

Module: Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

HOW CAN PRT BE USED IN THE CLASSROOM?

Preschool

The most important PRT goals for learners with ASD in the infant/toddler and preschool years are to

- Develop and generalize social communication skills that can be used to interact with same-age peers, team members, and other adults; and
- Acquire necessary preacademic skills needed to enter kindergarten (R. L. Koegel & Koegel, 2006).

Typical preschool environments are ideal for providing enhanced opportunities for learners with ASD, since they most often include highly preferred objects and activities, a small adult-child ratio, and typically developing peers who can model appropriate behavior. Team members can incorporate motivational strategies that increase responding and interaction by considering the strategies described in the following section.

1. Collaborate with parents to learn as much about young children with ASD as possible.

For example, team members can communicate with families to identify:

- learner's favorite toys, foods, and activities;
- learner dislikes;
- tasks that are hard for the learner to do;

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- strategies that soothe the learner when he or she is agitated;
- communication strategies the learner uses; and
- skills that are being worked on at home and what strategies are being used.

In addition, observations of learners in natural settings provide useful information about preferred toys, activities, and objects, as well as how they engage with materials and people.

2. *Include learner choice as an intervention strategy.*

Through planned and unplanned learning opportunities, include favorite or preferred items that can be used to help the learner acquire additional language and communication skills. By including favorite materials, learners can select specific items that naturally interest them to increase motivation. For example, dinosaurs could be included in a painting or writing activity to increase motivation to participate.

3. *Use natural, contingent reinforcement.*

When learners indicate interest for an item or activity, model the desired response. For example, if the target is a single word, label the object “ball,” or “doll.” If the target response is multiword, model the phrase “Want markers,” or “I want markers.” If the learner fails to respond, then model the desired response again. Any clear attempt to respond should be reinforced with the natural consequence of playing with the item and praise.

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4. *Place items in sight, but out of reach or in containers the learner needs help to open.*

These strategies provide opportunities for children to make choices as well as to initiate communication and interaction. For example, place a clear box of animals on a low shelf to motivate the learner to initiate a social communicative exchange with an adult. The team member then can prompt the learner to use the target skill (e.g., “Toys, please.”).

5. *Give items with more than one piece or part gradually (e.g., food treats, pieces to a puzzle, crayons) so that learners must request to obtain them.*

Having an activity that includes materials with numerous pieces gives additional opportunities for communication/language practice. When using this strategy, make sure to intersperse other, less demanding types of requesting to prolong learner interest and motivation and decrease frustration. For example, if you are working on “Want block,” make sure to also accept some reaches for blocks, “Block,” or just give some for free as well as periodically waiting for the full target response of “Want block.” Make sure to reinforce the target response differentially; that is, giving it the most reinforcement by either providing more of the requested item or increasing the degree of praise when the learner uses the full target word or phrase (R. L. Koegel, Koegel, & Surratt, 1992; R. L. Koegel, Sze et al., 2006).

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Team members also can encourage the development and generalization of skills to interactions between the learner with ASD and typically developing peers by implementing motivational strategies in the following ways:

- Arranging the environment indoors and outdoors to stimulate interest through the use of preferred items and activities (e.g., take dinosaurs outside in the sandbox).
- Following the learner's lead and allowing the learner to become interested in certain objects or activities (e.g., watching what children are doing and imitating their play).
- Prompting one of the learners (either the child with ASD or a typically developing peer) to interact with one another and provide a clear opportunity to respond that is related to the item or activity that is of interest to the learner with ASD.
- Prompting a typically developing peer to immediately provide the preferred item contingent upon the learner's attempt to verbally respond.

Motivation techniques can also be used to successfully teach pre-academic skills to both typical developing and young children with ASD. For example, colored blocks, crayons, and markers provide many opportunities to work on color names. If a learner is interested in playing with one of these items, the team member or peer can provide

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each piece contingent on naming the color. Opportunities can also be provided to work on letter recognition and number concepts, including reading letters of names written on lunch boxes, labels written on objects/areas in the classroom, boxes that hold toys or games, the number of blocks in a tower, how many pushes on the swing for each learner's turn, how many pretzels a learner gets at snack, and so on.