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
  o You know which client behaviors to target for change
  o You know which partner behaviors will facilitate those changes

Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Skill</th>
<th>Partner Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer tagged yes/no questions accurately (&quot;Are you feeling ok, yes or no?&quot;)</td>
<td>Use tagged format when asking each yes/no question  (Garrett &amp; Lasker, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make choices by selecting an item from a written list</td>
<td>Provide written choices in appropriate, meaningful situations (Garrett &amp; Lasker, 2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Use a pre-programmed message to introduce self when meeting someone new | Use least-to-most cuing hierarchy to prompt:
  • Natural cue
  • Expectant delay
  • Point toward device
  • Provide aided AAC model (Light & Binger, 1998) |
• When Partner Behaviors Inspire Partner Intervention
  o It’s natural to begin by noticing behaviors that do not facilitate communication
  o 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
  o A. How is the partner failing to facilitate communication?
  o B. What exact partner behaviors would be more facilitative?
  o 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
  o Decide which ones to target
• Some partner instruction approaches are relatively lengthy and tackle many client and partner behaviors
  o Hanen Program
  o Ann Kaiser’s parent instruction program
• Our approach: ImPAACT Program (Binger et al., 2008 & 2010; Kent-Walsh et al., 2010 a & b)
  o Focused instruction in limited contexts
  o Build on initial success
• Partner Skill Selection: The ImPAACT Approach
  o Defined explicitly
  o Eliminate the least helpful partner behaviors
  o Acquired rapidly by partner
  o Change client outcomes quickly
  o Are easily identifiable and measurable
  o 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
  o Ensures that the techniques result in the desired client outcomes
  o Helps you clearly define what you plan to teach
  o 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
  o It’s much easier for the partner if he or she knows when to use the skill
  o Identify 1–2 specific contexts to begin
  o Activity should last no longer than 10–15 minutes
  o 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**

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


