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Enhancing Communication Skills in Children with ASD: Role of Active Parental Participation in Speech Therapy with Behavioral Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to address the communication challenges faced by children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), recognizing the substantial difficulties on their daily engagement. This includes social interactions, educational activities, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life, as measured by assessing the child's overall well-being, ability with daily activities, and functional independence. Focusing on two objectives, this project sought to 1) evaluate the impact of active parental participation through structured training programs, and 2) integrate strategic behavioral strategies, including applied behavioral analysis (ABA), social skills training, and cognitive-behavioral techniques, to reinforce communication skills in therapy sessions and at home. Parents engaged in specialized training with a speech therapist to provide targeted communication development strategies through a behavioral approach. This included parents implementing the behavior modification strategies that are found to be most effective in the current research. Anticipated outcomes involve improvements in receptive and expressive communication skills, assessed through observations during naturalistic communicative interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Communication challenges in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) necessitate specialized training programs and active parental involvement to improve social interactions and well-being (Killmeyer & Kaczmarek, 2017).

Integrating evidence-based speech therapy techniques and tailored behavioral strategies is crucial for enhancing communication skills and promoting positive behavior in children with ASD (Heath et al., 2020).

Primary Aim:

- To provide parents of children with ASD beneficial information and resources to enhance parental training in behavior management strategies, ultimately improving outcomes in speech therapy.

Secondary Aims:

- To evaluate the impact of active parental participation through structured training programs.
- To integrate strategic behavioral modification strategies, including ABA, social skills training, and cognitive-behavioral techniques, to reinforce communication skills in therapy sessions and at home.

APPROACH

Examined evidence-based speech therapy techniques and targeted behavioral strategies that prioritize individualized care and holistic development for children with ASD, including:

- Structured Training Programs:** Involving parents and teachers in programs like Social Skills Training (SST), Parent Training (PT), and Cooperative Parent-Mediated Therapy (CPMT) enhances social, communication, and daily living skills in children with ASD and reduces ASD symptoms.
- Effective Strategies:** VOICE is an acronym that describes effective strategies parents can utilize in therapy sessions and home environments. This approach offers a comprehensive guide for enhancing the communication and social skills of children with ASD.

V

VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids, such as visual schedules, help children with ASD understand daily routines, easing transitions between activities and reducing anxiety.

O

OPTIMIZING THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Parents should adapt the home environment to support their child's needs, with key adaptations including clear routines, calming sensory lights, minimized noise, respected space, organization, neutral colors, and safety measures.

I

INTERACTIVE PLAY

Interactive play, including pretend play, collaborative games, and sensory activities like reading books and playing with mud or slime, enhance communication and social skills in children with ASD. Play therapy facilitates back-and-forth interactions, aiding their development.

C

COMMUNICATION BOARDS

Communication boards, such as Picture Communication Boards (e.g., PECS) and Choice Boards, help non-verbal individuals with ASD express needs and make decisions by selecting images representing desired objects or actions.

E

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement emphasizes the importance of positive reinforcement in recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors as it motivates, nurtures, and promotes long-term behavioral improvements in autistic children.

FINDINGS

Active parental involvement in speech therapy, coupled with behavioral strategies like ABA, social skills training, and cognitive behavioral interventions improves communication and social skills in children with ASD:

- Parental involvement enhances communication skills and language proficiency in children with ASD by facilitating language development through everyday activities, while strategies like social skills training enable children to express themselves and engage with others. (Heath et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2022; Chung et al., 2024).
- Parent training programs empower parents to support child's communication and social skills development through practical strategies and skills taught during everyday interactions (Matsumura et al., 2022; Otero et al., 2015; Valeri et al., 2019).
- Effective behavioral modification strategies like ABA and social skills training enable children with ASD to develop positive behaviors and improve social interactions, enhancing overall quality of life. Cognitive behavioral interventions help children recognize and express feelings more appropriately (Dekker et al., 2014; Heath et al., 2020; Otero et al., 2015; Chung et al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Clinicians should prioritize active parental involvement in the child's treatment, teaching them effective strategies for better outcomes among children with ASD and implementing evidence-based behavioral strategies to improve communication and social skills.

Structured parent training programs like VOICE are crucial for empowering parents to support their child's communication and social skills effectively. Continuous parent education ensures ongoing support in reinforcing skills and managing challenging behaviors, while collaborative approaches between parents and therapists facilitate personalized treatment plans tailored to each child's needs.

Future research should focus on improving behavioral strategies and parent training programs to maximize social and communication skills development in children with ASD.

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