

What To Do If A Child With Autism Cannot Receive Therapy In Person Due to Covid

(Originally given to a professor at Shi Da University for here student teachers)

Trying to do ABA therapy online for children with Autism can be very challenging and depending on the level of functioning of the child, might not be an option. If doing therapy online is not possible, the next best thing is to teach the parents to teach their own child. Before doing this though, be aware that parents are already experiencing a lot of stress during these Covid times, so check with them to determine if they want to do this. At the same time, tell them not receiving therapy for long periods of time will not only hurt the child's progress, but he may start forgetting some of the things he has learned. If they want to try doing therapy on their own, here are some recommendations:

Work on increasing compliance:

Take advantage of the time to gain better compliance from their child. They are together much more now, so they should be able to give their child more opportunities to respond, reinforce them more, and give a correction.

Tell parents they do not have to always follow through. They have things to do, too. Try to pick a time during the day when they have the most energy. For example, they can say, "From 1 to 3 pm, I will consistently reinforce and offer corrections if needed.

The parents can also take turns. One parent can be consistent for one hour and then they take turns. I ask parents to keep a schedule so that it becomes a routine and each person knows what to expect.

Start with the common 1-Step and 2-Step Directions. Later on tasks within the chores around the house can be included. For example, chores like laundry (put in / get clothes from laundry machine, hang up / put away clothes), set up before / clean up after meal time, dressing self, etc.

Create routines and schedules:

Since they are frequently home, their schedule should be very stable. This is a great time to work on routines. They can create a wake up routine in which the child learns to brush teeth, get dressed, and help with breakfast. There can also be a lunch and dinner routine. A bedtime routine

can consist of taking shower, changing clothes, brushing teeth, etc. Help them create and break down each routine including how to prompt and reinforce.

The families can also work on creating a daily schedule. For example, what happens at 8 am, 10 am, 12 pm. Creating a picture /text schedule in the house will let the child know what to expect and decrease anxiety. Seeing the same pictures also forces the parents to come up with more activities for the child to do. Picture schedules can be on cell phones or Ipad if needed.

Run programs:

If the parents are capable of running programs, I would have them run maintenance programs so they do not have to learn a lot of prompting procedures. Tell them to designate a place to teach in their house. Use the reinforcers that are usually used in class. Depending on how capable they are, I would tell them not to keep data. Try to do the programs as often as they can. I would remind them the more they teach, the more likely their child will learn the targeted task. If they feel comfortable doing it, I would give them more material.

If they cannot run programs, familiarize them with all the programs the child has mastered and see if they can help generalize some of the programs. Tell them all the various Sd's that were used.

Target the stims:

The time at home is actually a great opportunity to decrease the stims. Children often do not have a good teacher-to-student ratio while they are at school. Now that the child is home, they can offer consequences more frequently and consistently, which is what is needed if they want to significantly decrease the stims. Come up with a behavior plan and ask them to monitor the progress in writing if needed.

This is a very difficult situation for children with ASD and other disabilities. This is why I decided to go get the vaccine. Hopefully, Taiwan will get the vaccine soon.

Find more reinforcers:

Reinforcers motivate the child to learn. The more variety you have, the more likely the child will not be bored with them. For example, if you only offer the child three kinds of food, after eating those three many times, the child may be bored of them, or there may be some days in which the child doesn't feel like eating a particular food, so then there might be only two options left. Once you run out of reinforcers, the child will not be motivated to work anymore.

When I start teaching a child, I ask the parents to give me at least eight edible reinforcers (e.g. candy, fruit, chips, crackers, desserts, etc.) as well as some toys, and a list of videos that she may like. Having all these reinforcers will make sure the child is motivated to learn and decreases the chances of tantrums.

During the time you have to stay home due to Covid, do a reinforcer assessment. Give the child different kinds of food. Food that can be broken into little pieces without causing a lot of mess would be ideal. Use food scissors to cut them if needed. You can also try various videos including movies. Sometimes children need to watch a few minutes of a movie/video before they determine if they like it or not, so leave the movie/video on for a few minutes. If they like a particular video like a music video, try other music videos. If they like cartoons, try other cartoons. If they like animal videos, try more of those.

Some children like to look at books. If this is the case, try to find a video of that book being read out loud online. Some of the videos add animation and music to the books to make them even more interesting. Some good free (some may charge a small fee) websites include:

www.youtube.com

<https://storylineonline.net/>

<https://www.justbooksreadaloud.com>

<https://secure.starfall.com>

ww.getepic.com