

Using Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) at Home Article 5: Self-Management

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Through the technique of self-management, a person learns how to assess and make changes to their own behaviour. Self-management is widely considered a pivotal behaviour as people who learn to manage their own behaviour have been shown to continue to do this beyond the teaching situation (Koegel, R. L., Koegel, L.K., Harrower, J.K., & Carter, C.M., 1999, p 180). Applying motivational strategies to self-management involves including the child with ASD in the decision-making process whenever possible. The child may be a part of choosing the target behaviour, the reinforcers and the recording system, which they will be taught to use to self-monitor.

The steps of self-management include:

- **Choose and operationally define the target behaviour**

Define the behaviour in terms that are specific, observable, and measurable. Ensure that this definition is clear to anyone involved in the teaching of this behaviour or skill.

If the morning routine is difficult, you may decide your child could learn to manage these skills independently and efficiently. With other care providers involved (and your child, if appropriate) define this as completing the morning routine (getting dressed, making her bed, eating breakfast and brushing her teeth and hair) within 40 minutes.

- **Select reinforcers**

A reinforcer is an item (activity, game, food) that the child enjoys. The delivery of the reinforcer is related to the increase or decrease of the target behaviour. Whenever possible, the child should learn to give him or

herself reinforcement following mastery of the self-monitoring system (see below).

For example, the child can gain access to a favorite activity (computer, reading, TV, etc.) if the morning routine is completed within the set amount of time. Naturally the amount of time she is able to engage in the activity directly relates to how quickly she completed her routine (i.e. if she completes the routine in 25 minutes there is more time left to enjoy the reinforcer before she must leave the house in the morning).

- **The recording system and device is determined**

Find a way to record whether or not the child engaged in the target behaviour. The system needs to be simple enough for the child to easily learn and use. There are many options, such as a chart, graph, mark in a calendar or in an agenda at school, tally counters, or electronic options (apps for various phone systems are available).

To record successful completion of the morning routine, a simple visual chart with a bingo dabber, stickers or coloured marker can be used. The chart can include a spot to note the routine was completed prior to the timer going off.

- The child is taught how to self-monitor

The child must be taught to recognize when they have completed the target behaviour. This can be taught using prompting and reinforcement methods. A separate, related skill to teach your child is to record completion of the target behaviour (i.e. morning routine) on their chart. Reinforcement, such as using a favourite type

of marker, applying a scented sticker, or a high five for remembering to use the chart can be used to teach this skill.

For example, while learning to self-monitor for the morning routine, your child may be taught to set a timer and be allowed to choose a special marker to use for checking off each task once completed. Once all the tasks are completed, she can then be prompted to look at the timer and if there is still time left, place the last check on the chart and move to the reinforcing activity.

- **External prompts and reinforcement of self-monitoring are faded**

As your child begins to succeed in monitoring his or her own behaviour, the prompts she is given should be reduced. Also the amount of reinforcement given for marking on the chart is also decreased. These fading procedures allow your child to become independent with this skill.

- **Adult presence is faded, while ensuring the child continues to self-monitor the target behaviour**

As your child becomes more independent in monitoring the target behaviour, it is important to assess if your child continues self-monitoring and if they are self-monitoring in other environments.

Periodically review the morning routine chart and check to see the timer is being used properly. As your child learns to complete this routine quickly with no reminders from you, the use of the recording system may be faded. Ensure your child continues to complete each task within the same time frame when they are no longer using the chart and the timer. You can also assess if they are completing other similar routines in a more efficient manner (e.g. bedtime routine).

In Conclusion

These five articles have highlighted the PRT approach to intervention for four main pivotal areas: motivation, self-initiation, responding to multiple cues and self-management. The examples included in each section have demonstrated different ways these strategies might be used at home or in the community. With practice, family members and other caregivers are able to provide this effective and evidence-based intervention approach with their child in their home, while engaging in the regular routines of their household.

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