

Selecting Skills to Teach Communication Partners

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Common Frustrations with Partner Instruction

- We've all witnessed partners interacting with our clients in less-than-ideal ways
- And we've all attempted to change these behaviors
 - Offering suggestions
 - Checking in to ask "How are things going?"
 - Demonstrating other ways to interact with the client

Why Some Partner Instruction Approaches Don't Work

- Changing any behavior, including communication, is difficult!
 - Providing information without action often does not have much inherent value to people
 - Direct instruction with hands-on practice is required
- Partner techniques are not carefully selected
 - Important to take the necessary time and steps to identify the most relevant skills you want to target and in which sequence.

Common Problems with Partner Skill Selection

We often:

- Focus on what is 'wrong' with the partner instead of improving client behaviors
- Try to change too many partner behaviors at once
- Try to change too many client behaviors at once
- Try to change client and/or partner behaviors in too many settings or situations at once
- Fail to link changes in partner behaviors to identifiable, measurable changes in the client

Four Guidelines for Selecting Partner Skills

(1) Focus on Client Skills & Identify Partner Behaviors

- Sometimes, these steps are straightforward
 - You know which client behaviors to target for change
 - You know which partner behaviors will facilitate those changes

Examples

| Client Skill | Partner Skill |
|--|---|
| Answer tagged yes/no questions accurately ("Are you feeling ok, yes or no?") | Use tagged format when asking each yes/no question (Garrett & Lasker, 2005) |
| Make choices by selecting an item from a written list | Provide written choices in appropriate, meaningful situations (Garrett & Lasker, 2005) |
| Use a pre-programmed message to introduce self when meeting someone new | Use least-to-most cuing hierarchy to prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Natural cue• Expectant delay• Point toward device• Provide aided AAC model (Light & Binger, 1998) |

- When Partner Behaviors Inspire Partner Intervention
 - It's natural to begin by noticing behaviors that do not facilitate communication
 - However, if you focus on what partners are doing 'wrong'
 - It will make them defensive (or at least feel badly)
 - It may not result in improved client communication
- When Partner Behaviors Do Not Facilitate Communication
 - A. How is the partner failing to facilitate communication?
 - B. What **exact** partner behaviors would be more facilitative?
 - C. What **exact** client behaviors would result from these changes?

(2) Select Client and Partner Skills

- Once you have a list of client and partner skills
 - Decide which ones to target
- Some partner instruction approaches are relatively lengthy and tackle *many* client and partner behaviors
 - Hanen Program
 - Ann Kaiser's parent instruction program
- Our approach: ImPAACT Program (Binger et al., 2008 & 2010; Kent-Walsh et al., 2010 a & b)
 - Focused instruction in limited contexts
 - Build on initial success
- Partner Skill Selection: The ImPAACT Approach
 - Defined explicitly
 - Eliminate the least helpful partner behaviors
 - Acquired rapidly by partner
 - Change client outcomes quickly
 - Are easily identifiable and measurable
 - Used initially within 1–2 highly specific contexts

(3) Practice Partner Techniques with the Client Before You Begin

- Practice the selected partner techniques **before** trying to teach them to a communication partner
 - Ensures that the techniques result in the desired client outcomes
 - Helps you clearly define what you plan to teach
 - Allows you to:
 - Observe the range of client behaviors that arise while using these techniques
 - Troubleshoot problem areas that may arise
 - Problem-solve how to teach the partner to cope with these issues

(4) Start Small, Then Expand

Begin with highly specific contexts

- It's much easier for the partner if he or she knows *when* to use the skill
- Identify 1–2 specific contexts to begin
- Activity should last no longer than 10–15 minutes
- We know you want to change so much more!
 - But trying to change too much at once can be counterproductive

Moving Toward Generalization

- Once the partner has **mastered** one context, select additional contexts
- Continue to select specific contexts

- Continue to limit use of technique in new contexts (activities to last no more than 10–15 minutes)
- Keep expanding as the partner builds his or her success

Example Contexts

| Population | Start with... | Then expand to... |
|---|--|---|
| Preschoolers | One set of storybooks (e.g., Little Critter) | Other sets of storybooks (e.g., Clifford); other activities |
| Preschool or school-age | A classroom activity (e.g., a craft) | Other classroom activities (e.g., science centers, exploratory play, circle time) |
| Adult with acquired disability (e.g., aphasia, TBI) | Selecting where and what to eat for dinner | Selecting where to go and who to see during other social outings |
| Nursing home resident | A social event (e.g., bingo) | Other social events (e.g., monthly birthday parties, gardening activities) |

Next Steps: After You Select Partner Skills

- Careful selection of appropriate client and partner skills is the first step toward effective partner instruction
- Once you've selected appropriate targets, take a systematic approach to teaching these new skills to communication partners
- One evidence-based approach is the ImPAACT Program
 - 8-step program proven to improve both client and partner communication behaviors
 - Multiple articles published (see reference list)
- SIG 12 *Perspectives* articles coming in December, 2012 & April, 2013

References

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