

Picture books simplify self-care skills training

Caring for autistic children who can't dress themselves, feed themselves, or help with household chores is difficult and time-consuming. But a new study offers encouraging news: its results suggest that even low-functioning young children can readily be taught to perform self-care skills independently, using a simple picture book system, and that such training can also reduce inappropriate behavior.

Karen Pierce and Laura Schreiberman worked with three low-functioning autistic boys, teaching them self-care skills including dressing, making lunch, doing laundry, setting the table, and making a bed. They began by making a picture book for each task, using color photos of objects or actions to detail each chore step-by-step. Each book had a green felt dot on the bottom right corner of each page, to cue page-turning and make the pages easier to turn, and a "smiley face" sticker on the back page to indicate successful completion of the task. Training consisted of three phases:

PHASE I: The children were taught to correctly identify the pictures depicting steps in the task to be trained. Verbal praise and small snacks were used as reinforcers.

PHASE II: A book containing the first photo for a task, followed by the "smiley face" page, was placed in front of the child, and a therapist demonstrated how to open the book and asked the child to identify the picture and then imitate the action or get the object shown. If the child was unsuccessful, the therapist modeled the correct response; if he was successful, he was praised. Prompts were gradually faded until the child responded to the picture alone.

The therapist then pointed to the green dot and prompted the child to turn the page to the "smiley face." When he complied, he received praise. Each child was also taught to reward himself with a reinforcer selected, before beginning the task, from a variety of foods and toys.

Successive book pages were trained the same way, until all of the pictures had been added.

PHASE III: The therapist's presence was gradually faded. Initially, the therapist intermittently left the room for about 20 seconds at a time, saying "good work, I'll be back in a minute." Gradually, the therapist's absence increased in length, until the child performed the entire task independently.

Before training, the researchers say, the boys were unable to perform any of the tasks successfully, and inappropriate behaviors such as hand-flapping and echolalia were frequent. "At post treatment," they say, "inappropriate behavior decreased and on-task behavior increased to high levels, often 100% for all three children."

At a two-month follow-up, all children completed the tasks successfully using the picture books. In addition, the children tended to learn new picture-book tasks much more quickly than the original task; for instance, one child learned his first picture-

book task in three hours and his third in less than one minute.

The researchers found that the boys reacted to changes in their books—for instance, a change in the order of the pages—by altering their routines. "This reliance on the [pictures] has positive aspects," they say, "implying that the picture book can be modified to meet the demands of the environment and the advancement of the individual."

At follow-up, the children were able to perform some but not all tasks without the books. The researchers say, "all children could complete at least two out of ... three tasks at follow-up without the book," indicating that the picture books could be successfully faded.

"The benefits of pictorial self-management are many," they note; "the picture book is small, readily transported to novel settings and may be easily faded. Our findings suggest that once children become familiar with using pictorial self-management, additional behaviors can be taught with relatively little time and effort for caretakers." But the most important benefit

F/C update:

APA takes a stand, CBS makes a movie

The F/C wars continue. The American Psychological Association, at its August Annual Meeting, issued its long-expected statement condemning the practice of F/C. The statement calls F/C an "unproved communicative procedure with no scientifically demonstrated support for its efficacy," and says that allegations of abuse made through F/C may threaten the civil and human rights of people with retardation or autism and their caretakers.

"From a scientific viewpoint," said APA spokesman Brian Gladue, "the overwhelming evidence arguing against the wide and vast claims of Facilitated Communication is more than compelling."

"I fully support the APA position," asserted Diane Paul-Brown, director of the Speech-Language Pathology Section of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). "The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that it is the facilitator doing the communicating." ASHA is expected to issue a formal statement on F/C soon.

Douglas Biklen of Syracuse University termed the APA position "terribly unfortunate." Biklen spoke of a future "new wave" of studies which will support F/C.

Meanwhile, CBS is about to broadcast as its "movie of the week" *Cries From the Heart*, a fictionalized account of a case in which an autistic child reportedly accused a caretaker of sexual abuse. Parents and caretakers, as well as researchers concerned about the effects of false allegations, have petitioned CBS to refrain from unintentionally inciting a rash of "copy cat" F/C abuse cases.

of picture book training, they say, is "the decrease in parental burden" as children become more self-sufficient.

"Teaching children with autism daily living skills in unsupervised settings through pictorial self-management," Karen L. Pierce and Laura Schreiberman; *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, in press. Address: Karen Pierce, Psychology Department, 0109, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093-0109.

FDA update:

S. 784 passed, H.R. 1709 being blocked

As our readers know, the Food and Drug Administration has outraged millions of Americans, and will do irreparable harm to autistic children (as well as to the citizenry in general), by its many abusive, and too-often successful, attempts to restrict our right to purchase nutritional supplements. (Tryptophan, for example, a perfectly safe amino acid helpful to many autistic children, was taken off the market in 1988 because one shipment was contaminated. You still cannot buy it.)

The public was so incensed at FDA attempts to control supplement availability that Congress has been flooded with calls and letters. As of our publication date (late September), the Hatch Bill (S. 784), which would protect us from the FDA, had been passed unanimously, but the Richardson Bill (HR 1709), which has 259 cosponsors in the House, was being blocked by Representatives Waxman (CA) and Dingell (MI).

What can you do? When this newsletter arrives, call **Citizens for Health at 800-357-2211** and ask if these bills are now law. If S. 784 and H.R. 1709 were not passed, they will give you your Congressional representatives' phone numbers so you can call them and advise them in no uncertain terms that you are upset at Congress's failure to act on this important FDA-control legislation, and that your vote for them in the forthcoming election may depend on their stand on this crucial issue.

ALLERGY DIETS AND AUTISM

In previous issues of the ARRI we have reported research showing that some autistic children improve markedly when placed on diets free of gluten and casein. Gluten is found in wheat, oats, barley, and rye, while casein is found in milk. ARI Publication 146 (\$4.00) is a compilation of several articles on allergies and behavior. ARRI subscriber Lisa Lewis, Ph.D., who has found a gluten- and casein-free diet to make "a huge difference" in her autistic son, has compiled an up-to-the-minute 16-page handbook to help families try this approach. Our office will copy and send you the "Lisa Lewis" paper for \$3.00. To order both her paper and ARI Publication No. 146 send \$7.00 (includes postage).