

Intervention Case Study 8

Introduction

Haley and Kelti are 6 year old twins who live with their mother Shannon. They are both deaf and attend a school for deaf students. They both have a diagnosis of pervasive developmental disorder and show limited social and language development. Haley is more independent than Kelti and does show more signs of sociability. Kelti is more sensitive and prefers predictability. They both display problem behaviors of hitting, kicking, screaming, and crying. Haley will run away from her mother and Kelti sometimes engages in self-injurious behavior such as hitting her head.

Functional Behavioral Assessment

The team interviewed Shannon separately about Haley and Kelti. Haley tends to display problem behaviors when she does not get an object she wants or does not get to do something she wants. Haley also will display problem behaviors in unpredictable or unclear situations such as when something unexpected happens or when she is not sure what she is supposed to do. Kelti's problem behaviors also occur in times when she does not get what she wants and when she isn't sure of what is going on. She also displays problem behaviors in situations when she is frustrated because she does not know how to communicate her desires. The team concluded that both girls needed an intervention that would help others communicate to them what would happen next and that would help them communicate to others their needs and desires.

The team also tested the girls' familiarity with symbols by having them match words, pictures, real objects, and signs. They found that they did not have high accuracy with words so the team decided pictures would be better for communication.

Intervention

The main goal of the intervention was to help Haley and Kelti communicate better and understand communications better. This was done mainly through the use of pictures.

One way to help a child understand instructions for an activity is to provide the child with illustrations for each step of that activity. For example, Kelti throws a tantrum whenever it comes time to wash her hair. Her mother Shannon picked pictures to represent each step of hair washing-the shampoo bottle, putting shampoo on hair, washing hair, and rinsing hair. She laminated the picture and put it in the bathtub. After roleplaying the activity using an empty bottle for a few days, Kelti was able to wash her hair without having a tantrum.

The same method can be used to help a child understand rules. Haley and Kelti both display problem behaviors when told to stop watching television so they could go to school. Their mother made signs that said TV, NO TV, SCHOOL, and NO SCHOOL. She placed the appropriate signs on the television each morning.

Haley and Kelti also need help to communicate their wishes to others. Haley acts out when in public by running away from her mother to look at some new object. If her mother reprimands her for leaving without permission, Haley will hit her mother. Shannon created a card for Haley

with a picture of a hand that said “can I touch?” Haley learned to use the card instead of running away when she wanted to explore in a public environment.

Kelti has a limited sign vocabulary and displays problem behaviors when she has trouble communicating what she wants. Shannon created a booklet of 100 symbols to represent common activities and objects. Kelti learned to use these symbols to make choices and communicate her desires.

Results

Shannon found success using a picture based communication system across a variety of activities for Haley and Kelti including brushing teeth and washing hands. Using symbols to teach appropriate behavior also helped Haley and Kelti behave better at the mall and in the car. Haley and Kelti do not more problem behaviors than their peers and using the symbolic communications systems, have been able to learn new tasks more quickly. Shannon has created a number of communication products-you can see them here: <http://www.portacom.bc.ca/>

Mirenda, P., MacGregor, T., & Kelly-Keough, S. *Teaching communication skills for behavioral support in the context of family life*. In J. M. Lucyshyn, G. Dunlap, & R. W. Albin (Eds.), *Families and positive behavior support: Addressing problem behavior in family contexts* (pp.185-207). Baltimore: Brookes.