Background

• Manding, or requesting, is a critical step to effective communication.
• A child requests a desired object or action and is rewarded by receiving it; he or she will be more likely to continue manding.
• Manding is one of the first steps in developing more complex communication skills.

Our Program:

• Therapists at the intensive Autism Service Delivery Clinic strategically incorporate manding in a natural play environment.
• Goal is to motivate children to request desired items based on their preferences.
• Once successful, we involve parents to help generalize the mands to other settings.

Objectives

• Use motivating operations to increase verbal communication.
• Contrive opportunities for practice of vocal manding.
• Manipulate environments for the use of new novel mands.

Methods or Description of the Program

• Mand training is an integral part of each child's beginning program based on individual assessments and current levels of echoing, requesting and initiating actions.
• Therapists determine each child's preferred items and develop strategy to limit access.
• When preferred item is identified in the environment, therapist provides a model prompt for the child to echo.
• When the child successfully echoes, he or she is immediately given the preferred item.
• Continued practice and nonspecific prompts such as "what do you need" are utilized to help the child mand independently.

Findings/Results

We found:
• Contriving more situations for the children to request items produced more independent mands.
• Prompting in the beginning phases was higher but as children were reinforced for vocalizing their requests we saw independent requests rise.
• Children who had tacting skills or listener discriminatory skills were able to generalize objects they knew to mands without specific training.

Conclusions

• Encouraging vocalizations by setting up opportunities for the child to be motivated to communicate through specific prompting and echoing can help children with autism improve independent requesting skills.
• Children can then express what they want or need, and it helps their parents gain a greater understanding of their preferred activities, foods or toys. Being able to reinforce and respond to a child's request is essential in learning.

References