

Module: Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

HOW CAN PRT BE USED IN THE CLASSROOM?

Elementary School

The elementary school experience is much more complicated than preschool in a variety of ways, and increases in complexity with each grade level. Classroom environments change significantly each year, including fewer preferred toys, games, and visual materials as well as moving to a much heavier emphasis on verbal skills. However, motivation strategies can still be used to maximize opportunities for learners with ASD to continue to develop vital communication and social skills.

Coordinating with parents continues to be a critical component in increasing the learner's potential for success. This remains constant throughout the school experience. Though the content changes as academic demands increase in complexity and diversity, parents and school staff should continue to collaborate about teaching strategies, goals, and progress in order to maximize learning opportunities and generalization of skills.

Team members arrange the environment to include as many opportunities for *learner choice* as possible. Learners can make choices regarding books to read, writing instruments (e.g., pens, pencils), the order in which to complete tasks, and options of different playground equipment at recess (e.g., balls, games to play at a table).

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Academic development becomes a priority in elementary school, and maximizing all of the PRT strategies can optimize learner interest and engagement in challenging academic tasks. Specifically, team members should incorporate the following PRT principles:

1. *Task variation should be included in all tasks and assignments.*

This includes varying length, size, duration, and difficulty of lectures and assignments to maximize motivation. Many opportunities can be developed to change the style or format of a task, and also incorporate more opportunities for learner choices. For example, learners can practice reading the items at lunch before opening the containers, or reading labels on various supplies in the classroom (e.g., markers, crayons, reading room, and directional signs around the school area). Writing can be broken up into different types of projects, such as writing postcards to friends and family. Using varying modalities is also a successful way to engage learners, such as using manipulatives with different textures for math fact practice (e.g., mini marshmallows, raisins, and colorful marbles).

2. *Reinforcement should be used in all activities.*

Delivering verbal and written praise for attempts is critical to maintain motivation.

3. *Learner choice should be used as an intervention strategy.*

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Allowing multiple opportunities for learners to make choices is very powerful in gaining their attention and keeping their motivation high. For example, whenever supplies are needed for a project or activity, allowing learners to choose colors of items, paper, or writing instruments is an easy way to increase motivation. Choosing objects to use for math activities provides an opportunity for a choice as well as setting up a powerful reinforcer.

4. *Natural, contingent reinforcement should be used as much as possible.*

Whenever possible, design the natural consequences of an activity so they are reinforcing to the learner. This is easiest when learners choose items or activities themselves; however, choices and reinforcing items can be embedded within adult-directed activities. For example, when using manipulatives for math practice, allow learners to eat the raisins or mini-marshmallows after successfully completing the lesson or play with the marbles for five minutes. Another logical reinforcer is to set up the contingency that learners can go to recess as soon as they write two sentences about with what and with whom they are going to play.