

## Promoting Language

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## Why is Language Important?

- To communicate:
  - What we want
  - What we need
  - How we feel
- To decrease problem behavior or other inappropriate ways to gain what is wanted

## How Do We Teach At Home?

- Know your child's abilities
- Set up opportunities
  - Contrive the motivation
- Set specific times
- Follow through!!!!

## What Do We Work On?

- Requests (Mands):
  - Contrive motivation for preferred items
  - Require some language for your child to get that preferred item
  - Reinforce that language with specific item they want
  - This is controlled by the motivation for the object. If they do not "want" the item, they will be less likely to respond for it
  - Mands are what we typically teach children first because there is motivation to communicate

## Other Types of Verbal Operants

- Labeling (tacts)
  - Naming or labeling and item or action
  - Not based on motivation for that particular item
  - Nonspecific reinforcement
    - The reinforcement is NOT what they label
- Fill-ins (intraverbals)
  - Finishing sentences (twinkle, twinkle, little \_\_\_\_\_)
  - Answering questions (what is your name? \_\_\_\_\_)
- Usually begin teaching these once the child has some language already

## Why Train Mands?

- Operants are independent
  - Just because a child can tact (label) an item does not mean the child can ask for the item
- For nonverbal children, mands do not occur directly or evolve
- Once a child learns to effectively mand for one item, teaching other mands is easier
- Reduces inappropriate behavior
- Aids in acquisition of other acquisition skills

## Why Train Mands?

- Mands are the only type of language that directly benefits the child
- Establishes rapport
- Success for the child
- Helps establish the connection that language is meaningful

## When to conduct mand training

- To train a mand, there must be a motivational operation (MO)
  - Example: Only teach a child to say “out” when he wants to go outside, or teach a child to say “juice” when he is thirsty
    - If a child is pushing juice away, should you continue to try to get the child to ask for juice?
- MOs can be captured or contrived

## How Do We Motivate Our Child?

- Find effective reinforcers
  - Primary reinforcers:
    - Food
    - Drink
    - Warmth
  - Secondary reinforcers
    - Toys
    - Social attention/praise
    - activities

## How Do We Motivate Our Child?

- Contrive motivation for reinforcing items
  - Deprivation: Withholding of a reinforcer to increase learning
    - If I am thirsty, would water be a more powerful reinforcer?
    - If I am not thirsty, would water be a reinforcer? Why?
  - Satiation: Overabundance of a reinforcer has been provided, so that a particular reinforcer loses its reinforcing properties
    - Is the 50<sup>th</sup> m&m as powerful as the 1<sup>st</sup>?
- If you don't want something, you are less likely to ask for it, right?

## Examples of Contriving Motivation

- Using food as a reinforcer before dinner (when they are hungry)
- Using a favorite toy after it has been hidden for awhile
- Using an movie that they do not get unless they ask for it
- Throwing them in the air only when they request it
- It is important to change up the items you use to keep motivation there
  - After 20 cheetos, he may not want another cheeto (therefore, they have no reason to ask for it)

- Does this mean you should sit and wait for a child to show interest in something particular?
  - No.
- Every child has interests, it may even be an item you wouldn't have predicted
- MOs can be captured or contrived
  - Our environment is being manipulated all the time

### How to choose items for beginning mands

- Choose items that
  - You can control access to
  - Can be available for a short period of time initially
  - Are easy to deliver/remove
  - Are consistently strong (don't lose effectiveness quickly)

### Making mands simple

- Use salient/relevant items
- Use items that are easy to say, sign, or picture exchange
- Avoid words with a negative history attached (i.e. bed, no, potty, etc.)
- Make sure the items are what the child prefers and not what the adult prefers
- Make sure words can be used for a variety of motivations, not just one isolated environment

### Motivational operations (MOs)

- Capturing naturally occurring MOs
  - Examples:
    - Child wants to go outside
    - Child wants you to open a bag
    - Child wants pretzels
- Contriving MOs
  - Because we can not wait around all day for naturally occurring MOs
  - Examples:
    - Tracks without train
    - Cup without juice
    - Bowl without spoon
    - Garage without cars

### Simple Mands

- Mands for Food
  - Cheeto, m&m, etc
- Mands for Drinks
- Mands for toys
  - Ball, Elmo, baby

### Complex mands

- Mands for actions
  - Jump, stand, come, move, stop
- Mands for adjectives
  - Color, size, shape
- Mands for prepositions
  - Put in, on, etc.
- Mands for information
  - Who, where, what, why, etc.

### Types of Language

- Your child does not have to be vocal to be verbal
- PECS: Picture Exchange Communication System
- Sign Language: American Sign Language or modified signs
- Voice output devices
- Vocal language

### Where to start – vocal mand Step 1

- MO for item
- Item present
- “What do you want?”
- Prompt mand
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement

### Step 2

- MO for item
- Item present
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement
  - Once reliable introduce a 2<sup>nd</sup> mand then 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - Items should not sound similar and should be very different from each other

### Step 3

- After the child has 2-3 mands in step 2
- MO for item
- “What do you want?”
- Prompt mand
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement

### Step 4

- MO for item
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement

\*\*Do mand training in multiple environments with various conversation partners\*\*

### Where to start – With signs or PECS to mand Step 1

- MO for item
- Item present
- “What do you want?”
- Prompt mand – say “Sign \_\_\_.” and model sign, guide hands if necessary, use a physical prompt for PECS
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement

### Step 2

- MO for item
- Item present
- Mand
- Access
- Additional reinforcement

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- MO for item
- Mand
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### Some last thoughts

- It is important that initial mands are strong before adding in too many
- Train in natural environments
- Fade out the presence of the target item
- Frequent training trials throughout the day
- How far do you push?
  - Should be fun and functional
  - Fragile process
  - Intersperse training trials
  - Consider motivation

### One more...

- The goal is to get the highest quality response, with the least amount of prompting

## Reference

- Sundberg, M.L. & Partington, J. W. (1998). Teaching Language to Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities. Pleasant Hill, CA: Behavior Analysts, Inc.  
– [www.behavioranalysts.com](http://www.behavioranalysts.com)