

Training Support Staff in a Community Based Program to Facilitate the Social Interactions of a Child with ASD and His Typical Peers

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Background

Although great progress has been made in ameliorating many of the symptoms of ASD, social impairments continue to be the primary area of need of improvement for this population (Alpern & Zager, 2007). Specially, individuals with ASD continue to exhibit difficulties initiating, responding, and maintaining interactions with their typical peers, particularly in inclusive settings (Hauck, et. al., 1995; Strain & Schwartz, 2001). What is more, most social skills intervention studies are either applied in clinical or school settings, with very few addressing training of staff in community-based settings (e.g., after-school programs) (Crow & Synder, 1998). With the growing number of children with ASD participating in inclusive settings, it is imperative that researchers address how best to support students and staff in these environments (U.S. Dept of Education, 2004). Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of training staff in a community-based program on how to implement PRT techniques in order to support the interactions of a child with ASD and his typical peers.

Participants & Setting

- UCSB Boy's & Girl's Club
- Club counselors and administrator
- 10 year-old boy with ASD
- Approximately 15 typically developing 4th-6th grade peers

Procedures

- Baseline: 10 days
- Phase 1: 1-hour presentation on symptoms of ASD and PRT social techniques
- Phase 2: In-vivo training with counselors comprised of 15 minutes of modeling followed by 15 minutes of practice-with-feedback. PRT social techniques included using the buddy system, cooperative arrangements, and social conversation. Staff training occurred 2 times per week for a total of 7 days.
- Generalization: 2 weeks post last training session

Reliability

All data were scored by two naïve research assistants. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements over the total number of disagreements plus agreements, yielding an overall reliability of 78%.

Discussion & Implications

In a relatively short time, there were considerable gains in the number of positive social interactions between the child with ASD and his peers, as well as a decrease in the number of negative interactions. Additionally, staff increased their personal interactions with the child with ASD from baseline levels. Future studies should examine the impact of more extensive staff training and its effects on generalization.

Results

