


**Empowered Collaboration:  
Giving Autistic Individuals a Voice for Self-Advocacy through Functional Communication**



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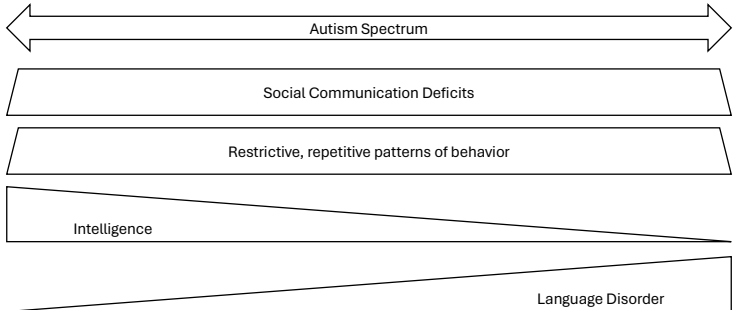
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**Autism history**

<p><b>01</b></p> <p>Originated from the greek word „autos“ for self</p>	<p><b>02</b></p> <p>Eugen Bleuler first used the term autism in 1911 under the umbrella diagnosis of schizophrenia.</p>	<p><b>03</b></p> <p>Hans Asperger (1944) und Leo Kanner (1943) beschrieben Autismus unabhängig voneinander als eigenständige Diagnose</p>	<p><b>04</b></p> <p>Sie beschrieben den „Zustand der inneren Zurückgezogenheit“</p>
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**Autism Spectrum Disorders – linear**



Autism Spectrum

Social Communication Deficits

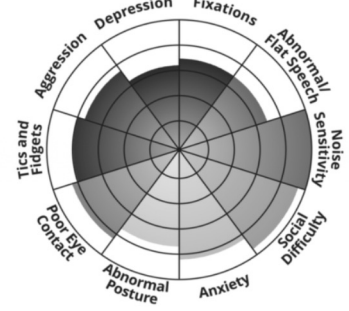
Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior

Intelligence

Language Disorder

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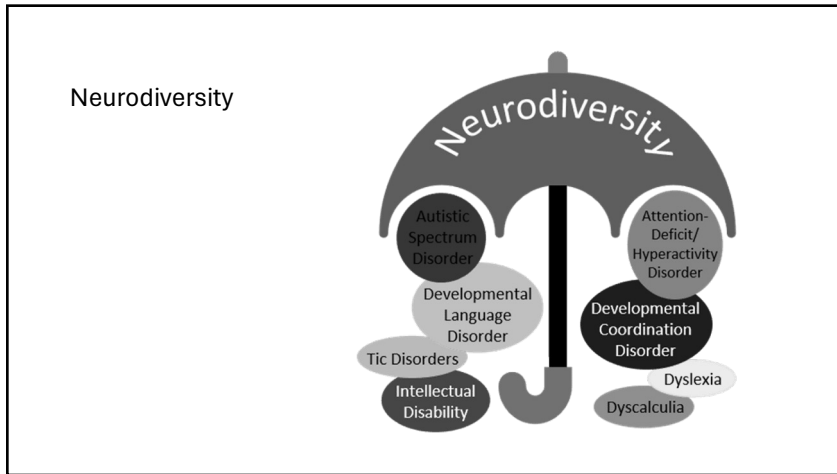
**Results:**



**Multi-dimensional view of Autism**

Your autism spectrum symptoms are high.

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### Further development of diagnostic aspects

- Potentially identifying “profound” Autism
  - IQ below 70
  - Minimally verbal
  - Needing 24-hour supervision

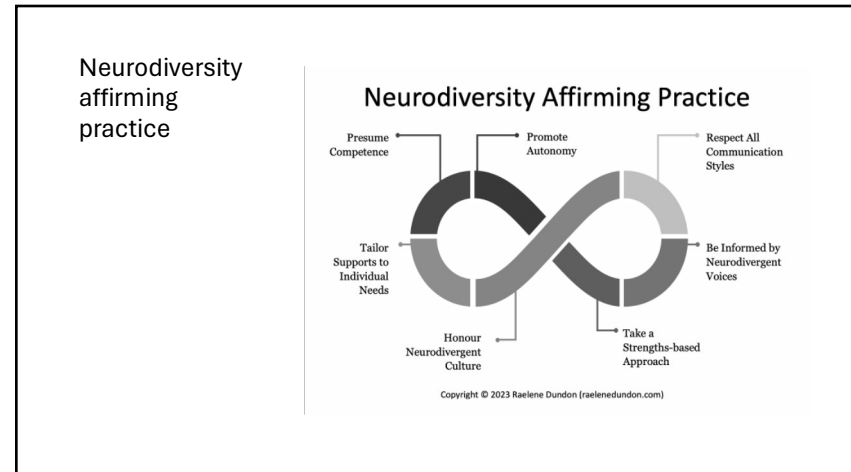
Challenge with a different kind of spectrum

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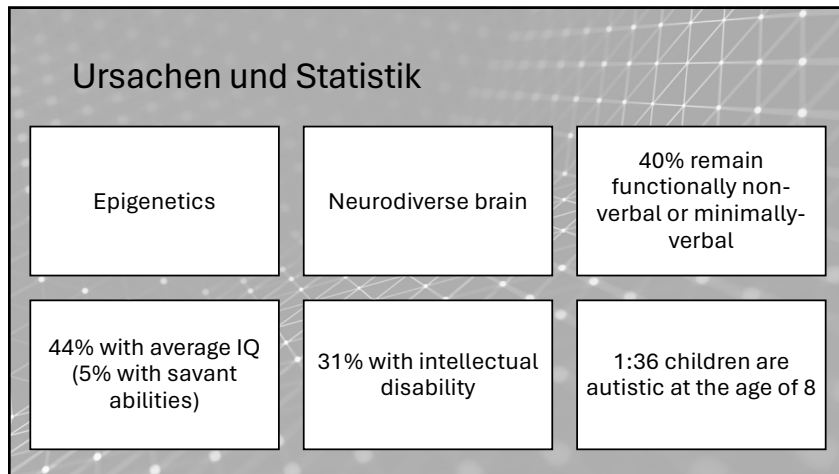
### Parents voices

- It feels like the type of autism my son has, still has to be hidden. He doesn't talk, he has hard times with small things in life, such as going to the store or when people come over. Anytime I go to the store other parents feel like they have to share their opinion with me, when my son is overstimulated. Am I supposed to lock him up? He can't advocate for himself, so I am his voice.
- Of course, I love my child. But, if my other kids also have needs. It's not fair to arrange our lives only after the needs of one child. Just because he has autism, I can't allow him to destroy the house when he is overstimulated. With intensive ABA he has learned to communicate to us his needs without having to destroy things or hit himself. Now we can go to restaurants, family events and he is even integrated into some mainstream classrooms. Some days he can't do that, but some other days are better.

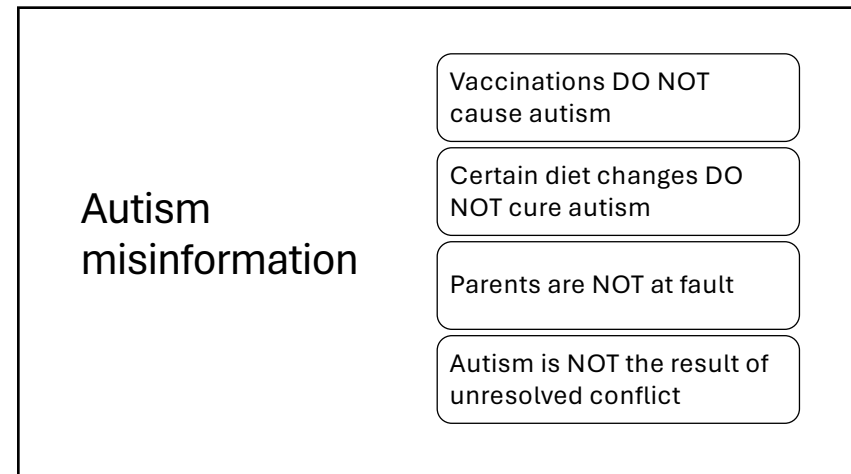
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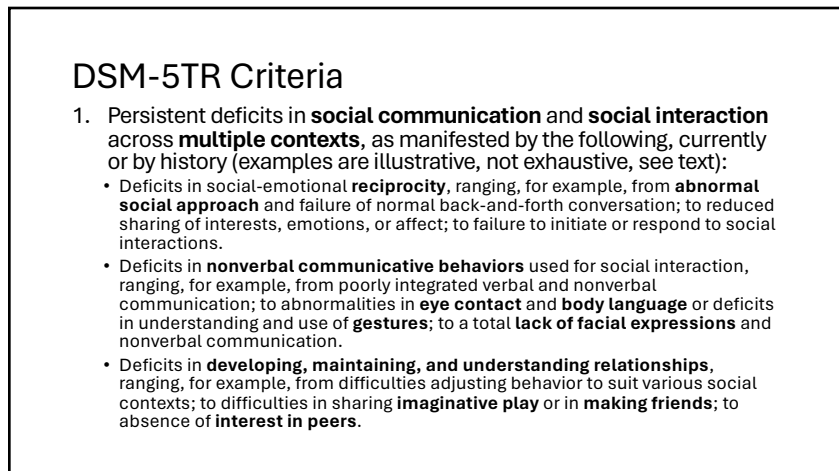
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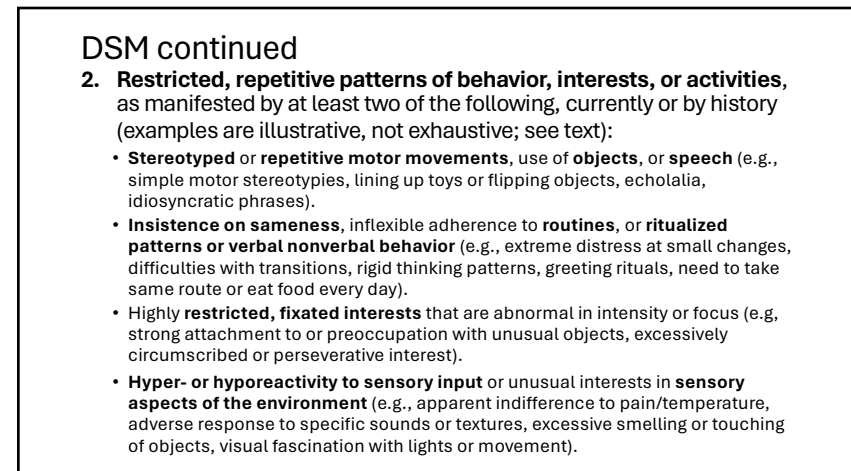
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### DSM

3. Symptoms must be present in the **early developmental** period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).
4. Symptoms cause **clinically significant** impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.
5. These disturbances are **not better explained by intellectual disability** (intellectual developmental disorder) or **global developmental delay**. Intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder frequently co-occur; to make comorbid diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability, social communication should be below that expected for general developmental level.

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### Levels of autism

- Level 1 – children need support.
- Level 2 – children need substantial support.
- Level 3 – children need very substantial support.
  
- With or without accompanying intellectual impairment
- With or without accompanying language impairment
  - **(Coding note:** Use additional code to identify the associated medical or genetic condition.)

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Masking  
autism



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### Autism in females

The same diagnostic criteria apply

Barriers to diagnoses are present:

- Parental concerns
- Other's perception
- Clinician perception

Success and competence in some domains does not rule out autism

Positive traits may be suggestive of autism

Sensory sensitivities

May have unusual language/speech (prosody, semantics, sounds)

Look for patterns of behavior (routines)

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## Heightened *ATTENTION* to Socially Salient Stimuli

Can show sympathy and intact affective empathy	Better at engaging in small talk (superficial communication)	Difficulty reading non-verbal cues
Invests large amount of energy preparing for social interactions, with following exhaustion	Learned and sometimes forces eye contact	Still consider early developmental years

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## Voices of some females with autism

“Back in the day they didn’t really help me, they just put me down to really being a naughty child.”

“ I was unbearable with my mother, but at school I was perfect.”

*“The reward of trying hard to be normal was to be ignored because you were acting normal and I look at stories online of kids who were going off the rails and I think, I should have just burnt more cars!”*

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

*Autism Res* 2020, 13: 1358–1372

## Recognition of Girls on the Autism Spectrum by Primary School Educators: An Experimental Study

Alana Whitlock, Kate Fulton, Meng-Chuan Lai, Elizabeth Pellicano, and William Mandy

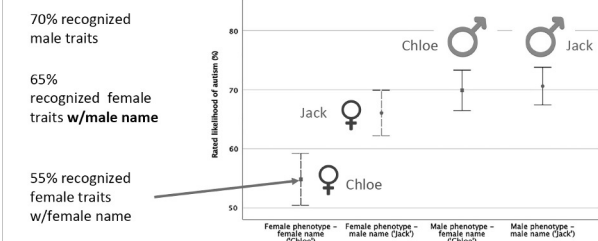


Figure 1. Rated likelihood of autism diagnosis as a function of vignette phenotype and gender (mean, 95% CI).

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Autistic male



Gets compared to



Neurotypical male

Autistic female



Gets compared to



Neurotypical male

Autistic female



SHOULD be compared to



Neurotypical female

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## Autism in females

- Often females with autism get overlooked due to their masking abilities
- Higher risk of suicide and self-harm

**SUICIDE ATTEMPTS ODDS RATIOS**

Diagnosis	Females	Males
ASD + ID	2.5	6
ASD	10	5.55

**DIED BY SUICIDE ODDS RATIOS**

Diagnosis	Females	Males
ASD	3.85	14.26
ASD + ID	12.72	-

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## Differential diagnosis of the following

ADHD	Trauma	Global developmental delay
Angelman syndrome	Fragile X-syndrome	Rett syndrome
Hearing impairment	Traumatic-brain injury	Fetal alcohol syndrome

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## Considerations for treatment

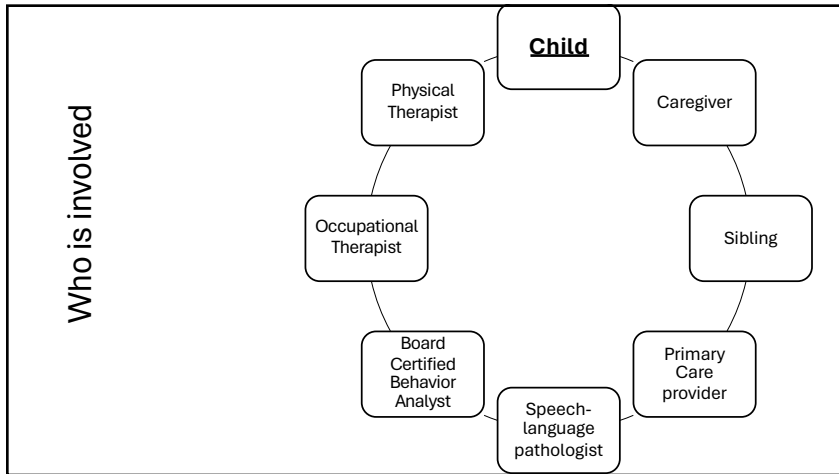
**SETTING**      **PROVIDERS**      **INTENSITY**

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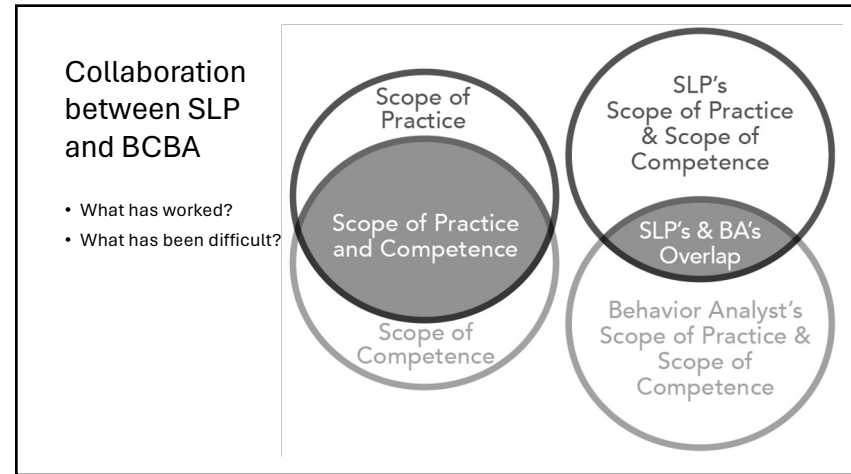
## Setting

- School
- Autism center/school
- In-home
- Private practice

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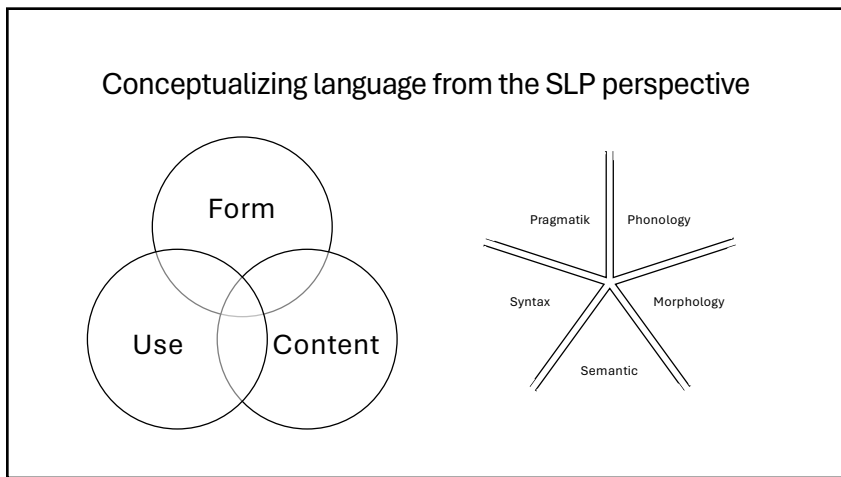
**Relative Strengths and Opportunities for Collaboration**

RELATIVE STRENGTHS	
<p><b>SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diagnostics</li> <li>Spoken and Written Language</li> <li>Child Development</li> <li>Articulation/Phonology</li> <li>Swallowing and Feeding</li> <li>Language Structures</li> <li>Augmentative and Alternative Communication</li> <li>Speech, Fluency, and Voice</li> </ul>	<p><b>BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data Collection Strategies</li> <li>Behavior Interventions</li> <li>Functional Behavior Assessments</li> <li>Reinforcement and Motivation</li> <li>Single Case Design Methodology</li> <li>Functional Communication Training</li> <li>Preference Assessments</li> <li>Principles and Tactics of Effective Teaching</li> </ul>

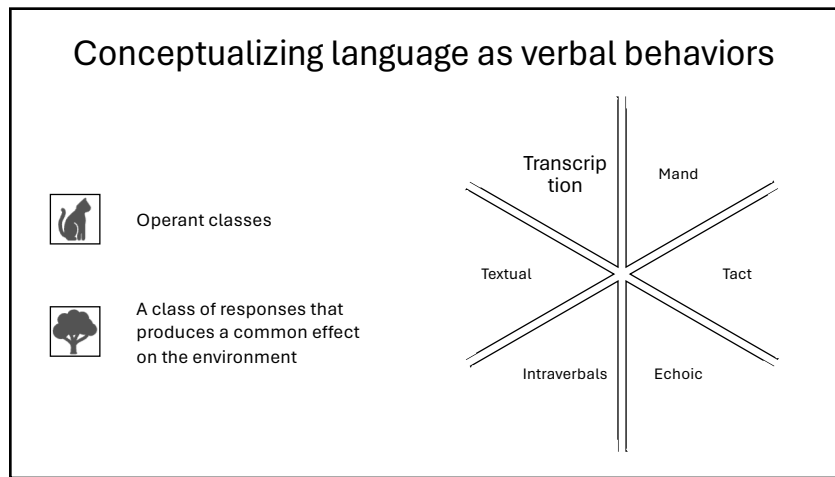
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OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION	
<p><b>SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behavior Management</li> <li>Functional Communication Training</li> <li>Single Case Design Methodology</li> <li>Data Collection Strategies</li> <li>Preference Assessments</li> <li>Principles and Tactics of Effective Teaching</li> </ul>	<p><b>BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developmental Norms</li> <li>Articulation/Phonology</li> <li>Structures of Language</li> <li>Feeding</li> <li>Language Sampling</li> <li>Augmentative and Alternative Communication</li> </ul>

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## Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others or self.

Self Advocacy

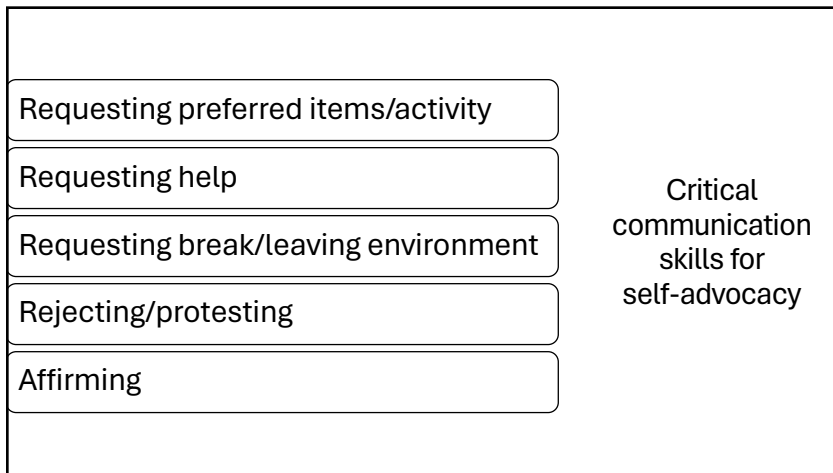
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## Self-advocacy in autism

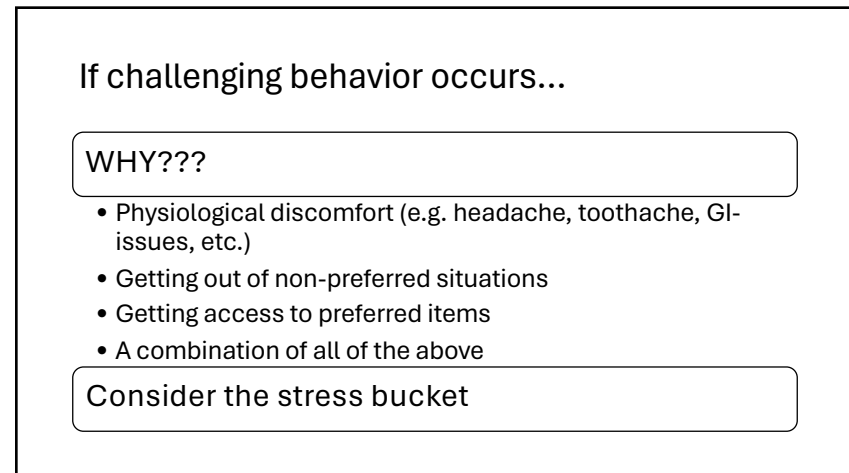
- Often looks like challenging behavior
  - Functions can vary
- Language disorder prevents child from advocating for themselves
- Social demands are too high to access language
- Decision-making often done by other well-meaning people

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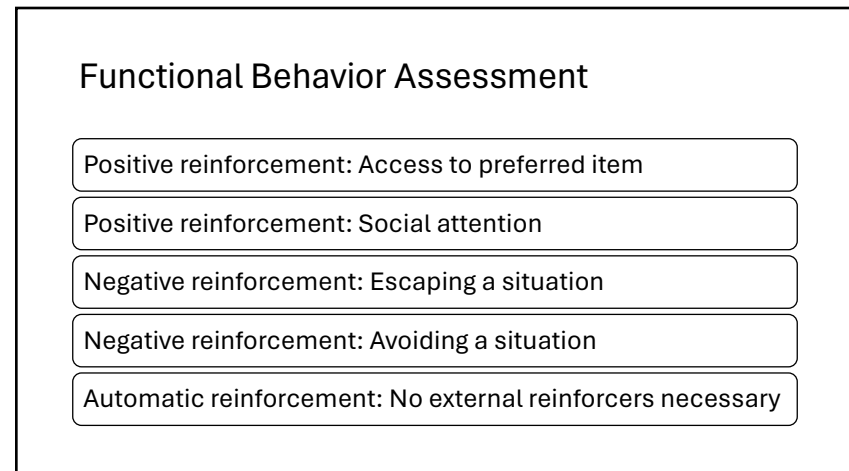
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## Functional Communication Training

- Most common and effective intervention for severe problem behavior
- The learner is taught an alternative response that results in the same class of reinforcement
- It has been shown to be effective for individuals with a variety of disabilities across different ages who engage in:
  - aggression, self-harm, motor and vocal disruption, inappropriate sexual behavior, and inappropriate communicative behavior

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## FCT for Self-Advocacy

[J Appl Behav Anal.](#) 1990 Spring; 23(1): 79-89.  
doi: [10.1901/jaba.1990.23-79](#)

PMCID: PMC1286212  
PMID: 2186017

**Balancing the right to habilitation with the right to personal liberties: the rights of people with developmental disabilities to eat too many doughnuts and take a nap.**

[D J Bannerman](#), [J B Sheldon](#), [J A Sherman](#), and [A E Harchik](#)

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**Learners vote with their feet!**



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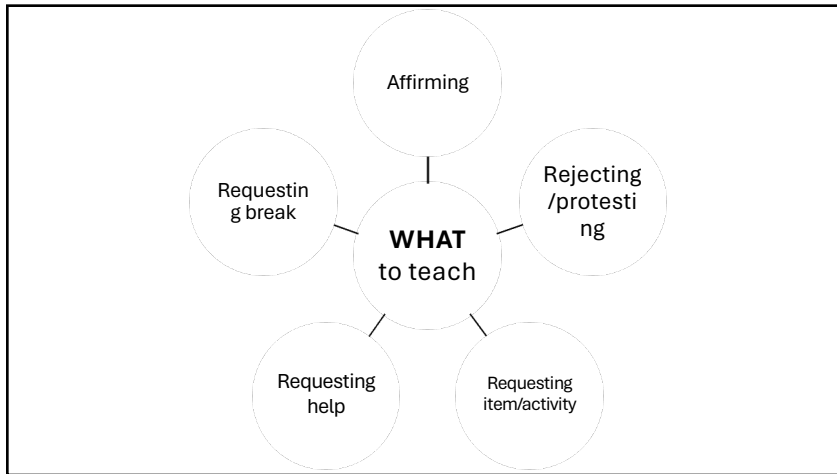
## Communication tries to accomplish a balance

- able to be flexible
- doing non-preferred activities
- doing things in a non-preferred way
- going to non-preferred places
- being in the presence of non-preferred people
- etc.

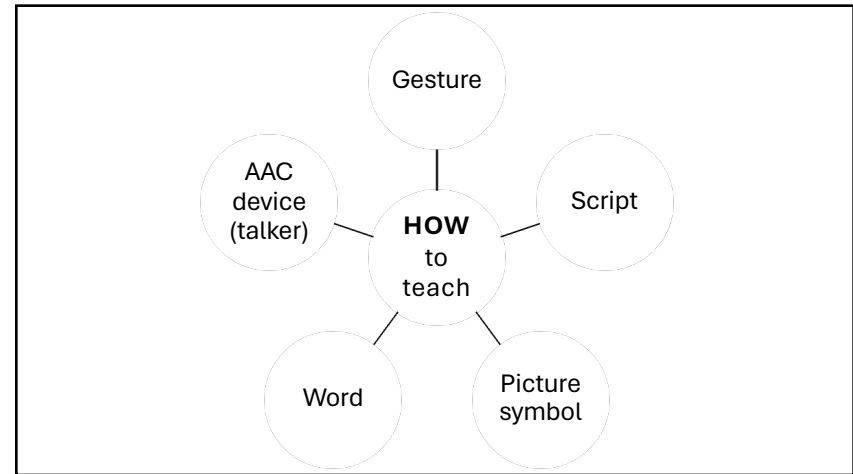


- getting breaks
- getting attention
- getting to meet sensory needs
- appropriately rejecting activities
- doing things the learners way
- advocating for your own needs
- etc.

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### Guidelines



Response effort should be less than the challenging behavior



Response should be recognizable in all relevant social settings



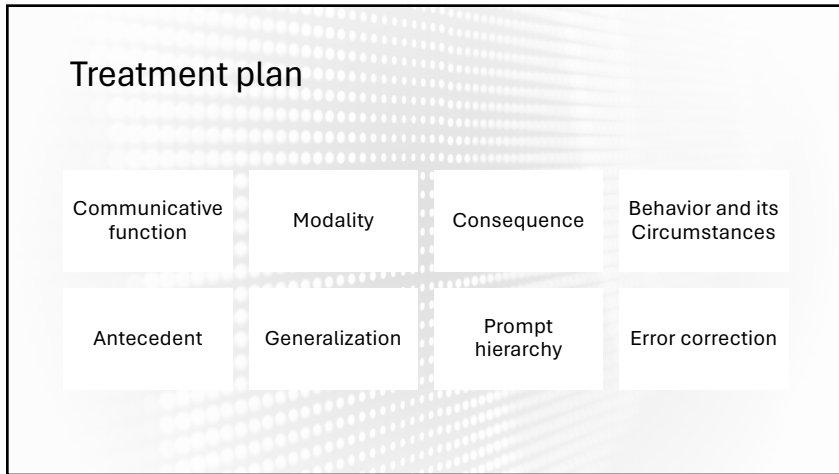
Response should be quickly acquired

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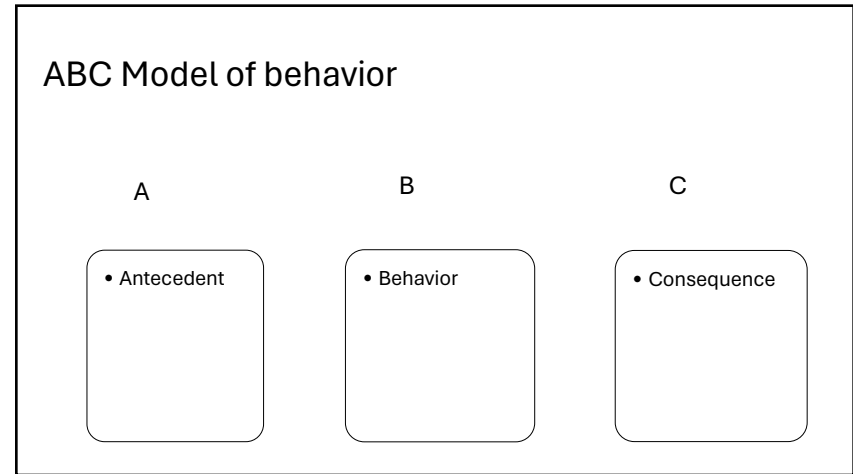
## How do children with autism learn?

- Most autistic individuals DO NOT learn through modeling and imitation
  - Some common language facilitation techniques are not as effective as direct instruction
- Direct instruction and repetition
- Hyperfocus on details of interest
- Screens
- Reading (Hyperlexia can occur)

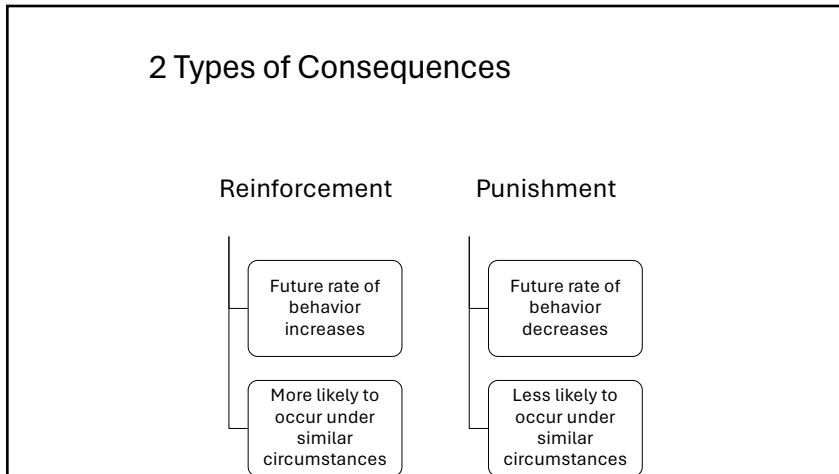
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### Quick review


	Stimulus is added	Stimulus is removed
Behavior occurs again under similar circumstances	Positive Reinforcement	Negative Reinforcement
Behavior decreases under similar circumstances	Positive Punishment	Negative Punishment

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### Guideline




Immediate



Use the most powerful reinforcer for the most difficult tasks




Praise is only a reinforcer if it actually increases behavior




Most effective when varied

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### Relativity of reinforcer




REINFORCEMENT IS DEFINED BY WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BEHAVIOR IN THE FUTURE



DO NOT ASSUME YOUR OWN REINFORCER WORK FOR OTHERS



TAKE TIME TO IDENTIFY REINFORCERS



PREFERENCES WILL CHANGE OVER TIME


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### Schedules of Reinforcement


<p><b>Fixed Ratio</b></p> <p>Reinforcement given after a specific number of responses</p> <p>Use when you are teaching a new skill</p> <p>Example: Vending machine</p>	<p><b>Variable Ratio</b></p> <p>Reinforcement given after an average number of responses</p> <p>Use when you are maintaining a skill</p> <p>Example: Slot machine</p>
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### Behavior



In the case of teaching self-advocacy through communication, we consider communication acts a behavior.



Remember the WHAT and the HOW to teach communication responses!

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## Circumstances of behavior

- Under which circumstances does the behavior occur?
  1. Spontaneously
  2. Response to a question
  3. Through imitation
  4. Script

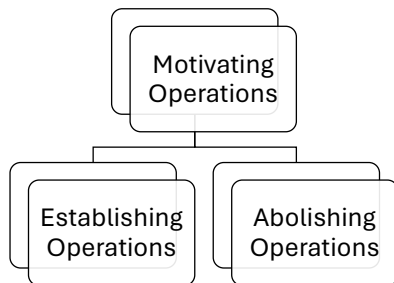
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## Antecedents

- SD (discriminative stimulus)
  - Signal the availability of a reinforcer
- S-delta
  - Signal the unavailability of a reinforcer
- Motivating Operations
  - Changes the value of a reinforcer

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## Antecedent Variables

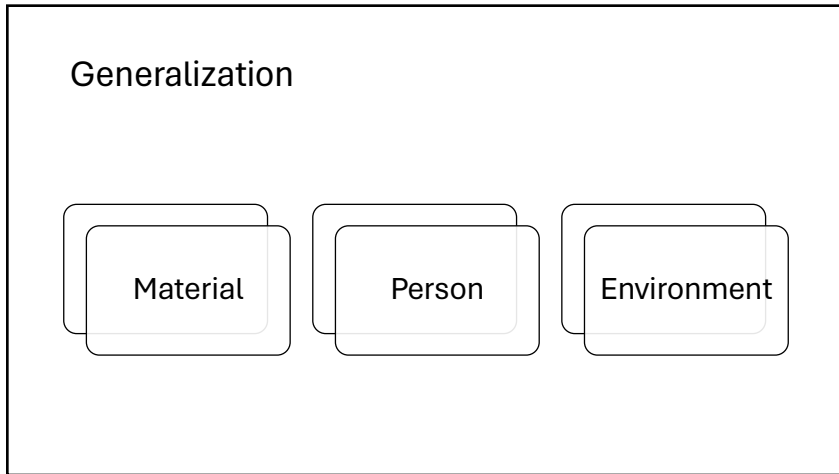


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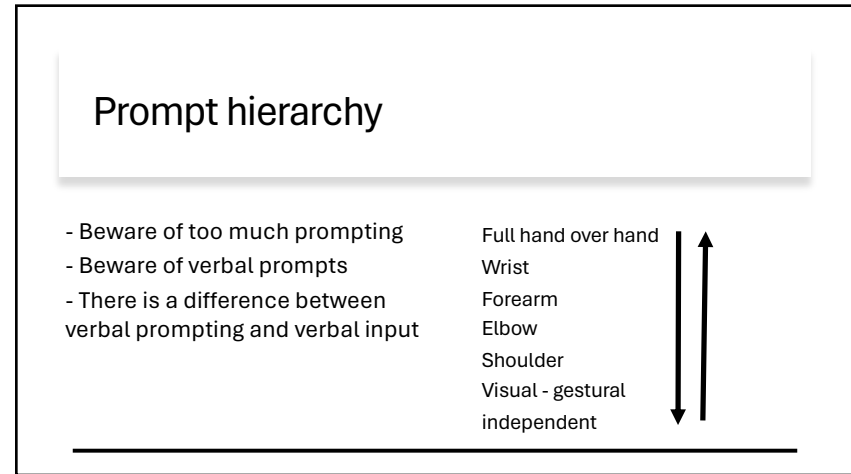
## Antecedent

Antecedent		Behavior
No access	Can lead to	Spontaneous requesting
Asking a question	Can lead to	Responding to question
Modeling something	Can lead to	Attempt to imitate
Environmental arrangement	Can lead to	Compliance in therapy
Locked cabinet	Can lead to	Request for help
Broken toy	Can lead to	Initiation of communication
Visual schedule	Can lead to	Transitions between activities
Presence of preferred person	Can lead to	Engagement during therapy
Time on the clock	Can lead to	End of therapy
Street sign	Can lead to	Slowing down or yielding
Smell of fresh bread	Can lead to	Asking for a piece
Access to regular breaks	Can lead to	Fewer attempts to escape or avoid tasks

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### Let's get started with therapy

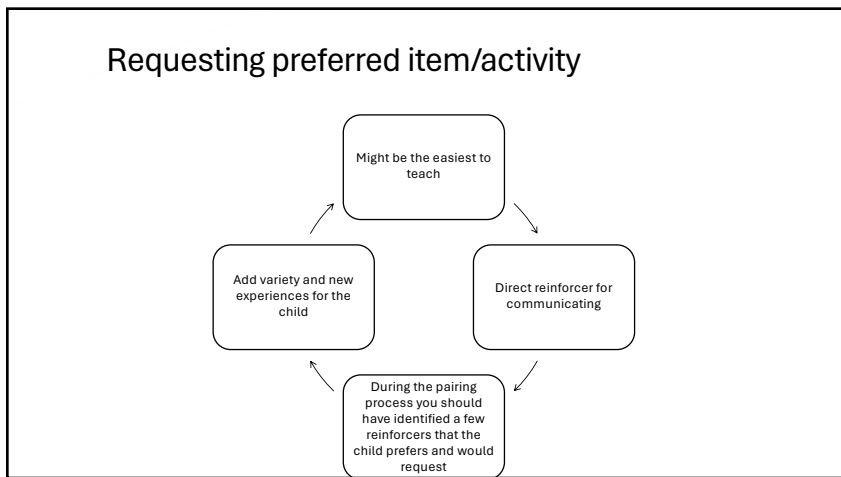
- Pairing
  - With therapist
  - With environment
  - Build connection
  - Get on the level of the child
  - Observe the child and its preferences
  - Always attend to the child
  - Attempt parallel play
  - HRE (Happy - Relaxed - Engaged)

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- Requesting preferred items/activity
- Requesting help
- Requesting break/leaving environment
- Rejecting/protesting
- Affirming


Critical communication skills for self-advocacy

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### Circumstances of request




Spontaneous – set up the environment



In response to a question – hold a preferred object and ask the child: "What do you want?"



Imitation: "Say \_\_\_\_\_!"

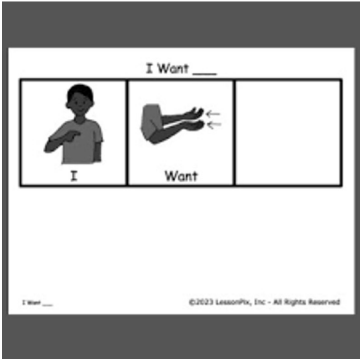


Script

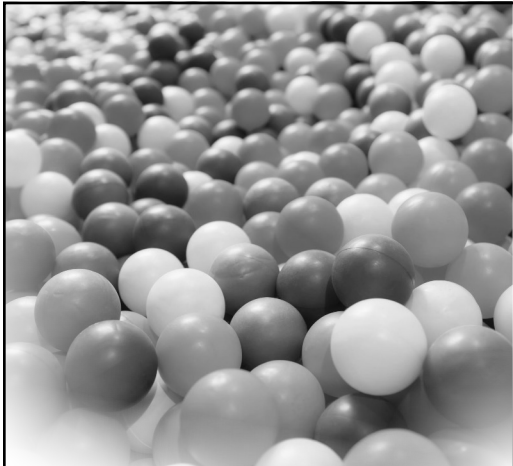
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### Script training

- Even for non-readers
- Written script
- Visual script
- Fade script
  - Delete a word or picture and visually indicate a placeholder
  - Continue to delete more as child progresses
  - Use gestural prompts and stay away from verbal prompts



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### Requesting objects - activity

- Trains
- Cars
- Craft
- Shopping
- Dolls
- Baking
- Dress-up
- Legos
- Sensory room
- Board game
- Music activity

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### Requesting help


- Child should initiate on their own
- Identify natural opportunities
- Create opportunities
  - Opening container
  - Pencil is not sharpened
  - A piece is missing
  - No batteries
  - iPad not charged
  - Others?

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### Circumstances of request help




Spontaneous –  
set up the  
environment



In response to a  
question – hold an  
object with a  
problem and ask  
the child: "What  
do you need?"



Imitation: "Say  
\_\_\_\_\_!"



Script

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### Requesting a break

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Replaces escape-maintained behavior

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Everyday life can be a lot more challenging to manage for someone with autism and therefore higher cognitive load

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Child should initiate the break

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Break should have neutral activities and not highest preferred activities

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Short breaks, but more often

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During the break no demands (including asking question or chatting)

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After the break, return to the previous activity

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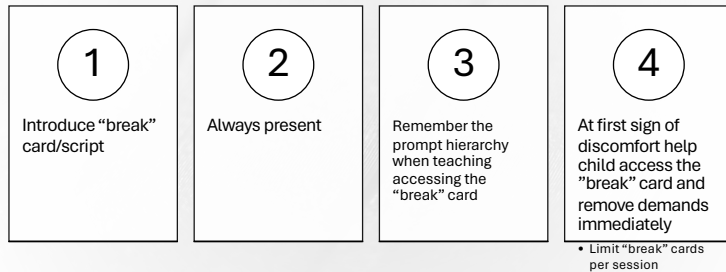


The grid contains 16 icons:

- Row 1: Four icons of a person sitting at a desk, each labeled "break".
- Row 2: "spring break" (tree and sun), "I need a break" (person lying down), "I need a break" (person lying down), "taking a break" (person at desk with "BREAK" sign).
- Row 3: "KEEP CALM TAKING A BREAK" (sign), "taking a break" (person at desk), "taking a break" (person at desk with "TAKE A BREAK" sign), "taking a break" (person at desk with "BREAK" sign).
- Row 4: "It's Time For A Break" (dog), "I'M TAKING A BREAK!" (cloud), "taking a break" (person at desk with "Take A Break!" sign), "taking a break" (clock showing 12:00 with "WILL RETURN" sign).

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## Sequence for teaching “break”



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## Circumstances of requesting a break

Spontaneous – set up the environment

In response to a question – hold a preferred object and ask the child: “What do you need?”

Imitation: “Say: break please!” or “Say: I need a break”

Script

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## Benefits of teaching “break”

Limit challenging behavior for the long-term

Empower child to recognize when they need a break

Life-skill

Gain respect of the child when you consistently honor their communication requests for a break

- More likely to be okay when a break is not available

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## Rejecting/protesting

- How does the child reject things currently?
- Identify situations or items that the child finds slightly uncomfortable
  - Push buttons a little bit
  - Make sure child is generally in HRE when attempting to push buttons
- The reinforcer is the removal of the non-preferred item (negative reinforcement)
- Honor the rejection, even if you put a lot of effort into an activity

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Circumstances for rejecting/protesting

- Spontaneous – set up the environment
- In response to a question – hold a preferred object and ask the child: "Do you want me to stop?"
- Imitation: "Say: no thanks!" or "Say: stop!"
- Script

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**Affirming**

- Different types of "yes" responses
  - Is this car red? (concrete response)
  - Do you want the car? (social response)
- Start with a question that has a concrete response/reinforcer as consequence
- Correspondence checks for the question with a social response







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Requesting preferred items/activity	Review of critical communication skills for self-advocacy
Requesting help	
Requesting break/leaving environment	
Rejecting/protesting	
Affirming	

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**Critical receptive communication skills**

			
<b>Reaction to "wait"</b>	<b>Tolerance of "no" or "not right now"</b>	<b>Transfer between activities</b>	<b>Following directions</b>
			Visual Verbal

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## Reaction to "wait"

- Use a visual signal regardless of which modality the child communicates
- Start with a wait time of 1 second
- Slowly increase wait time

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## Tolerance of "no" or "not right now"

### 01

Visually present a "no" or "not right now" symbol

### 02

Present an empty container



### 03

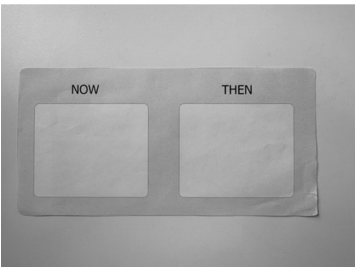
Offer alternatives

- Alternatives should have somewhat equal reinforcing value

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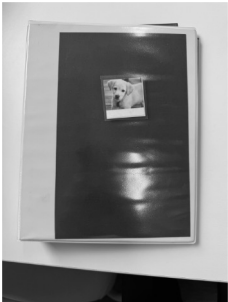

## Transfer between activities

First	Then
 Clean Up	 Playground



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## Activity schedules


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### Activity schedules

Close-ended activities




Open-ended activities




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### Transfer




Use objects that make the transfer easier



Reinforcer should be visible



Connect the task with the reinforcer



Beware of bribes (they are reactive not proactive)

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### Following visual directions

<p>First concrete reinforcer</p>	<p>Getting a spoon leads to eating ice cream                  Putting shoes on leads to going outside                  Opening a bottle leads to drink                  Going upstairs leads to alone time or play time</p>
<p>Then social reinforcer such as praise, play, etc.</p>	<p>Cleaning your room leads to praise and a happy parent                  Putting away dishes leads to gratitude from parents                  Vacuuming leads to a nice mood at home</p>

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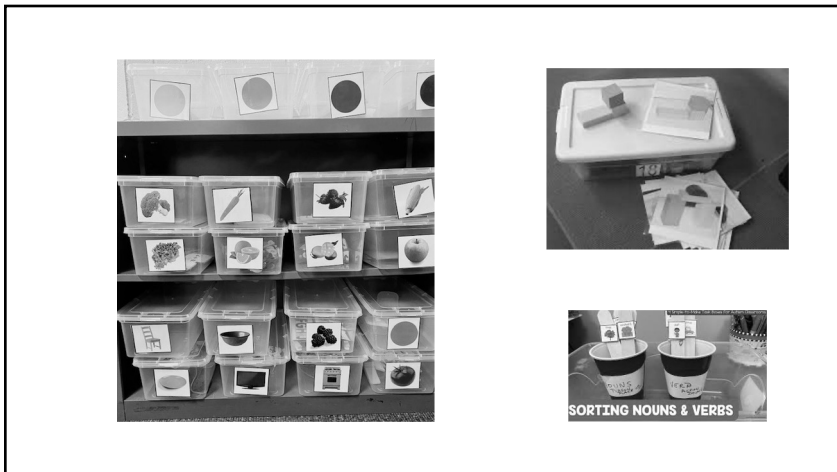
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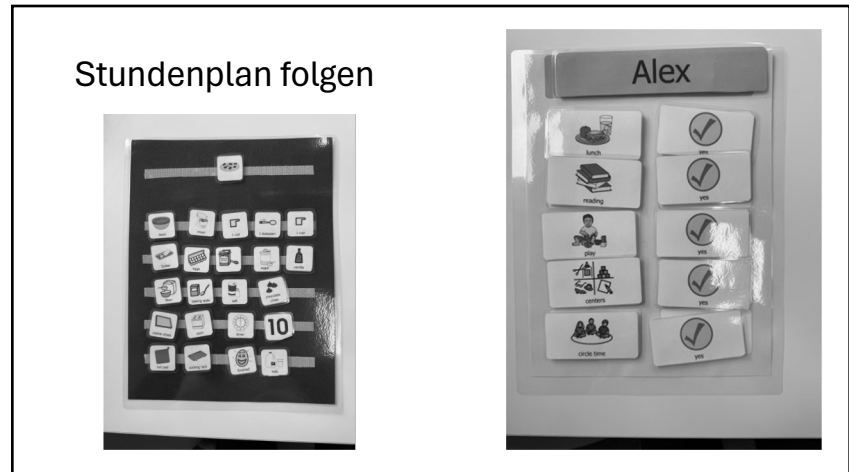
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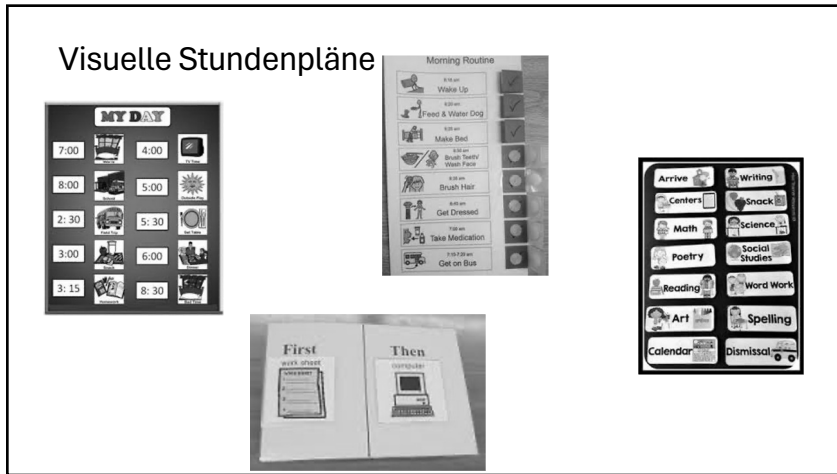
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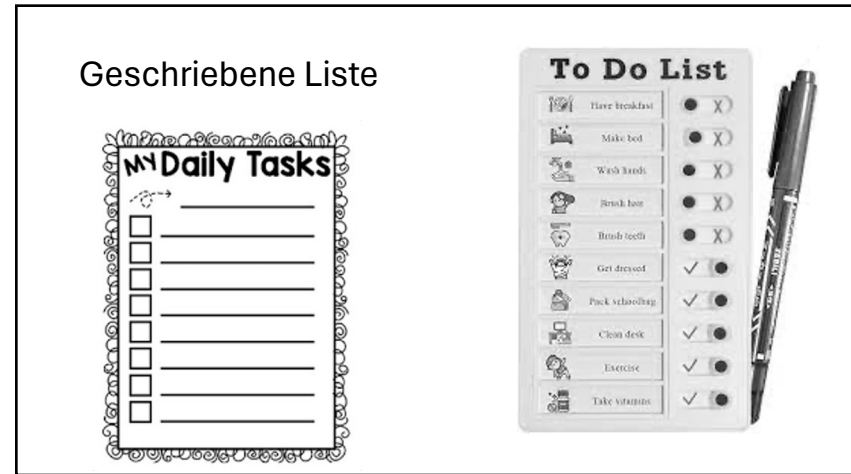
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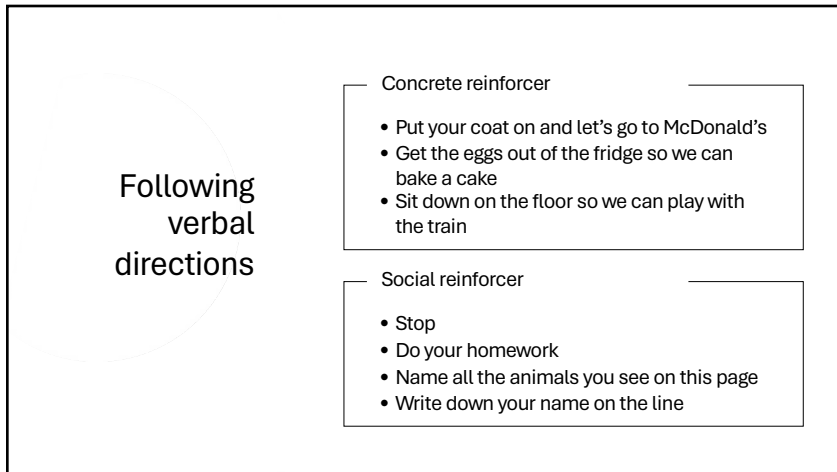
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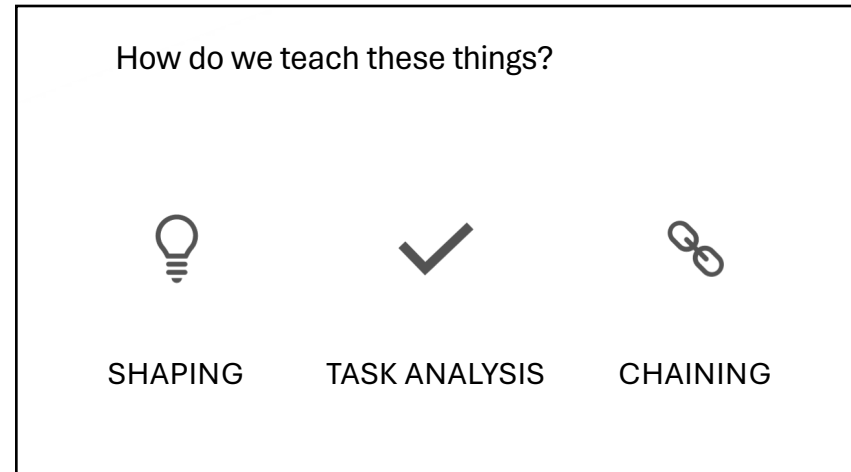
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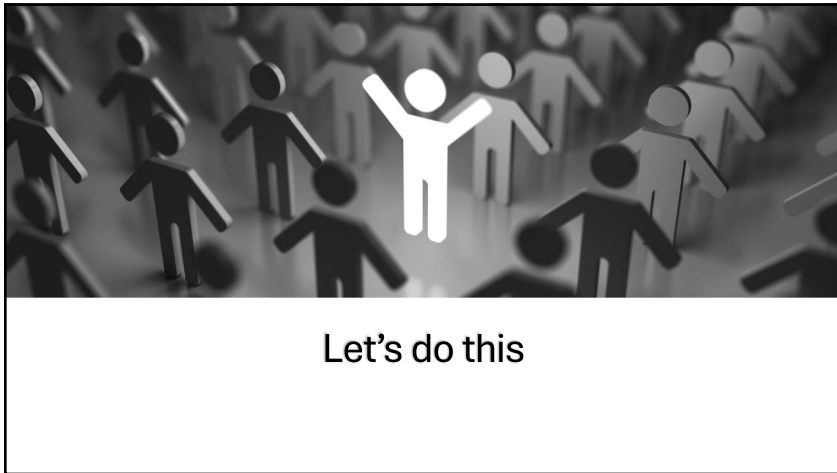
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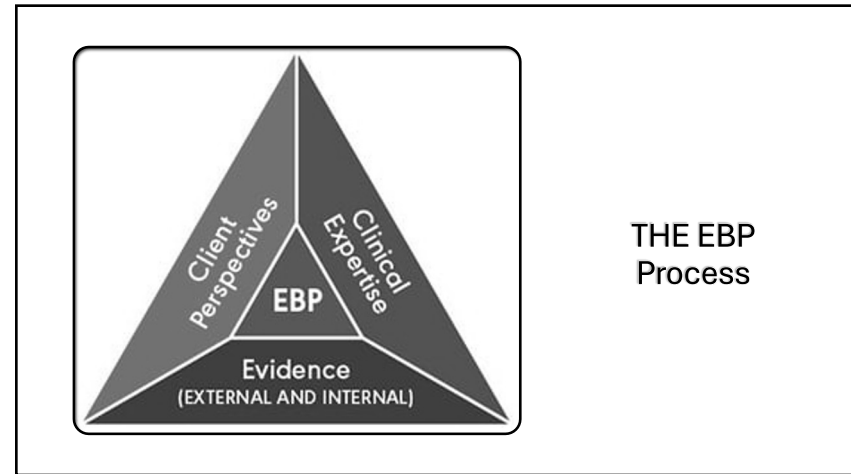
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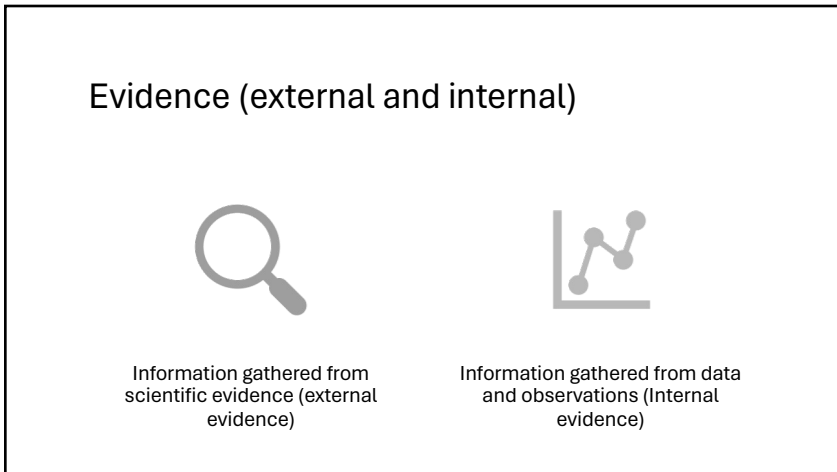
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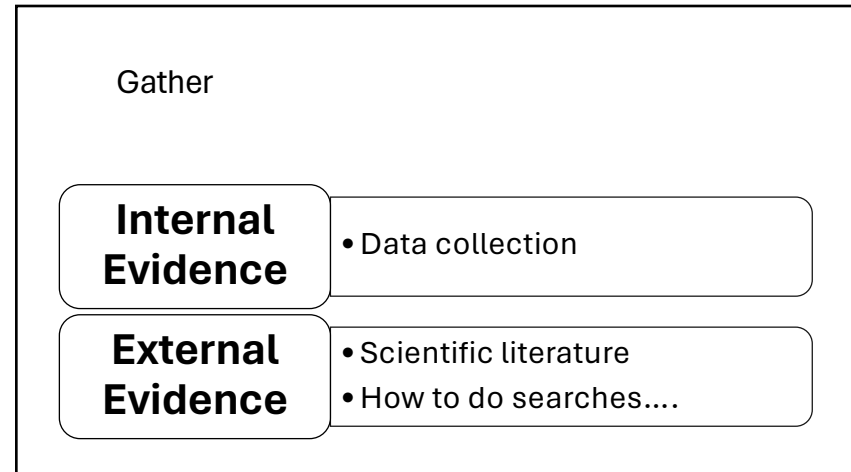
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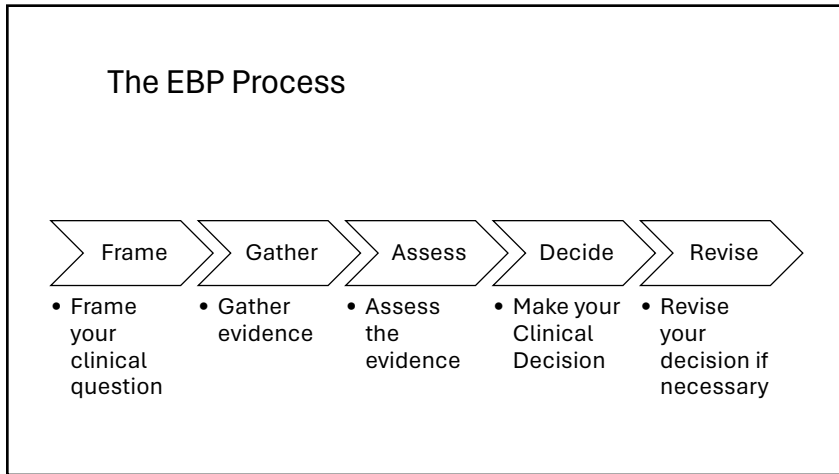


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