

Overview of Self-Determination for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers with Combined Vision & Hearing Loss

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Purpose of this Presentation

- Outcomes
 - Understand what self-determination is
 - The importance of self-determination
 - Ideas on how to teach / encourage self-determination
- We discuss the range / continuum of self-determination
 - ✦ Skills relevant for young children
 - ✦ And skills relevant for those who are older to highlight overall aim of self-determination

Self-Determination

- Can be defined as, “The means for experiencing quality of life consistent with one’s own values, preferences, strengths, and needs” (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001).
- In short, self-determination means having control or taking charge of things in your life.
- Regardless of how severe a disability an individual might have, self-determination is important because it gives the individual control over aspects of his/her life.

Self-Determination

- Self-determination encompasses:
 - Choice making
 - Decision making
 - Problem solving
 - Goal-setting
 - Self-advocacy
 - Self-regulation
 - Self-management

Self-Determination

- Individuals with strong self-determination skills report...
 - Higher quality of life
 - More satisfaction with their lives
 - More positive employment outcomes
 - Positive independent living outcomes

Self-Determination

- Self-determination occurs on a continuum
 - Can be complex and complicated (e.g., typical adult life)
 - Or as relatively simple as picking something to eat
- An example of choice-making on a continuum:
 - Some individuals can make choices in regard to most areas of their lives (e.g., where to work, how to get to work)
 - Others can make choices in fewer areas of their lives (e.g., what to eat, what shirt to wear)
 - ✦ Expect fewer choices to be made with younger children

One example of Self-Determination

- All individuals, regardless of age and disability, can be taught skills related to self-determination
- All individuals communicate and can be taught to make choices
 - Children with multiple disabilities often communicate in ways that are difficult to recognize
 - Eye gaze (e.g., length of time looking at an object may indicate choice)
 - Changes in breathing patterns
 - Changes in muscle tone
 - Other children may point or reach for an object
 - Other children may sign or talk

Self-Determination Skills Vary by Age

- For young children
 - How to appropriately say, "No"
 - What clothes to wear
 - What toys to play with
- For a young adult
 - Decisions regarding employment
 - Transportation
 - Decisions in the grocery store

Self-Determination in Childhood

- Teaching skills related to self-determination is important for very young children
 - Allows adults to provide young children with practice, support, guidance, and refinement of these skills before they are expected to be independent with such skills
 - May help to prevent:
 - Learned helplessness/prompt dependence
 - Over-dependence on adults
 - Low self-esteem

Self-Determination

- Always determine if the skills being taught fit into the family's value system (e.g., consider culture, priorities)

Ideas on How to Teach Self-Determination

- Questions thus far?
- As we move forward -- Ideas pulled from:
 - Cho & Palmer, 2008
 - Erwin et al., 2009
 - Shogren & Turnbull, 2006

Ideas on What to Teach – Home & School

- Teach choice-making in ways that are appropriate for the family and school setting
- Another session immediately following on choice-making

To Increase Independence – Home & School

- Place toys in accessible spaces (e.g., bins on the floor the child can access without help) and clean up independently
- Keep toys in the same space with a consistent organization system so the child learns how to find toys independently and where to put toys when cleaning up.
- Move objects that may make independent moving around house/school difficult (e.g., move rugs that block/prevent use of walker or wheel chair)

To Increase Independence – Home & School

- Teach the child to explore the feeling of flooring and/or to touch walls as he/she moves about the family's living space or classroom
- Use predictable and consistent routines, so children can anticipate what is going to happen next
- Encourage the use of adaptive/assistive equipment, as necessary, in daily activities

Communication

- If the child is non-verbal, encourage use of communication systems such as ...
 - Sign language
 - Augmentative / alternative communication
 - Gestures
 - Hand leading
 - Unconventional communication
 - Etc.
- Whether the child is verbal or non-verbal, encourage him/her to communicate throughout the day
- Encourage the child to express a range of emotions

Communication

- Encourage the child to express his/her opinions
 - Preferences (likes/dislikes)
 - Desires (what he/she wants)
 - To reject (e.g., I don't want that one)
 - Protest (e.g., I don't like this)
- Teach the child how to appropriately reject something
 - How to end an activity
 - Reject a toy (e.g., I don't want this one)
 - Reject a person (e.g., I don't want to work with you)

Communication

- When the child communicates, respond to his/her requests (as appropriate) to teach the child that his/her communication is important
- Teach beginning problem solving (e.g., if the child wants a toy and cannot reach it, teach the child to find an adult and ask for help; if the child cannot open the lunch box, teach the child to ask for assistance)

Communication

- Provide rich descriptions of what the child feels/touches/hears and what the adult is doing
- Place child's hands on top of adult's hands so the child can 'observe' the adult's actions

Social/Emotional – Home & School

- Provide a mirror in a place so the student can see him/herself, both to look at him/herself and while engaged in activities (e.g., washing hands)
- Display the child's artwork around the house/classroom
- Encourage the child/student to try new things and take new risks appropriate to his/her age (e.g., trying a new food, playing with a new peer, trying new playground equipment)

Social/Emotional – Home & School

- Discuss the child's/student's strengths and unique characteristics
- Encourage the student to evaluate his/her own strengths and weaknesses; discuss yours (e.g., "Waiting is hard for me, too")
- Help your child/student set and work toward simple goals

Social/Emotional – Home & School

- Encourage student to self-regulate (e.g., calm him/her self down)
- Encourage each student to work out small disagreements with peers

Social/Emotional – Home & School

- Encourage each child/student to be persistent when faced with difficult tasks
- Encourage the child/student to try new things (e.g., activities, games)
- Encourage and reinforce the child/student for engagement in activities, tasks, and play with things they are interested in

Social/Emotional – Home & School

- Provide reinforcement for appropriate behavior (e.g., appropriate social behavior, appropriate play, appropriate behavior specific to each environment)
- Teach consequences to choices

Social/Emotional – Home

- Find safe places where the child can go to be alone and allow him/her to have alone time
- Find an area that the child can control (e.g., his/her room, inside of a tent, a corner)
 - The child can develop a sense of control over his/her environment

A Few Possible Adaptations

- Before adapting anything, consider the child's safety and abilities
 - A bed can be lowered so a child with disabilities can climb in and out without help
 - Consider having drawers with clothing accessible so the child can choose what he/she would like to wear
 - Consider adapting toilets or bathtubs to be accessible to the child
 - Create play spaces in main living areas, so children can play in same room as adults and other family members
 - Create safe places to play inside and outside

Using Literature to Enhance Self-Determination Skills

- For children who are old enough to comprehend chapter books, Konrad, Helf, and Itoi (2007) offer a variety of specific examples on teaching self-determination through books.

Questions?

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