Module: Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

TEACHING PIVOTAL BEHAVIORS: PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATIONS

Self-Management Strategies to Reduce Interfering Behaviors and Teach Positive

Replacement Behaviors

Self-management of interfering behavior involves a second important phase after team members have successfully implemented strategies that reduced and managed the interfering behavior. To successfully reduce the interfering behavior over the long term, learners must be involved in the process of developing a comprehensive intervention plan that is durable, generalizable, addresses the different maintaining functions and problem routines learners present; and involves a self-management component (Horner & Carr, 1997). This requires (a) an assessment of the interfering behavior to determine its function and (b) the development of appropriate behavioral intervention strategies that teach learners how to use alternative behaviors that serve the same function as the interfering behaviors in question (i.e., **replacement behaviors**).

When self-management is being implemented to reduce an interfering behavior, the reinforcer/reward is particularly important, because for most learners it takes some time before the functionally equivalent replacement behavior becomes as successful as (ideally more successful than) the undesirable predecessor (e.g., appropriately requesting attention instead of having a tantrum). Rewarding the period of time without the interfering behavior will help to quickly reduce it while the replacement behavior is being learned (L. K. Koegel, Koegel, Boettcher, Harrower, & Openden 2006).

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Steps for Implementation

The following example illustrates the steps for implementing self-management

strategies to decrease interfering behaviors (described in L. K. Koegel, Koegel, & Parks,

1992) for a verbal 10-year-old with ASD who becomes frustrated in class and resorts to

making loud, inappropriate outbursts in the middle of class rather than asking for a

break.

Step 1. Defining the behavior. The first step requires developing a behavioral

definition for the inappropriate or interfering behavior. The behavior must be defined so

that team members know why it is occurring. This information can be obtained by

completing a functional behavior assessment (FBA). Once the function of the interfering

behavior has been identified, the replacement behavior to teach the learner can be

defined. For more information on functional behavior assessment, please refer to the

AIM module Functional Behavior Assessment at www.autisminternetmodules.org.

   EXAMPLE: *Jonah will raise his hand during class to ask for a break.*

Step 2. Preparing the self-management system. The next step is to prepare the self-

management system by defining the behavior that will be taught to replace the

interfering behavior. After identifying the function of the interfering behavior and

potential replacement behaviors, consider the following questions:

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- What behavior will the learner use to attract the team member's attention?

- When will the learner need to use the behavior?

- Can the learner independently use the behavior?

- How will the behavior be measured?

In addition, rewards must be identified to be used when the learner uses the replacement behavior. Remember that the rewards have to be worth the learner's effort. For example, if learners are not motivated by a given reward, they will not engage in the desired behavior. Learners also should have a range of rewards, some small and some large, to choose from as the behavior develops and becomes more consistent. Finally, an initial goal should be identified and explained to the learner. For instance, the team member would explain to the learner that he must wait until the adult asks for questions before raising his hand. Inappropriate behaviors also can be defined and explained through examples (or role play if needed) for learners. When initially implementing the self-management system, the team member also might pause more often for learner comments/questions, providing the learner with more opportunities to experience success. As the learner becomes more proficient at using the new skill, the length of the time between periods when learners can ask questions would increase.

Step 3. Teaching self-management. Once the system has been prepared, learners are taught to self-manage the new behavior. This process involves having learners

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identify and record the occurrence of the behavior. Initially, they may use wrist counters (e.g., a golf counter) or a sheet of paper with boxes for tally marks to record each response. As they progress, time intervals may be used, especially for higher functioning children and adolescents. Once enough checks or points have been gained, they are exchanged for one of the predetermined rewards chosen by the learner. Remember that the learner has worked hard for the reward and initially will need to be reinforced immediately after exhibiting the positive behavior.

Step 4. Creating independence. The reward system be can gradually faded by increasing the amount of time that the individual self-manages the behavior or the number of responses necessary for a reward. In the above example, the learner may be able to tolerate two class periods or check off 20 boxes before needing a break. Thus, his self-management program is adjusted accordingly (based on the data). Fading learners' reliance on prompts and the presence of team members are also critical steps to sustain independent responding.

The goal in this program is to teach behaviors that normalize interactions with others. Part of creating independence may require thinking about the selection of reinforcers. Initially, learners may require an object or item that does not necessarily improve social communicative skills. However, when learners can self-manage their behaviors, several other positive changes occur. As learners become more comfortable and successful,

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other reinforcers that promote sociability may be substituted to facilitate further development. In the above example, as the learner earns time toward a break for raising his hand, he may be more inclined to share this with a friend, such as playing a game at the computer or having a few additional free minutes at recess/lunch.

Step 5. Generalizing to Other Settings. The final step is to teach the learner how to apply the self-management program in additional settings. To ensure success, this may involve going back to prior steps in the teaching or planning phase. For example, the learner may need a break while at recess and may raise his hand, but the physical education teacher may not understand the behavior and thus unintentionally ignores his bid; or a learner might make inappropriate outbursts, but the function of the behavior has changed (now he does it to attract his peers' attention). These issues can be effectively addressed with the self-management program. With support and teaching, learners are likely to attain independence and self-control.