

# Teaching Play and Leisure Skills to Students with Autism

Presenters:

Rachel Upp, B.A.

Behavior Specialist at Monarch Center for Autism

Judy Borgen, M.Ed., BCBA/COBA

Behavior Analyst at Monarch Center for Autism



# Who Is This Presentation For?

Individuals wanting to increase their knowledge on teaching play or social skills to students\* with autism.

Individuals who want to incorporate more play or social skills in a student's life to encourage development.

Individuals who want to expand a student's play or leisure skills to incorporate other individuals.

\*Student or child of any age.

# Objectives

1. Learn how to develop rapport with your student.
2. Review different types of play and leisure skills.
3. Teach your student play or leisure skills.
4. Teach your student how to engage with other individuals during play or leisure skills.



Guardians' Disclaimer: Your student's instructors or specialists are available for support. If there are any concerns of increase in unpleasant behaviors, please inform them and they can collaborate with you to figure out what will be most helpful to your child.

# Why is Play Important?

- Play provides an avenue for students to learn developmental skills and about their natural environment.
- Encourages developmental of new skills
  - Gross and fine motor
  - Academic
  - Language
- Supports: social skills, interaction, rapport

# Steps to Play

1. Allow your student to be comfortable sharing their area with you
2. Slowly manipulate the play
3. Increase the amount of practiced play
4. Introduce students, siblings or other adults into play
5. Encourage interaction with other individuals in play

Remember: Communication with your student can reinforce each step!

# Sharing Areas

- Getting Started
- Parallel Play
- Joint Attention
- Demands



(Washington Post, 2016)

# Sharing Areas: Getting Started

- Play is the child's kingdom!
- Find where your student is most comfortable playing
  - Observe frequently visited locations
  - Determine if it is a safe environment
- Robert Schramm's 7 Steps to Earning Instructional Control
  - Establish a preferred area or design a safe one specific to play
  - Create a positive relationship between your student and yourself
    - Stimulus-Stimulus Pairing: when two things are presented at the same time in which eventually one thing acquires the same function of the other thing

# Sharing Areas: Parallel Play

- Join your student's kingdom!
  - Sit by or near your student, respecting their space
  - Play with unused toys
- With your toys, you can copy their actions
  - Demonstrates parallel play
  - Encourages positive relationship
- Educators, parents or caregivers can be an example, or model functional use
  - Show the student how toys can be played with or manipulated
  - Your student can learn to imitate you and gain new skills



# Sharing Areas: Gaining Control

- Keep your student's play in the designated area with you
  - Make the area special to your student and yourself (Schramm, n.d.)
- If your student attempts to leave the area, that is okay
  - Play objects should remain with you
    - Do not force objects from their hands
    - Communicate toys, or activities, stay in the designated area until they are ready to return
    - If your student does not leave the toy(s) in the designated area, redirect them back to the toy

# Sharing Areas: Example

- Play does not need to be interactive, but can still be side-by-side
- As your student is more comfortable with you, comment on their play! Let them know they are in their own area.



(Children's Museum of History, 2015)

# Types of Play

Play Category	Definition
Functional Play	Student's ability to play with or manipulate an object as it is intended to
Symbolic Play	Student's ability to pretend an on object is something else: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Object substitution</li><li>• Attribution of false properties</li><li>• Attribution of presence to imaginary objects</li></ul>
Sociodramatic Play	Student's ability to socially engage with peers in the form of cooperative role-playing or pretending

→ Many students with autism, in our program, stop here with their play skills.



Type	Definition
Unoccupied	Not playing
Solitary	Playing by self
Onlooker	Watching others playing
Parallel	Playing the same activity next to others
Associative	Playing with another, but not the same activity
Cooperative	Playing together on the same activity

# Possible Methods to Teach Play or Leisure Skills

- Video and Live Modeling
- Systematic Prompting Strategies
- Pivotal Response Training
- Use of Restricted Interests
- Activity Schedules with Correspondence Training
- Integrated Playgroup Model\*
- Script Training\*
- Social Stories\*

\*Techniques that can be used to support the teaching methods

# Begin Playing Together

- Commenting
- Introducing New Play Skills
- Reinforcement



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

# Begin Playing Together: Commenting

- Start interacting together when your student is comfortable
  - Use joint attention methods
  - Verbal comments can build play skills
- Make small comments on your student's play
  - Focus on concrete concepts
  - Label your student's actions to them
- Example: If your student is squishing a ball in between both of their hands, you can state, "You are squishing the ball for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 seconds. Awesome job!"

# Begin Playing Together: Introducing New Play Skills

- Teach new play skills with preferred objects
  - Engage in skills for a short period (5-10 seconds)
  - Pair them together to increase interest in new skills
- If your student does not understand verbal directions, use other methods:
  - Visuals or video models
  - Physical guidance or assistance
- After the student plays as instructed, reinforce the play and provide control of the play object back into their hands



# Begin Playing Together: Reinforcement

- Reinforcing your student's play can automatically encourage the frequency and quality of play
  - Does it actually increase play duration or play skills?
- Varying methods of reinforcement
  - Verbal praise (pair with a preferred method of reinforcement)
    - Positive comments
    - Be specific (e.g., "You did great rolling the ball!")
  - Physical pressure: tickling\*, squeezes
  - Tangibles (physical items): new toys, food, drink
  - Immediate return to play

Tickling Disclaimer: Tickling should only be done from parents and with caution if your child is unable to use a verbal response to get you to stop.

# Practice Playing

- Increased Time
- Play Sequences
- Roll the Ball  
Example



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

# Practice Playing: Increased Time

- Choose preferred toys or activities when increasing time
  - Use those items to shape more functional play
  - Begin sequencing play skills together
- Example: If you were first teaching your student to push down on the ball for five seconds you could then teach the following skills, ending with putting them all together
  - Push down on the ball
  - Push the ball away from the student
  - Parent/caregiver pushes ball back towards student
  - Child reaches for the ball

# Practice Playing: Teaching Procedures

Different chaining procedures break down a skill into smaller, more achievable steps

- *Forward*: Complete all steps with support; the first step is completed independently
- *Backwards*: Complete all steps with support; the last step is completed independently
- *Total Task*: Assist with steps as necessary

See additional resources for selecting and implementing different chaining procedures

# Practice Playing: Play Sequences

- Forward chaining for play sequencing
  1. Teach and praise the first skill
  2. You can assist with the other skills
  3. Once your student is comfortable with the first skill, teach and reinforce the second
  4. Repeat the process until sequence is learned
- Add skills together to make everything connect, just like a chain
  - Each skill gets reinforced!

# Practicing Play: Example

Goal: Teach your student to roll a ball.

Week 1: Encourage your student to push down on the ball.

- Use supports to teach or shape the skill
  - Video or in-person models, physical guidance
- Reinforce pushing the ball
- Fully assist with the rest of the steps
  - Push the ball away
  - Reach for the ball when it returns

# Practicing Play: Example

Week 2-3: When requested, your student demonstrates they can push down on the ball.

Teach the next step: pushing the ball way

- Use any supports needed
- Immediately reinforce this step!
- Fully assist with the last step (reaching for the ball when it returns)

# Practicing Play: Example

Week 4: Your student is now completing both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> step, independently! Yay!

Use needed supports to help them with the last step

- Continue reinforcement
- Once independent, they could complete the play sequence!



# New People in the Child's Kingdom

- Generalization
  - What it is?
  - Levels of Generalization
- Introducing New People
  - Final Step of Generalization
  - Playing with New People



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

# Generalization

- Generalization: the ability to complete a task with varying materials, environments and people
- When teaching play, make small changes to the environment to help generalization
  1. *Rephrasing the Question:* Use variations of phrases to initiate play skill
  2. *Subjects:* Use variations of the materials for the play skill
  3. *Settings:* Change just the place, or how it is presented
  4. *Persons:* Slowly alter who the child uses the play skill with

# Introduce New People

- Show your student that new people can be fun!
  - Another parent or caregiver
  - Siblings
  - Close family friends
  - Other students
- Your student should become familiar with others in their play area
  - Invite them in
  - Encourage parallel play with your student
    - Show your student that the new person is safe
    - Show the new person how to treat your student's play area
- Example: Have a train table in which your student and new people can both drive on, but do not have to immediately interact

# Introduce New People

- Parallel play will start promote skill development
  - Social skills
  - Generalization with new people
- Steps of Generalization Example:
  1. A student learns to roll balls with mother in bedroom
  2. A student uses different balls\*
  3. A student uses different balls in a new location
  4. A student uses different balls in a new location with a new person

\*Changes To Play Skill Begins at Step 2

# Play with New People

Initiate play sequences and invite others to join

1. Parallel play

2. Invite new person to join

- Develop rapport with new people
- Reinforce play with others
- Use positive gestures and comments

3. Slowly fade yourself from the environment

- Limit your comments
- Become more of an observer of the play
- Reinforce all fun social interactions!

# Conclusion

Play is a social engagement

- Takes time
- Develops positive relationships
- Teaches new skills

Play is for your student and you can be involved too!  
Have fun and play!

Additional Resources:

- *The 7 Steps to Instructional Control* (Robert Schramm, M.A., BCBA)
- Accessible ABA's Joint Attention information (Dalphonse, n.d.)
- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) websites
- Student's instructors or specialists

# Questions & Answers



# Additional Resources

## *7 Steps of Earning Instruction Control*

(Refer to website for more details.)

1. Show your child that you are the one in control of the items he wants to hold or play with and that you will decide when he can have them.
2. Show your child that you are fun. Make each interaction you have with him an enjoyable experience so that he will want to follow your directions to earn more time sharing experiences with you.
3. Show your child that you can be trusted/ Always say what you mean and mean what you say. If you say your child should do something, don't allow him access to reinforcement until it has been acceptably completed. This includes prompting him to completion if necessary.
4. Show your child that following your directions is to his benefit and the best way for him to obtain what he wants. Give your child easy directions as often as possible and then reinforce his decisions to participate by following them with good experiences.
5. In the early stages of earning instructional control with your child reinforce after each positive response moving to an ever increasing variable ratio of reinforcement.
6. Demonstrate that you know your child's priorities as well as your own.
7. Show your child that ignoring your instructions or choosing inappropriate behavior will not result in the acquisition of reinforcement.

(Robert Schramm, n.d.)



# Additional Resources

## *Accessible ABA: Joint Attention*

### Skills to Learn for Joint Attention:

1. Attending or responding to another person
2. Shifting gaze (eye contact) between people and objects
3. Verbally or nonverbally (pointing/gaze) gaining another person's attention

### Improving Joint Attention:

1. Use gestures to point out what the child is looking at or playing with
2. Place your hand over your child's hand to help them point while you look at the object
3. Mimic interest in your child's interests
4. Reinforce after children's success at skills

(Dalphonse, n.d.)  
(Paparella, 2015)

# Additional Resources

Media	Source
Video	Joint Attention (Into the Spectrum, 2016), <a href="https://youtu.be/zOLGF25cy08">https://youtu.be/zOLGF25cy08</a>
Podcast	ABA Insider Track, <a href="https://www.abainsidetrack.com/home/2019/1/30/episode-74-joint-attention">https://www.abainsidetrack.com/home/2019/1/30/episode-74-joint-attention</a>
Websites	How to ABA, <a href="http://howtoaba.com">howtoaba.com</a> Accessible ABA, <a href="http://accessibleaba.com">accessibleaba.com</a> I Love ABA, <a href="http://iloveaba.com">iloveaba.com</a> *The Behavior Exchange, <a href="http://behaviorexchange.com">behaviorexchange.com</a>  *Information on chaining procedures

# References

- Cooper, J. O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2020). *Applied behavior analysis* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Children's Museum of Houston. (2015, March 6). *Parallel Play* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20xy4wUgbsc>
- Dalphonse, A. (n.d.). *What's the Big Deal about Joint Attention*. Retrieved from <https://accessibleaba.com/blog/whats-the-big-deal-about-joint-attention>
- How to ABA. (2017, December 18). *5 Steps to Teaching Play Skills*. <https://howtoaba.com/teaching-play-skills/>
- Into the Spectrum. (2016, September 21). *Autism and joint Attention |Fun Minute Tip 3*. [Video film]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=21&v=zOLGF25cy08&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=21&v=zOLGF25cy08&feature=emb_logo)
- Jung, S., and Sainato, D. M. (2013). Teaching play skills to young children with autism. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 38(1), 74-90. <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2012.732220>
- Paparella, T., and Freeman, S. (2015). Methods to improve joint attention in young children with autism: A review. *Pediatric Health, Medicines and Therapeutics*. 2015(6), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PHMT.S41921>
- Schramm, R. (n.d.). *The Seven Steps to Earning Instructional Control with your Child*. Retrieved from <https://knospe-aba.com/cms/us/aba-info/aba-articles/the-7-steps.html>
- Stokes, T. F., & Baer, D. M. (1977). An implicit technology of generalization. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 10(2), 349-367. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1901%2Fjaba.1977.10-349>
- The Behavior Exchange (2018). *Understanding Chaining in ABA*. Retrieved from <https://behaviorexchange.com/blog/2018/09/understanding-chaining-in-aba/>
- Washington Post. (2016, April 12). *When Kids Want Parents to Play All the Time*. [Image]. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/on-parenting/when-kids-want-parents-to-play-all-the-time/2016/04/12/c4708e84-fa7b-11e5-9140-e61d062438bb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/on-parenting/when-kids-want-parents-to-play-all-the-time/2016/04/12/c4708e84-fa7b-11e5-9140-e61d062438bb_story.html)

## Monarch Center for Autism

- ❖ **Preschool**
- ❖ **Day School**
- ❖ **Transition Education Program**
- ❖ **Extended School Year Program**
- ❖ **Boarding Academy**
- ❖ **Adult Autism Program**
- ❖ **Adult Supported Living Residences**
- ❖ **Free Webinar & e-newsletter Series**
- ❖ **Online Resource Center**
- ❖ **Welcoming Spaces Program**

- ✦ **Web:** [www.monarchcenterforautism.org](http://www.monarchcenterforautism.org)
- ✦ **Telephone:** 216.320.8945 or 1-800-879-2522
- ✦ **Address:** 22001 Fairmount Boulevard,  
Shaker Heights, Ohio 44118
- ✦ **Join our e-newsletter mailing list:**  
<http://www.monarchcenterforautism.org/Newsletters/NewsletterSignUp>
- ✦ **Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/monarchcenterforautism](http://www.facebook.com/monarchcenterforautism)
- ✦ **Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/monarchohio](http://www.twitter.com/monarchohio)

