Navigating Toward Independence: Transitioning a Student with Autism from an Intensive Treatment Clinic into a Full-time School Environment



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Background

After a year on our waiting list, a young boy with autism received about three months of iASD clinic behavioral services when it was determined that he had quickly mastered all academic skills outlined in his Verbal Behavior Milestone Assessment & Placement Program (VBMAPP). He still showed deficits in social skills and group instructions. After attempting to teach those in our small clinic setting, we found that the skills he needed to practice could not be reciprocated by our other clients. We determined that his typical school setting would be a more natural environment, as long as he had the support of a 1:1 behavioral therapist to coach him as he mastered new skills in these few areas.

Objective

Provide specified learning opportunities in a more natural environment, while receiving coaching from behaviorally-trained student therapists.

Methods

Based on our regular VBMAPP testing results, our staff developed a plan for intervention in the classroom to help him master social skills and group learning skills.

With the cooperation and permission of school personnel, two student therapists coached him in his classroom for 10 hours each week.

Activities included:

- Prompting social interactions with peers in the classroom and then helping the client successfully follow through with peer interactions
- Working with teacher to get students engaged in group activities
- Helping the client follow teacher's commands by following through on group and individual instructions rather than letting the client avoid or escape the instruction given by the teacher during circle time or independent work

Results

- Client initiation for social interactions was higher than peer initiation throughout the intervention.
- Independent initiation was higher than independent responding throughout intervention so therapists worked to make sure the client followed through when peers initiated.
- Our client had 1 independent response per hour and 5 independent initiations per hour.
- Prompted initiation/responses continued to set up more opportunities for the client.
- Client responded best to receptive individual instructions so therapists worked to help client follow through with verbalizing answers and following group instructions.

Conclusions

Children with autism spectrum disorder can learn with the help of behavioral coaching in a typical school classroom. Especially helpful was support in social skills, following through with teacher's directions and setting up opportunities for client to respond appropriately to interactions with peers.

References

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