
EMPOWERING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM TO SUCCESS: WITHIN APPROPRIATE ECOSYSTEM

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Received date: 6 December 2019; Accepted date: 22 January 2020

Abstract: Early detection of developmental delays in children coupled with appropriate intervention is crucial to help children develop to their fullest potential. Over the next few years, Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) will work with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to form a network of touch points across the health and preschool sectors. This would include doctors at the hospitals, polyclinics and family medicine practitioners in developmental screening, and pre-school teachers in early detection of children with developmental needs, so that they can be supported through timely intervention. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a unique profiling personality in terms of diverse intelligence, natural learning patterns and styles, the most effective natural learning method and the thinking mindset. The journey begins when a child has been diagnosed with Autism, be it verbal or non-verbal. As days passed, some parents may wonder what they could do for the sake of them and their child. This paper draws attention to the strategies of how we can empower the child with ASD to gain success in life within an appropriate ecosystem. The ecosystem supports children with disabilities (ASD) and their families, so as to improve their quality of life. Existing initiatives will be enhanced to provide more holistic help and a smoother transition for children with ASD at different stages of their lives.

Keywords: Empowering, Ecosystem, ASD

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Identifying Audio, Visual and Kinesthetic Level in Autistic Children

Autistic children who are normally associated with learning disabilities have one thing in common, a processing deficit that interferes with their learning. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that every individual

learns differently and thus has a unique learning style (Riding & Rayner, 1998; Pritchard, 2013). By recognising the importance in identifying learning style in autistic child, processes of learning is much fun and more engaging. Each child learning preferences will provide effective experiences and situations which are more likely to lead to lasting attainment. Parents and special education teachers could explore which method is best that suits the children's need and behaviour. Auditory learners tend to benefit most from traditional teaching techniques. Many teachers use a lecture-style forum, presenting information by talking to their students. Regulating voice tone, inflection, and body language will help all students maintain interest and attention. Auditory learners succeed when directions are read aloud, speeches are required, or information is presented and requested verbally. Some students rely upon a visual learning style: "Show me and I'll understand." Visual learners benefit from diagrams, charts, pictures, films, and written directions. These students will value to-do lists, assignment logs, and written notes. Many of these techniques, however, also benefit kinesthetic learners. Most of the school population excels through kinesthetic means: touching, feeling, experiencing the material at hand. Children who are entered kindergarten as kinesthetic and tactual learners, moving and touching everything as they learn. By second or third grade, some students have become visual learners. During the late elementary years some students, primarily females, become auditory learners. Yet, many adults, especially males, maintain kinesthetic and tactual strengths throughout their lives. For some, auditory input is most valuable; others rely upon a visual style. Still others learn through kinesthetic means, or a combination of the three (Riding & Rayner, 1998). Every person has one primary learning mode. Once you identify that mode, you can learn to maximize it and enhance your child's learning experience.

Discover Inborn Talents of Children through Dermatoglyphics Technology

Dermatoglyphics is a scientific study of fingerprint analysis in discovering the inborn talents, congenital learning styles and multiples intelligence of children. The analysis is based on the comprehensive study of neurology, biologist, embryology, psychology, genetics, behavioral science, and modern statistics techniques (Schaumann, 1976). Human fingerprints are the best reflectors of the whole brain: Each finger represents a one-on-one direct relation with each brain lobe. Both (Singh & Majumdar, 2015) and

(Sin, Yeo & Hashim, 2010) state that through the fingerprint scanning and utilization of big data, analysis from the whole-brain function testing system, it shows comprehensive guidance for personal growth, education, occupational selection and career planning to help enhance core competencies and to carry out humanistic education. These findings will certainly be a great resource to discover any ASD child's inborn talent and can be consider one of the key tools to recognize their inherent potentials. It could be useful for the parents, educators and other supported group to develop the skills and the self confidence level of the child with ASD in the path that suits their natural traits while and the stressfulness to push them in something that he or she is not made for, can be averted.

Since the technology has been invented, it does help the parents to plan ahead in terms of providing the right education and with the right amount of budget for the future of their ASD child with proper measures and guideline. A lot of trials and errors could be avoided. There are a lot of children with ASD that probably has loads of unused intelligence that we may yet to discover. It is a matter of utter importance that they be made acknowledged of their hidden talents and potentials in order to help them lead a more fulfilling life. It is very important for parents, teachers and other acquaintances of a person to understand that no one is too highly abled than their own wards. Also, no one is born with similar capabilities as others. But each and every person has his or her own talents, some in conventional and some in unconventional fields of life. This uniqueness balances the society and there is huge need to understand this difference (Singh & Majumdar, 2015). Each child with ASD has different natural learning abilities. As a parent, we always look for tangible treatment to seek for best intervention and cure for autistic children but tend to forget the intangible side of it or simpler things or action that can give greater impact called love. All it takes for the parents is a new paradigm and creative strategies to develop their bonding with their ASD child, help to unleash the potential within them emotionally and mentally strong as they grow to adulthood phase (Prizant, 2015).

CORE AREA OF CHALLENGES

Real understanding the core areas of challenges which is unique and varies in each children. Before we can get through to our children and help them to bring out the best in themselves, we must first understand the core areas of challenges within them. We must understand what it like is to live in

their world. Figure out how they feel, the difficulty they have, their hopes and dreams and the language they speak. How well do you know the world of your child? How much of their language do you really understand? Are you in sync with how they think and talk? Take a peek into their world and from there build your rapport with your ASD child. These are some of the common challenges and findings in autism spectrum children together with some evidence-based strategies in addressing them.

Social Interaction Difficulties

Children with autism demonstrate marked challenges in their ability to establish joint attention engage in pretend play and sustain their interaction with their peers. All these are critical components to the development of social relationships and friendship building. Prelock (2012), state that the parent and typical peers could learn to scaffold the play with their ASD children, mediating and interpreting their play events, encouraging their joint attention and facilitating their sustained engagement in play. Try capitalizing on an environment where children with autism are familiar with their toys such as at home. Established routines and practice their skills as play partners in a common context for children without autism.

Communication Challenges

Scream, tantrum or just grab what they want, either it be verbal or non-verbal, ASD children often have some sort of communication challenges in terms of expressing, receptive and interpreting social language into meaningful conversation. It's important that they have a supportive environment to work through these challenges as it can lead to misunderstanding situation and aggressive behaviour that may further deteriorate their confidence and self-esteem level. Hutchins and Prelock (2013) state the usage of intepretive strategies that combines between Social Stories(tm) (Gray & Garand, 1993) and comic strip conversation (Gray, 1994), designed to facilitate social communication through story-based interventions in children with autism spectrum disorders. Applying Functional Communication Training (Carr & Durand, 1985) and The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) by Bondy and Frost (1994) that capitalise on visual strength in teaching communication initiations to ASD child can also be used to address variety of functions.

Repetitive Behaviours (RRB)

An effective way to address some types of repetitive behaviours as well as problem behaviours that can be associated with repetitive behaviors in autism, such as aggression and noncompliance is through Focus Intervention Practices (FIPs) model that usually use prompting, visual support and reinforcement with the adoption of behavioral teaching strategies such as differential reinforcement, response interruption or redirection (Boyd, McDonough & Bodfish, 2012). Therefore, researcher found intervention based on Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) as a form of behaviour modification is beneficial to reduce these RRBs. Besides that, go for early intervention may also help these children learn early on how to be more flexible so that they are able to learn how to tolerate against certain environment setting.

Anxiety

Anxiety can be mitigated when the children feel close to someone in their family and siblings. All they need are to feel the love in their surroundings. Love will make them happy and to take better care of themselves. Studies suggest those long-life benefits are largely explained by consistent emotional support. When they feel the love, dopamine, the feel-good brain chemical, is active and elevated eventually in creating the bonding hormone. Just being in the presence of someone who greets them with positive regards and caring can actually lower levels of cortisol and adrenaline. My advice is that the family members should not being ignorance and should not let them in the state of loneliness either physically or mentally which can damage their health.

BREAKING BAD HABITS

Managing Challenges and Develop a Plan to Breaking Bad Habits and Negative Thinking

Living in a modern competitive city, life is moving at fast pace and nowadays most of the children including child with ASD are either left at private center in the care of special need teacher or at home in the care of either grandparents or maid due to the nature of work demand for most parents while there's still some of them on a fulltime basis taking care of their child. It is even more challenging for the single parent to raise autistic child on their own and have to juggle their time especially with the cost of private therapy center are always on the rise and irrationally expensive. Like it or not, as a parent, we need to get involved in the gritty world of

our autistic child in order to bring the best out of them. Complaining, nagging and punishing will certainly not empower them to overcome their problems as it will further reinforce the negative thoughts and emotions they have about themselves. Our role as parents is to understand their challenges and provide them the strategies and encouragement to overcome them. Only then will they have the confidence and motivation to stride towards success.

Effective Communication Approach

Frustration, tantrums or unexpected outbursts of anger and chronic repetitive behaviours are just a few of the behaviors that can take hold of any autistic children's life and make everyone around them feel uncomfortable. It can actually level down their health and cause even more issues that are difficult to fix. Aside from fulfilling their sensory needs, learn how many these children emotions can drive their behaviour. Parents play a big role in using common sense to find out what is behind their children's bad behaviour and how parents can apply effective communication approach in showcasing good behaviour into their children. It is about setting reasonable goals for desired changes in their children. Below are some disciplines on how behavior modification of your child can be done at home.

- ***Ensure an autistic child understands the rules***

Create a list of rules at home either in written form or visual draw and post them around the house. As an example, you might list specific details your child must do to get ready for any specific activity. Instead of letting the children the freedom to do what they want, communicate to them by showing it how it is done and make sure they understand, and review them as necessary. Make it a routine until your child get the idea.

- ***Reward your child to encourage good behaviour***

It's important that the rewarding gesture take place immediately after the activity or task is completed as a form of encouragement.

- ***Give clear instructions***

Ensure sure a child attention by saying out his or her name. Next tell them specifically what we want him or her to do. Remind him or her consequences for disobeying the instructions and always follow through.

- ***Set up a daily / weekly goal system***

One effective system for encouraging your child to comply with your instructions involves his daily / weekly schedule. It is a kind of routine discipline for them to follow and creating a habit to meet their goal. Reward them as a motivation factor for them accomplishes goals consistently.

- ***Acceptance of the imperfection***

Praise the child and offer positive criticism for the effort. A good rule of thumb is to strike a balance between praising the child a good behaviour and criticise his or her bad behaviour. Rewarding your child's small steps will motivate them toward the desired outcome.

- ***Condition physiology aspect to change emotional states***

These children need to be exposed to outdoor activities that include body exercises and brain gym in order to preserve physiological health. Similarly, providing nutritional care for these children is also very important. It is good practice on how to shift these children mental state into positive nature. Not being in control of your child emotions can be very draining and can make parenting experience more of a challenging than it needs to be. No matter what the emotions might be, if they are constantly in high gear it may lead to anxiety and stress. Out-of-control emotions are the primary reasons behind the abusive and chaotic environment at home.

These effective communication approaches towards ASD children can positively change their emotional landscape for good. Many parents of autistic children may adopt these strategies into their family life. What these children needs is for the parents to provide them the support and guidance they need to cultivate good habits in order to produce good behaviour.

TWO PRECIOUS COMPONENTS

The life of children on the autism spectrum is always associated with unique challenges and struggles which caused by neurological wiring which many called neurodevelopmental disorder. Here, the role of each family members especially the parents, caregivers and other supported groups or even the community to play important part to encourage and

'stretch' these children just outside their comfort zone so that they can be a positive person in life as simple as create a positive mindset.

Case Study 1

Syira (not the real name), 9 years old always try to avoid taking bath alone. Every morning, she will tantrum and reluctant to go to the toilet alone. Then, we started to realise what was the main contributor of such behaviour that she has low self-esteem to taking bath by herself alone in the toilet. Maybe due to scare she might fall down alone, doesn't know how to start it or maybe she doesn't know how to use the tools like open tap for shower and etc. In order to encourage her to start, I will demonstrate it first then followed slowly by her. This process was keep going on until the end her wearing her clothes and pants. To complete this task, surely consume lots of time. Higher patience is required and the same process has to be repeated over and over again until she understands the full concept. Therefore, once your child grasps the concept, gradually let her do it independently. Don't forget to praise her every time she managed to complete it successfully. Bear in mind that, always praise your child tangible actions. Do not generalise your praises because it won't benefit them at all because it rather confusing or unusable by those on the autism spectrum. Finally, you will find their self-esteem will gradually increase and the courage to try new things will come afterwards.

Not giving up trying

Autistic children are prone to giving up easily from trying when there is no positive environment that supports them. The worst part, they can still act powerless even after environment change and become positive. This supported by Psychologist Dr Martin Seligman (1998) in his research, that any human or animal happened to expose themselves repeatedly to a negative environment which beyond their control, they seem losing their learning power. Normally, common factors that contribute to this, is from emotional traumatic experience caused from sensory overload, which turn to meltdown, after being bullied and also due to their neurological wiring which giving them hard time to see the big picture and find available possibilities or choices.

Every time Syira (not the real name), 9 years old wants to have meal, she will wait for respond to dine out in a restaurant from her dad. In a car, we will ask everyone what they wanted to eat, Once majority votes reached,

we went straight to find a suitable restaurant. Inside the restaurant, we will find corner-like area which a bit isolated from many people. Sometimes she feels uneasy with the new environment and started mumbling, when she does that, either myself or her dad will try to comfort her by saying it's ok. You just need to wait and look at the menu before ordering food. We will navigate the menu together and wait for her to respond to which food she prefers. We will start ordering once everything is finalised. Prior to eating, we will talk a lot about food in the menu to distract her from feeling discomfort. At least she can learn about ingredients from the menu.

In summary, always teach about ways to overcome their anxiety so that they won't feel helplessness. If parents find their child feels this way, quickly comfort them by giving positive encouragement. Repetition process is necessary with the ultimate objective to ensure these children on the autism spectrum are able to understand the concept and apply it successfully. You will be surprised that the effect lasted because the helplessness thought already being reversed! Besides that, parents, caregivers or even other supported group of the children on the autism spectrum can also apply teachable moments technique encouraged by Temple Grandin in her book *The Loving Push*.

Be optimist not pessimist

Misbehaviour among autistic children is always associated with irrational thinking inside their brain. Seligman realised (1998) that there is a missing intellectual insight which should be embedded in their thought. Therefore, he added "disputation" and "energisation" to the behaviour therapy model, known as REBT and CBT which were initially introduced by Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck respectively. In both therapy models, it is assumed that something activates an event (A), then we respond with both a rational or irrational belief (B), and then this belief influences the consequence (C).

The two things mentioned above actually give meaning, to encourage these children to feel positive and forget about being a pessimist, is to look for the positive approach by neglecting their negative thinking whenever they are in toughest moments. Then, cherish every own-made choice that succeeds in overcoming such negative belief! Please remember too that, these autistic children hardly think in a big picture, thus, need to be guided to show different perspectives of thinking and make them practice it over and over again.

These two added values are important to be applied as when these children stuck into their negative thinking, they hardly detached themselves from this irrational belief. Finally, it will lead to self-blaming attitude as they think there is no point to put much effort to overcome it if they unable to fix it. The three ideas that could help these children on autism spectrum to combat their self-blaming habit (Seligman, 1998).

- Educate these children to realise bad event do happen at any time in our life, but that no means as the end of the world! They need to know that; no such bad events are permanent while good events are temporary. These inverse beliefs have to be countered with specific and concrete examples and pointed it out clearly repeatedly.
- Help to divert these children thinking about failure in completing any task means forever is a failure. Again, thinking like an optimistic people during handling problems could help as they hardly chunking out big problems. Therefore, showcasing about things they are good at and let them get involved with activity that they feel good about. Do it frequently to become mastery the experiences routinely.
- Always teach these children how to think like an optimist in every situation, don't ever be the pessimist as both give different outcomes when it comes to judging good or bad event. In brief, optimist people assume it just a bad luck when bad event happen and will cherish their personal achievement and appreciate it. Whereas, for pessimist people, they will think reversely, like they are the one who caused that bad event and when there is good event happen, they assume it just an expected fate.

At first time introducing Syira (not the real name), 9 years old, about self-help skill in wearing own pants, she always reluctant to do it by herself because she has difficulties to stretch her pants although she has tried hard to pull it up. When she found the task is difficult, she will start tantrum and when I gave her some help, she continued with tantrum seems like she wants to convey a message to me she doesn't want to do it and if I do push her, she feel she just can't. After few observations, I slowly try to comfort her by saying let me help I know it's quite difficult to do it but if you do it

slowly and follow steps which I showed, you will be able to pull up your pants easily. This process definitely I have to repeat over and over again until she succeeds.

TRANSFORMATION WITH NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING (NLP)

Applying Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Approach in Transformation in Personal and Interpersonal Development of Children with ASD

NLP is defined as a particular approach most often used in psychotherapy forms of communication, and in the improvement of personal and interpersonal development. Neuro linguistic programming can be used in many ways. Today, it is most often used for psychotherapy and the treatment of various mental health related problems. Problems such as depression, anxiety, phobias, learning disorders and other mental disorders can be treated by a hypnotherapist or psychotherapist with neuro linguistic programming. NLP also used mostly in the commercial industry and corporate field to reproduce excellence through modelling employees and others who perform excellently within their roles in these fields. Using NLP in Sport and Personal Development has only more recently gained its place in the academic and peer reviewed journals within the fields of Psychology, Psychotherapy, Education and Special Education Needs (SEN).

Feustell and Woodsmall (2001) pointed out these techniques and strategies were and continue to be created by NLP Master Practitioners using the methodology of NLP called 'modelling' which has been used to refine many models from many other fields such as cognitive science (left/right brain, TOTE, mind-body connection), pedagogy (learning styles), sport psychology (mental training) as well as the field of communication and behaviour modification. Modeling is by design strictly practical. It works! It was developed, tested and is being used with outstanding success within both the corporate and athletic sectors and the U.S. strategic military and intelligence environments. Modelling is a process of replicating systematically the inner behaviour of a subject that consisting six high performance key aspects to another person, including, enabling beliefs, heuristics, values, ability to make refined distinctions within a particular

representation system, internal mental approach, or cognitive strategy, and physiology.

Besides modelling, other NLP tools such as reframing, perceptual positions and Meta programme can also be taught on child with ASD. Carroll (2010) shared his own journey and personal experience raising a child with ASD on how through NLP method helps his child increase communication capabilities. He described on using perceptual positions and meta program known as chunk size helps his son develop central coherence (form and meaning) and filtering information in which an area normally seen weak in ASD child (Frith, 1989). In a nutshell, it leads his child being able to have empathy and experience the world from multiple perspectives in order to see the big picture. NLP can play a significant role in contributing to the evolution of individuals and communities with autism. NLP must be taught and learned within contextual frameworks of ecology and Meta-ethics.

CONCLUSION

In summary, difficulties in completing or handling one task can make autistic children feel that failure means life as a whole is a failure. They really don't know how to think optimistically. However, if parents, caregiver or even the supported group who are closed to them must remember to keep moving forward even in the face of obstacles. They didn't give in to their doubts, and they didn't quit when they hit these challenges. Family members and others supported these children on autism spectrum must always have faith and continues finding opportunities to improve these children life.

Talent, education, and intelligence are just guideline, not the sole keys to success. This chapter is not written for the purpose to compare which method is the best to fit all. In fact, it is merely a discussion in finding which method is providing the best training environment and experience for your own child and the whole family's success in the long run. It is not about therapies or treatment alone can act as a miracle cure. It is more to the parents', siblings' and other team member's willingness to integrate, involvement and belief system together with discipline, love, commitment, bonding and dedication to strive towards reaching the ultimate goal. Remember don't give up when result's intended not been achieved. It takes time and patience to build a long-lasting bonding and to

cultivate trust. It is important to think positively and always to give the very best in managing any situation with your child. The integration of understanding your child in the context of your family and the daily activities and transactional impact of people and learning supports that becomes critical influences on your child's development in everyday experiences. Hopefully with these sharing, we all can embrace these children to be successful instead of doubting them. They are precious gifts in our lives.

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