LEARNING TOGETHER

Specialized Services At Your Fingertips

Introduction

Welcome Back Everyone!

This week's addition of Learning Together we will be focusing on communication. We will discuss the importance of communication, common communication challenges, expressive language, what is Functional Communication Training and how to implement it.

For additional information and resources on communication visit ConnectAbility by clicking this link.

Reminder starting in September the Learning Together Newsletter will be moving from bi-weekly issues to monthly.

In order to better support our readers, we would love to hear from you! Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey and let us know how we are doing or what topics you would like us to discuss In future editions. You can also give us feedback or your topic suggestions to the Learning Together newsletter email at: specservicesnewsletter@cltoronto.ca
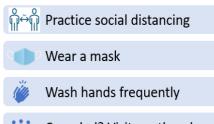
Activities in The Community

As Ontario enters Phase 3 of reopening many businesses and community services previously closed due to Covid-19 are now open! We've complied a list of some amazing places you can visit now that we are in phase 3. But before visiting don't forget:

Reminders:

- Practice social distancing
- Wear a mask
- Wash hands frequently
- Crowded? Visit another day
- Feeling sick? Stay home!

Explore the Toronto Zoo on a scenic drive-thru on their Scenic Safari driving route. It allows guests to see the Zoo's animals from the comfort and safety of their own vehicle along a 3.4 kilometres route. As on July 4th Toronto Zoo reopened its doors for walk-ins. Don't forget to pre-purchase your tickets before going!

Brant-Brantford Twin Valley Zoo is a 25-acre, family-run, wildlife park home to over 80 species of animals, a nature trail, and picnic areas.

Enjoy a day of hiking on one of Toronto's many trails listed here. Wind through parks and wooded areas and past rivers and lakes that are home to many flora and fauna.

Opt for a calming, meditative activity out in nature this summer, with lavender farms offering up the opportunity to roam around beautiful fields of purple flowers and places to shop for fresh lavender goodies.

Visit a farmer's market this summer. These markets are a great way to get farm fresh food in the city o check out this list to see which ones are open and where.

Want to get out and enjoy a movie but you're not ready to go to a theatre? No worries! The good old drive-in is here to offer a low-risk environment in which to lose yourself in a good film. So, make yourself some popcorn and check out this list of drive-ins around the city.

Importance of Effective Communication & What is Expressive Language?

Communication is an important life skill that children learn at a very young age. It helps us express our ideas and feelings and, at the same time, helps us to understand the emotions and thoughts of others. It is the foundation for establishing and sustaining social relationships and the mode in which we interact and connect with the world around us. Communication is a two-way street and successful communication involves understanding and being understood by others.

Expressive language can be defined as: the use of words, sentences, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate with others. It is common for many individuals with developmental (DD) or intellectual disabilities (ID) to have delays in speech and difficulty communicating with others. Often, individuals living with developmental or intellectual disabilities have trouble expressing if they're hungry, frustrated, or need to use the bathroom. Expressive language is important because it allows these individuals to express their wants, needs, thoughts, and feelings in order to engage in meaningful interactions with others.

For these individuals this difficulty in or lack of effective communication skills to express their needs, wants, or feelings can result in an increase in challenging behaviours.

Therefore, it is integral to teach and establish an effective form of communication, or communication system, to reduce and manage challenging behaviours. This can be achieved by developing an individual's vocabulary; the more words they understand (receptive language) and use (expressive language), the easier it will be for them to communicate functionally and socially.

For example, if a non-verbal individual is requesting for a preferred activity, such as food or a toy, their expressive language repertoire includes the use of gestures through pointing at the item or using words and sentences through PECS or Proloquo2go to request for the item.

Although expressive language may seem innate for ourselves and others, often there are some necessary building blocks in order to develop expressive language. These building blocks include:
- Receptive language through understanding
- Attention and concentration
- Pre-language skills
- Play skills
- Gross and fine motor skills
- Motivation

What is Functional Communication Training?

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is an evidence-based behavioural strategy that is highly effective at reducing problem behaviour by teaching a communicative response as a replacement behaviour.

FCT is essentially a type of differential reinforcement procedure. We covered the topic of differential reinforcement (DR) in our previous edition linked here. If you have not read that edition yet, we highly recommend that you do before continuing to read the following. Functional Communication Training is a Differential Reinforcement procedure because the individual is taught an alternative response (verbal communication) that allows the individual to access the same reinforcement that the problem behaviour produced. This means that the selected communicative response gives the learner access to the same kind of reinforcement that problem behaviour did.

Example 1: Juanita scratches her peers when they are in proximity. When Juanita scratches her peers, they quickly move away and give her space. Juanita's teachers prompt her to say "give me space" when her peers are close by and her peers immediately move away from her. Juanita starts to independently request for "give me space" instead of scratching her peers.

Example 2: Tony cries and picks at his hair when he is hungry. His caregivers respond by giving him a hug, holding his hands, and then providing him with a snack. To teach an alternative communicative response to replace the crying and hair picking, his caregivers prompt him to pick up a picture of food and exchange it with them. The caregivers only provide Tony with access to the snack once he exchanges the picture. Tony's engagement in crying and hair picking decreases and he independently exchanges the picture to request for a snack.

Common Communication Skill Challenges

Difficulty processing auditory information

Limited speaking skills

Difficulty understanding the meaning and rhythm of words and phrases

Difficulty understanding body language

4 Methods for Increasing Communication Within Applied Behavior Analysis. (2020, January 22). Retrieved from https://online.regiscollege.edu/blog/4-methods-for-increasing-communication-within-applied-behavior-analysis/

It is important to remember that communication does not need to be spoken; in many cases, individuals are taught to use sign language, augmentative communication devices, and picture exchange to communicate. The form of communication taught depends on the individual's learning profile and pre-requisite skills.

How to Implement Functional Communication Training

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1. Have a Functional Analysis conducted to identify what is maintaining the problem behaviour. A Functional Analysis will consist of direct and indirect assessments to help determine why the individual engages in the behaviour.
2. Select a communicative response or "replacement behaviour" that is recognizable and can be learned quickly. Communication can be learned using verbalizations, visual aids, signing or whatever is appropriate for the individual you are teaching. It is important that this behaviour serves the same function as the problem behaviour.
3. Arrange multiple opportunities to prompt and reinforce the communicative response. Manipulate the environment whenever you can to elicit the behaviour. Teaching in multiple environments and across different people can help to generalize the behaviour.
4. Utilize graduated guidance and other prompting procedures and remember to reinforce every correct response.
5. Utilize differential reinforcement. Refer to our last newsletter for more information about differential reinforcement procedures.

References:
Tiger, J. H., Hanley, G. P., & Bruzek, J. (2008). Functional communication training: a review and practical guide. *Behavior analysis in practice*, *1*(1), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03391716
Franzone, E. (2009). *Steps for implementation: Functional communication training.* Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

How to Implement Functional Communication Training

1.) IDENTIFY AND DETERMINE THE FUNCTION OF THE TARGET BEHAVIOUR

Conduct a Functional Analysis to determine the function of the target behaviour.

2.) IDENTIFY A REPLACEMENT BEHAVIOUR

It is important that this behaviour serves the same function as the problem behaviour

MANIPULATE THE ENVIRONMENT TO ELICIT THE BEHAVIOUR

Arrange many opportunities for the learner to elicit the target behaviour and prompt and reinforce the replacement communicative response.

4.) PROMPT

Use graduated guidance and other prompting procedures and reinforce every correct response.

USE DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT

Reinforce communicative responses and ignore all other problem behaviour.