PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The Importance of Consistency and Parental Involvement in ABA Therapy

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INTRODUCTION

• **The Purpose** of this presentation is to provide information regarding the importance of parents in their child’s in home therapy.

• I am a Senior Supervisor for Navigation Behavioral Consulting and have been in the field of Special Education since 2005 as a special education teacher and now an in-home ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapist.

• ABA, in short is a systematic approach to teaching that uses motivation, what people want, to make meaningful changes in their behavior, what they do.

• It is driven by research, consistent implementation, and the techniques have been proven to yield results, especially for children/individuals on the Autism Spectrum.
DISCLAIMER

• Just to be clear this presentation centers around a fictional character named Johnny

• The examples being used are fictional

• Johnny is not based on an actual person or client
INITIAL MEETING

• Your child gets a diagnosis and now everyone is telling you to get this, "ABA" therapy (Applied Behavior Analysis)

• So what happens next?

• A person comes to your home and talks with you about your concerns and discusses the different assessment options.

• It is important during this initial meeting to be really honest about the types of behaviors your child engages in.

• Don’t tell us what you think sounds good or avoid certain behaviors because they seem, “strange”

• Tell us what you need help with so we can develop a plan or choose an assessment that is best for your family
INITIAL MEETING

• I meet parents all the time and they always come straight out with the things the doctor has told them or that a teacher may have mentioned but I keep listening and waiting to hear what the parent thinks

• Your opinion and observations of your child are so much more valuable to me than what another, “professional” has said

• I wait for things like, “well he has a hard time putting his toys away”, so I can ask, “what does that look like?” and I get a variety of answers
  • like this example, “he throws them across the room and lays on the floor screaming for an hour but it’s okay he eventually calms down.”
  
  OR

  • “We don’t really go to stores with him because he used to refuse to get out of the car and then cry for a long time”
Let’s look at the “we don’t really go there” or “that makes him upset” (that being whatever routine they were being asked about, going to the store, eating, going to the bathroom, playing with other kids, following parent’s direction, etc)

This can be a tough one, is your child fine with what he is doing or are you just so used to seeing it that you are now fine with it

• I would guess that your child is okay with it as it is working for him/her
• I cry and don’t get out of car, I no longer have to go to Walmart
• I throw my toys long enough and mom will come handle this
BEHAVIOR

• Kids are like little scientists exploring their world and they **only** do things that **work** for them

• Let me explain:
  - Behavior is a term that describes anything a person does, so really the only people who can not emit behavior are dead

• Some behavior is more pleasant than others but **All** behavior has a function, or a reason why
BEHAVIOR

Example:
- I go to my mom and ask when dinner is because I am hungry and I want to know how much longer I will need to wait to eat.
  • Another version of this may look like this:
    - You are looking at what you are going to cook and you are standing in your kitchen when Johnny toddles in and starts hitting your leg repeatedly, so you move and you continue moving until you are (wow just by chance) in front of the cabinet that has snacks in it. So you think, let me give him a snack and that may distract him from hitting me.
      - You give him the snack and BOOM he smiles eats and toddles away.
    • Johnny has just requested food in a very different way and received food, so guess what Johnny is going to do when he is hungry?
      A) Hit you
      B) Politely ask you for a snack
• Let’s look for a second at the four things that keep a behavior going:

1. Access
2. Escape
3. Autonomic
4. Attention
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING????
ALSO KNOWN AS
FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

• **Access** – I want it
  • The example where Johnny was hitting his mother’s leg, that is access

  - He was hungry, perhaps doesn’t have the words to ask but knows that when he has hit people before they move

  - SO now Johnny knowing that if he hits people, they move is thinking hmmm I can’t reach the food but I know she gives me food and good things come from that cabinet let me see if I can get her over there

  - Kids are smart
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING????
ALSO KNOWN AS
FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

• **Escape:** I don’t any part of that

  - Later that day mom tells Johnny to pick up his shoes and Johnny does one if not all of these things
  - Walks away, ignores her, dances around, says no, starts playing with the shoes
  - All of these things are the same, Johnny not picking up his shoes

This can be in response to any request made by a parent, eat your food, throw that away, come here, etc....

All the responses serve the same purpose and that is, NOPE not doing it.
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING????
ALSO KNOWN AS
FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

• Autonomic: It feels good
• Many people on and not on the Autism Spectrum do a number of things for no other reason than it feels good.
  • I hum, A LOT to myself at a low volume and I also am a mover or what people have called a fidgeter, I bounce my leg, rub my feet together, dance when I eat good food. These are my autonomic behaviors. Everyone is different.
  • Some kids flap their hands, jump, spin, run back and forth, put things close to their eyes, sing, vocalize things from movies. I can’t name everything I have seen, I knew an individual that liked zip ties, it is what it is.
  • UNLESS this behavior is competing with other important daily living activities or dangerous to the child in some way, trying to stomp it out all together may be impossible and unnecessary (time and place can be taught)
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING????
ALSO KNOWN AS
FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

• Attention: Look at ME!!!!!
• I saved this one for last as this one can be very different looking at times
  • Some children seek attention in very pleasant ways such as trying to hug you, asking you to read or play with them, and showing you things, some do not
  • Examples:
  • You are on the phone and all the sudden you hear crashing, the pots on the counter are on the floor and here’s your child looking at you with a grin on his face
  • In response to this you get off the phone get in his face and ask him why he has done this and he is standing there, then you yell and narrate every move you make while cleaning this up
  • You have given him attention, one on one, not what you would consider positive but attention non the less and he will remember this, when mom is on the phone if I do X then she will come running in here and do Y
BEHAVIOR SUMMARY

• The point of that is to let you know that I get it, I have seen it, and I want to help so the more you tell me and the more I get to see the better.

• I prefer to come at the time of day that is the hardest as that’s the one we need to try and make better.

• I may know these things about behavior but I do not know your child and it could take months of me coming and working with this child for any of these issues to arise naturally which is why it’s ideal if the parent tells me what areas are an issue for them.

• My role is to help make a plan that will work for your family and at this stage your role is to be honest, lay it all on me.

• Be as normal as possible while I am there so I can see what it is like and prescribe interventions that are realistic for you.
• Now that we are all behavior experts and agree on what time of day is great to come work with your family, services start

• Do not agree to sessions that are not feasible for you, I know therapy 7 days a week has got to be better than 3 days right?! NO
  • If Friday is movie pajama night starting at 4:30 in your house then lets not have therapy that night
  • Make a schedule you can stick to as canceling frequently will decrease consistency which makes for less progress
  • When schedules are keep the same a good routine can be established that a child can rely on and that helps everyone
  • **Parent role here:** Keep your scheduled therapy times and don’t go over board, if 3 days is what is feasible then do not agree to 5
  • **Therapist role here:** Offer a schedule that meets child’s clinical needs and is suitable to the family, even if I want to come 7 days a week , I need to respect your schedule
CONSISTENCY

• When a session is taking place there will be times where the therapist is directly teaching a concept and may need to do that one on one with the child
  • These concepts or targets should be in the treatment plan and should be gone over with you before they are introduced
  • A portion of the session can be used to model what is being worked on and hen the teaching trials have been mastered the therapist will model how you can practice this when they are not there
  • The end game of all of this is for you to be able to practice these strategies with your child
  • You are your child’s first and most valuable teacher, what good is it to the child if the only time he asks for a drink of water is with me?
CONSISTENCY

• **Example**: Your child is working on vocally requesting items and you have seen him do this with Shelly, his therapist, in sessions and she has shown you the different items he has been successful with and asking for chips is one of them!!

• You have 3 choices:

  1. Do nothing when Shelly leaves its business as usual

  2. Try once or twice but don’t remember that Shelly mentioned that Johnny has been using 3 words to ask for chips

  3. Practice all the targets she showed you and show your husband as he was at work and now that Johnny can ask for a snack you want to make sure everyone in the home gives him the chance to do it
CONSISTENCY

• Let’s look at the possible results from the options:
  1. You did nothing, Johnny is hungry and he hits you a lot and you give him chips
     - Shelly comes back and he requires prompts to ask for the items again and by the end of the session he is consistently asking her with 3 whole words for chips
  2. You tried right after she left and the rest of the day and he did ask once using words and then the next day things were hectic and you didn’t remember and he tried the words, your didn’t hear them, so he hit you, and you gave him chips
     - Shelly returns and after a lower level of prompt he is asking her for chips consistently but when the chips are out and you are near them he hits you
     - This is an example of history, he now has a history of asking for chips with Shelly and getting them versus hitting her which got him nothing. When he asked you he got chips once or twice as opposed to hitting you, which got him chips everytime
Lastly:

3. You practiced this at the end of the session and then after Shelly left and it worked, he didn’t hit you, he asked you for chips. You had some time so you practiced 2 other things that she showed you he could ask for and they worked too! Now you are convinced Shelly is not a magician, you show your husband and he tries as well. Things are awesome, the next day you see him near the food cabinet and you do what Shelly suggested, ask him what he wants and he says, “chip.”

-When Shelly returns:

You have been practicing all the things Shelly suggested and are happy to report that he asked you for a targeted item once and you didn’t have to ask him first what he wanted.

These were just examples to demonstrate that when parents are consistent and practice it makes for big results and much quicker results.
CONSISTENCY

• The possible outcomes and example relating to Shelly modeling techniques for the parent illustrate a very important part of a child’s therapy and that is the parent

• The parent allows the therapist to do the teaching trials after the skills to be worked on are determined and agreed upon by both the family and the therapist

• A portion of the session should be devoted to modeling those techniques used to teach the child a new skill to the parent

• This gives the parent the opportunity to ask questions, practice with the therapist before the therapist leaves

• It is then the parent’s role to practice these skills with the child
CONSISTENCY

• The term consistency here is used to describe the way a parent should view therapy in their home and how they should practice the skills.

• When a parent gives a child a consistent, meaning the same response to a behavior the child emits, the behavior will either continue as is or change to better suit the child’s need.

• Example:
  • Let’s say Johnny has a history of hitting toys on the floor.
  • Shelly observes this in session and determines that he is seeking your attention as every time he does this you stop what you are doing and go to him and correct him.
  • Shelly, the therapist recommends an intervention that involves teaching him to go to you and say, hey mom look.”
• **Example Continued:**
  • She also models how you can prompt or help him do this.
  • She then tells you that because he is seeking attention that no matter what if he starts hitting the floor with toys you should not pay attention to him as that would only reward the behavior with what he wants—attention.
  • If you consistently only gave him attention when he came to you and said, “hey mom look,” hitting the floor with toys would fade out and asking for your attention would go up.
  • Now he may try a few other things to get your attention but as long as your response is the same he will give up on those as well as they do not work.
  • Always remember kids only do things that work!
In the last example Johnny was doing some things to get attention that may not seem like they would be reinforcing at all but keep in mind any attention even if it is negative (yelling, arguing) is attention.

To create lasting changes in your child’s behavior you have to be consistent when handling these things:
- Hitting the floor can never yield your attention or he will not be motivated to change that behavior, if it didn’t work at some point he would not be doing it.
- This basically means if you want him to ask then he will need to ask all the time, not just on Tuesdays at home.
- This includes at dinner, the library, shopping, etc...
- If the hitting behavior works it will continue.
- Why would a person want to change something that works for them?
MOTIVATION

• Being consistent with your reactions to things will motivate your child to change his behavior to meet his wants and needs in a more appropriate way, the way you are teaching him.

• The difference between motivating a person and bribing them is simple:
  • If Johnny wants a cookie and he screams then you tell him I will give you this cookie if you stop that’s a bribe.
  • If Johnny wants a cookie and you are teaching him to ask for one then you would prompt him especially if you already know what he is after and if he asks for one he would get one but if he screams he would not and you would walk away from the cookie jar and he can try again later.
  • Then he learns if I scream no cookie appears, if I ask cookies appear.
TO SUMMARIZE

• Behavior happens for a reason and most of the time it is not emotional
• Kids do things that work
• When parents are involved and practice the interventions modeled then lasting changes in their child’s behavior can be made
• When parents are not involved the child’s behavior will not change in the home with the parents, Johnny will still be hitting mom for a cookie but Johnny will ask Shelly for a cookie and not hit her as she is consistent with her reaction to this
• You are your child’s most valuable teacher, we as therapists are only there for hours a week, what good is to you or your family if Johnny only asks me for the cookie?
THANK YOU

• I hope that this presentation provided some useful information
• Never be afraid to ask your therapist to model techniques, show you what things mean, and practice things with you
• The point of therapy is to help the family as a whole
• If there are any questions that I did not answer here I can be reached via email at munionnb@gmail.com
• Thank You