

Additional ABA Strategies to use with Naturalistic Interventions (Schreibman et al., 2015)

Using Loose reinforcement contingencies (Loose Shaping): This procedure consists of providing reinforcement for any behaviors in the direction of the target skill. This could be providing reinforcement for attempting to use the skill or making an initiation to use the skill. Loose reinforcement contingencies help keep the learner's motivation to attempt the target skill while the skill is continuing to emerge.

- **Example:** Sarah's teacher is working on teaching her to request items using her AAC device instead of screaming. Typically, when Sarah wants an item, she will orient her eyes to the object for 2-3 seconds and then start screaming. Every so often, Sarah's teacher will provide the item to Sarah for looking at the item (before she screams) since orienting her attention to the item is in the direction of requesting it. In this situation, Sarah's teacher is able to reinforce eye gaze without reinforcing the tantrum.

Interspersing easy tasks: When using this procedure, the teacher/practitioner provides reinforcement for using previously mastered skills while working on new target skills. This procedure supports the learner maintain previously mastered tasks and reduces the likelihood of frustration by allowing the learner to "take a break" from being required to continuously engage in the "harder tasks" (target skill).

- **Example:**
 - **Mastered Skill:** When Sarah is asked, "What color is this", she is able to select the word of the color on her AAC device.
 - **Target Skill:** When Sarah is asked, "what shape is this", she will select the word of the shape on her AAC Device
 - **Interspersing Easy Tasks Session:** Sarah's favorite activity is using cookie cutters to make various shapes with play-doh. Therefore, Sarah's teacher uses play-doh time as the context for teaching skills. Throughout play-doh time, Sarah's teacher uses cookie cutters to make a square and triangle and then will ask Sarah, "What shape is this?". Since identifying shapes is a new emerging skill, the teacher will alternate requesting Sarah to identify one of the play-doh colors (easy mastered skill) after every request to identify the shape. Over time, the teacher can increase the number of target skills trials (i.e. "what shape") within the easy/hard task ratio.

Contingent Imitation (aka mirroring): The teacher/practitioner imitates the actions of the learner within the context of a learning situation. Research indicates that learners with ASD increase their level of attentiveness to the teacher/practitioner when contingent imitation is used. This strategy has been used to increase imitation skills, joint attention, and the duration of social interactions (Schreibman et al., 2015).

- **Example:** When Sarah is playing with Playdoh, she likes to pretend to eat the "cookies" she makes with the cookie cutters. Sarah's teacher will gain her attention and imitate the exact action of Sarah and then elaborate by saying, "Yummy" to model a verbal response.

Shared Control: When using shared control, the teacher identifies a highly preferred activity. The activity is decided by the learner instead of the teacher. However, the teacher may restrict some of the materials/play choices by making the materials/play choices contingent on a desired response. The goal of shared control is to increase social reciprocity, duration of interaction, and turn taking all within a context that is desirable to the learner.

- **Example 1: Turn Taking (“my turn, your turn”):** The learner wants to roll the car across the floor. So, to teach turn-taking, the teacher says, “first my turn” and then rolls the car on the floor. Next, the teacher hands the car to the learner and says, “your turn”. In order for the learner to have another turn, the learner must hand the car to the teacher and say, “your turn.” Repeat as necessary.
- **Example 2: Shared Control Variation (aka “Sabotage”):** Sabotage is not as cruel as it sounds. It provides a situation for the learner to practice advocating/clarifying. When using sabotage, you simply respond to the learner’s request by providing them with something that wasn’t requested, so the learner has to use their communication skills to clarify with the teacher. This strategy shouldn’t be used all the time, however if you intersperse into the week, it’s a great way for the student to learn self-advocacy/clarification skills.
 - **Example:** The learner is sitting at the snack table. The learner says, “more cookies please” and instead the teacher provides the student with a few pretzels. If the student looks at the adult with a confused look, the adult prompts the learner to use their communication to clarify their original request.

Broadening the learner’s attentional focus:

Learners with autism often demonstrate a specific attention deficit defined as “stimulus overselectivity” (Schreibman et al., 2015) that occurs when the learner identifies a stimulus by a restricted set of characteristics. For example, if a child is learning to identify an apple, the child may identify the apple because of its “redness”. Therefore, when a child encounters an apple with less “redness” or an apple that is yellow or green, the child will have difficulty identifying the apple.

The goal of broadening the learner’s attentional focus is to increase the learner’s ability to focus on the relevant stimuli/cues that signal the desired behaviors. Teaching a concept across its variety of stimulus conditions will often support the learner’s attentional focus.

Example: Sarah is in preschool and uses an AAC device to communicate. The teacher who is working with Sarah is teaching her to identify numbers 1-10. In order to teach the full range of variations with how numbers are written, the teacher programmed the icons on the AAC device to have 2-3 examples of how numbers are written per number on each icon of the AAC device. For example, the number four has two distinct variations: (1) an open square top and (2) a closed triangle top. Therefore, both examples are programmed on the number four icon on Sarah’s AAC device. That way, when Sarah’s

teacher says, “Sarah, point to number four”, Sarah is able to respond under both conditions of the number four to reduce the likelihood of overselectivity.