

Education update:

Autistic child taught to allow physical contact

Researchers using "holding" as a negative reinforcer have taught a 30-month-old autistic boy, who formerly screamed whenever held by an adult, to tolerate and apparently even enjoy physical contact with others.

During nine 90-minute treatment sessions, a trainer held the boy in a light hug; whenever the boy's crying lessened, he was rewarded by being allowed to leave the trainer's lap for 30 seconds. The trainer gradually increased the amount of quiet "holding" time needed to earn "free" time, until the boy was able to sit quietly with the trainer for extended periods. Food rewards were given while the boy was being held.

By the ninth session, the boy had learned to tolerate being held and even began returning to the trainer's lap voluntarily. Teachers and family members also reported that the boy's eye contact improved following treatment, and that he showed more interest in other people.

"The Effect of Negative Reinforcement on Tolerance of Physical Contact in a Preschool Autistic Child," Michael D. Powers and Carolyn A. Thorwarth; *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 299-303, 1985. Address: Michael D. Powers, PsyD, Child Development Center, CG-52 Bles Building, Georgetown University Hospital, 3800 Reservoir Road, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007.

Sensory reinforcers better than food

"Sensory reinforcers"—tickling, music, kaleidoscopes, etc.—are more effective in motivating autistic students than food rewards, according to two recent studies.

In a study by Arnold Rincover and Crighton Newsom, three children worked the longest and learned the most when a variety of sensory rewards were used. "In fact," the researchers noted, "some of the multiple-sensory sessions lasted over two hours without breaks, tantrums, or other 'escape' behavior in the children studied. Such lengthy, intensive sessions are rarely possible when food is used."

Rincover and Newsom found that alternating several sensory rewards proved to be more effective than using only a single sensory reward. However, varied food rewards were not greatly more effective than single-item food rewards.

In a separate study, L.J.V. Baker and Yvonne Milner found that three autistic students showed higher levels of task perfor-

mance when they were rewarded with sensory reinforcers than when they were rewarded with food. The researchers also noted that sensory rewards are most effective when they are similar to self-stimulatory activities the child naturally prefers.

"The Relative Motivational Properties of Sensory and Edible Reinforcers in Teaching Autistic Children," Arnold Rincover and Crighton D. Newsom; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, No. 3, Fall 1985, pp. 237-248. Address: Arnold Rincover, Surrey Place Centre, 2 Surrey Place, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C2.

—and—

"Sensory Reinforcement with Autistic Children," L.J.V. Baker and Yvonne Milner; *Behavioral Psychotherapy*, 1985, 13, pp. 328-341. Address: L.J.V. Baker, 25 Westland Row, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Videotapes help teach daily living skills

Videotapes can be very effective in teaching community skills and promoting generalization of these skills, according to California researchers.

The three autistic adults in this study were first trained to buy items in one community or school setting. They then viewed videotapes of models performing the same shopping skills they had learned in a variety of different settings. During these sessions, instructors would ask the students questions such as, "What is [the shopper] doing?", "How much will he pay?", and "What will he do next?"

The researchers found that while the initial training in stores and cafeterias was not well generalized, the videotape training (along with continued training in community settings) led to "rapid and durable increases in performance". They conclude that using videotapes to promote generalization of skills may be much more efficient and cost-effective than transporting students to different community settings for training sessions.

"Teaching Generalization of Purchasing Skills Across Community Settings to Autistic Youth Using Videotape Modeling," Thomas G. Haring, Craig H. Kennedy, Mary J. Adams, and Valerie Pitts-Conway; in press. Address: Thomas G. Haring, Ph.D., Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara; Santa Barbara, California 93106.

"Positive practice" used to teach skills

"Positive practice"—discouraging an inappropriate behavior by having an individual repeatedly practice an appropriate alternative behavior—can be used to simultaneously extinguish unwanted behaviors and teach new skills, according to Georgetown researchers.

In this study, an eight-year-old autistic boy's screams, whines, nonsense words and echolalia were the target of a "positive correction" procedure which required him, following each incident of inappropriate vocalization, to answer a series of social questions ("What is your sister's name?", etc.) which previously were not part of his repertoire.

Using the procedure, staff members were able to reduce the boy's inappropriate vocalizations and also teach him 24 appropriate responses to social questions.

"The Educative Effects of Positive Practice Overcorrection: Acquisition, Generalization, and Maintenance," Michael D. Powers and Raymond L. Crowl; *School Psychology Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 360-372, 1985. Address: Michael D. Powers, PsyD, Child Development Center, Georgetown University School of Medicine, CG-52 Bles Building, 3800 Reservoir Road, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007.

Autistic adults on the job: an encouraging report

Three autistic adults in Maryland were able to improve their behavior and job performance enough to work successfully in nonsheltered job settings (with full-time counselors) following a behavior modification program.

In one case, a retarded autistic adult was motivated to work at the same rate as a non-handicapped worker by the use of praise and feedback.

The authors note that in all three cases the training procedures were used on-site during the work-day, and did not disturb co-workers, interfere with work production, or call undue attention to the autistic workers.

"Managing the Behavior of Adults with Autism in the Job Setting," Marcia Datlow Smith and Doreen Coleman; *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 145-154, June 1986. Address for either author: Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children, 751 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville, Maryland 20851.