understand spoken language
- Discuss four easy-to-implement steps to target expressive language goals with students in 1:1 settings, small group settings, and daily routines
- Identify caregiver supports for collaboration and training

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Communication Differences in Students with Autism

Students with ASD may experience…
- Delayed language development.
- Difficulty with speech (echolalia, voice tone).
- Difficulty with comprehension (understanding what others are saying).
- Sometimes the student does not learn to talk (non-speaking or non-verbal).
  - If a student doesn't use verbal speech, they should be taught other ways to communicate (AAC).

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Let's Hear From the Experts
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)

- "Not every autistic person can talk, but we all have important things to say."
- Talking can be hard due to…
  - Motor differences – makes it challenging to find the words, start/stop talking, or control volume
  - Hearing differences (auditory processing)
  - Anxiety – including when others are not being patient

Scan here to learn more about autism from ASAN!

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Let's Hear From the Experts
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)

- "Just because we can't talk, doesn't mean we can't communicate. Autistic people communicate in all sorts of ways!"
- "No matter how we communicate, we should be listened to. Talking isn't better than other kinds of communication."

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Behavior is Communication

- Students don't always understand verbal directions, especially long directions that are unclear or abstract:
  - *"I don't understand what you are asking me to do."*
- It can be hard for students to pay attention to important details and shift their focus of attention when asked:
  - *"I don't want to leave this activity and go to the next activity."*
- Communicating wants and needs are hard, especially during stress:
  - *"I don't know how to tell you what I need."*
- Response to sensory stimuli can impact reactions:
  - *"Sensitivity to sounds, textures, and light can affect the way I react to people and events."*

What other ways do you see students communicating with you during the day?

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Teaching New Behaviors

Comprehensive curriculum
to identify and teach language skills

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Curricular Tools and Resources

Assessment and progress monitoring	STAR Program STAR Media Center
Data collection	
Detailed lesson plans in core curricular areas	Links Curriculum Routine Teaching Units
Differentiated learning for 1:1 and group instruction	
Digital tools	STAR Online Learning System (SOLS)
Strengths-based	

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Add Environmental Supports

Environmental
supports

Comprehensive curriculum
to identify and teach language skills

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Environmental and Visual Supports

Help students understand expectations:
- What am I supposed to do?
- Where should I go?
- When will I be done?
- What happens next?

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When Necessary: Individual Behavior Assessment / Supports

Behavior
support

Environmental
supports

Comprehensive curriculum
to identify and teach language skills

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Individualized Behavior Support

☆ Identifying what motivates/reinforcers the student
   ☆ Preference assessment
   ☆ Reinforcement Inventory
☆ Consistent daily schedule with transition supports
   ☆ Transition cues/warnings
   ☆ Visual schedule on the student's developmental level
☆ Observation and individualized strategies from district personnel
   ☆ ABC (Antecedent – Behavior – Consequence) charts to look for patterns
   ☆ Data collection on the frequency, rate, and duration of behaviors

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Language is a Powerful Tool!

Receptive Language
- Attending skills – response to name, shifting attention toward a communication partner
- Children learn a large base of receptive labels before learning to communicate expressively
- Children use imitation to learn play skills and routines, in addition to language
- In order to participate meaningfully in daily routines, individuals have to learn to follow directions and comprehend complex language

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Language is a Powerful Tool!

Expressive Language
- Understanding that our voices (sounds) have meaning
- Labeling things in the environment (objects, animals, people, etc.)
- Asking and answering questions to gain information
- Communicating wants, needs, and thoughts to others which includes spoken language, pictures, augmentative or alternative communication or a combination
- Self-initiations and spontaneous language

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Key Skills for Communication

- Receptive language skills
  - The individual needs to know the name of the item, i.e., receptive label
  - Shuǐ = water
- Expressive language skills
  - The student has to have the ability to imitate speech sounds and/or words when modeled
- Motivation/History of Reinforcement
  - The person has to be motivated to use these skills
  - Have these attempts been reinforced in the past? Are they effective? Is the request meaningful to the child?

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Choosing Interventions

- Comprehensive behavioral treatment for young children (Discrete Trial Training)
- Behavioral interventions (ABA methods)
- Pivotal Response Training (PRT)
- Schedules (student schedules)
- Language training (e.g. modeling verbalizations for the student to imitate)
- Self-management (promoting independence)

- Modeling (imitation of target behavior)
- Naturalistic teaching strategies (child-directed to teach functional skills)
- Scripting
- Peer training package
- Parent training
- Cognitive behavioral intervention
- Story-based intervention package
- Social skills package

https://www.nationalautismcenter.org/national-standards-project/

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Foundational Skills: Language Skills

★ **Receptive Language**   ★ **Expressive Language**

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Functional Communication

- When children develop language, most first words and or word combinations are centered around communicating wants and needs.
- Teaching students to respond using an appropriate or alternative way of communicating can decrease or replace behaviors perceived as challenging.
- What are some options?
  - Spoken language (e.g., sounds, imitation, spontaneous words, phrases, etc.)
  - Gestures and nonverbal communication
  - Pictures
  - Communication boards
  - Speech-generated devices
  - Written language
  - A combination or any or all of the above

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Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

- ☆ Consider individual and family priorities and preferences when choosing language and communication goals
  - ☆ Set-up meetings with caregivers and/or students and ask questions
  - ☆ Examples: what are your short-term goals? long-term goals? challenges in the home? favorite routines? challenging routines? etc.
  - ☆ Choose materials (e.g., toys, foods, activities, books, etc.) and expressive language targets that are culturally and linguistically inclusive
  - ☆ Consider language environments (i.e., is another language spoken at home?)

See ASHA's Portal page on Cultural Competence, Bilingual Service Delivery and Collaborating with Interpreters, Transliterators, and Translators

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The Power of Understanding Language

- ☆ Increases success and provides more opportunities for teachers to reinforce desired behaviors
- ☆ Decreases prompt dependency
- ☆ Increases independence and participation in routines

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Practical Tips to Support Understanding

- ☆ Use clear, concise language
- ☆ Identify a time to practice
  - ☆ Use DT and PRT lessons
- ☆ Provide specific feedback and reinforcement
- ☆ Use visual supports and effective prompting during routines

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Tip 1: Use Clear, Concise Language

- ☆ Tell the student "what to do" versus "what not to do"
  - ☆ "Walk with me" versus "stop running"
- ☆ Simplify your language
  - ☆ Use consistent language like "stop," "wait," and "walk with me"
  - ☆ Keep in short-use only a few words at a time
  - ☆ Use only the important words
- ☆ Be direct (avoid indirect questions or statements)
  - ☆ Do not phrase your request as a question, such as "Should we go wash our hands?"
- ☆ Say it once, then help the student understand in another way
  - ☆ Use visual cues, gestures, or prompts

Scan this QR code to see an example of a common language poster!

SCAN ME

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Say This, Not That

Instead of this…	Say this…
"It is lunch time. Do you want to come sit at the table and choose something to eat?"	"Lunch time! Come sit down."
"You need to get your backpack right now because it is time to go home."	"Get backpack."
"Are you ready to give me a turn with the toy?"	"My turn with toy."
"No hitting!"	"Hands down."
"Don't throw your toys."	"Put toys in bin." (or show/tell appropriate play)
"Stop running!"	"Walk with me."

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Video Example: Understanding Language

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Tip 2: Teach Using DT Lessons

- ☆ Links and STAR lessons provide "recommended items to teach"
- ☆ Think beyond the recommended items
- ☆ Use routine data and choose commands that will increase students' success in routines

Skill	Example
Object imitation	"Do this" (unzipping backpack) "Do this" (putting notebook in bin)
Following one-step commands	"Get your backpack" "Unzip backpack" "Take out notebook"
Following multi-step directions/location commands	"Go to the shelf and get your backpack"
Identifying objects or pictures	"Give me backpack" "Give me notebook"
Picture Sequencing	"Put in order" (pictures of the steps of the arrival routine)

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Video Example:
Following Two-Step Commands

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Tip 3: Provide Feedback

- ☆ Embed opportunities for students to follow directions during routines
- ☆ Provide reinforcement after the student follows the direction, even when prompted
- ☆ Whenever possible, use natural reinforcement by following the request with a preferred item or activity
  - ☆ If the student is thirsty, say "give me the cup" and then immediately give them water
- ☆ Be specific in your praise by labeling the specific behavior
  - ☆ "Great job getting your shoes"
  - ☆ "Nice walking with me"
  - ☆ "Good work putting toys away"

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Tip 4: Use Visual Supports in Routines

When giving a verbal direction, pair your words with **visual supports to** show the student what to do!

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Video Example:
Using a Visual Strip

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Use Effective Prompting

- ☆ Get the student's attention and say the cue one time
  - ☆ Use clear, concise, consistent language
- ☆ Use the least intrusive prompt necessary to increase success and avoid prompt dependence
- ☆ Fade prompts as quickly as possible

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The Power of Expression

☆ Empowers individuals to have more control and choice
☆ Caregivers and educators learn what students want
☆ Increases positive interactions with peers
☆ Decreases and often replaces behaviors perceived as challenging

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Four Steps to Teaching Communication

1. Choose 1-2 target goals
2. Identify time and space to teach and practice goals in a 1:1 or small group setting
3. Set-up expressive opportunities in daily routines
4. Respond to the student's attempts to communicate

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Identify Lessons to Teach

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STAR: Preschool and Elementary

☆ Create a **PRT area** in your classroom
☆ Gather **motivating** materials and place in a bin or within sight but out of reach
☆ Post **target goals**

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Teaching Sequence

☆ Student choice
☆ Minimally block access to create an opportunity for communication
☆ Provide a cue (verbal or nonverbal)
☆ Student responds or attempts
☆ Give access to toy/activity
☆ Prepare for next cue

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Schedule 1:1 Time to Teach Communication

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Use Motivating Materials and Collect Data to Monitor Progress

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Opportunities in Routines	Strategies
Snack or Mealtime	• Accept appropriate communication attempts i.e., eye contact, reaching pointing, approximation of sounds, words or phrases • Model language you want the student to use • Expand on their level of communication (e.g., Student says, "Cookie." Adult says, "I want cookie." and gives the cookie.) • Place desired items in sight but out of reach, give inadequate portions, provide choices
Play Time or Leisure Time	• Follow the student's lead • Take balanced turns • Playfully obstruct desired items and provide wait time
Small Group	• Choose motivating activities • Model language you want the student to use • Provide social communication opportunities (i.e., greeting others, asking and answering questions, etc.)

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Snack Routine Example

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Socializing with Friends/Playing a Game Example

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Provide Reinforcement

- ✿ Provide **direct** reinforcement
  - ★ The toy or activity is a natural consequence to the behavior
- ✿ Provide **clear and immediate** reinforcement
  - ★ Give the student access to what they want immediately and *only* after a desired response
- ✿ Reinforce **attempts**
  - ★ Any appropriate response to keep the student motivated

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Caregiver Collaboration

- ✿ Develop partnerships with families:
  - ✿ Shared goals and expertise
  - ✿ Establish rapport
  - ✿ Communication
- ✿ Coach caregivers to use strategies at home
- ✿ Provide access to tools

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Home Supports and Webinars for Families and Caregivers

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Thank you for joining!

For more information: www.starautismsupport.com

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