



Core Strategies for Supporting Children with a Dual Diagnosis of ASD and Deafness

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Every component of our world is based upon some type of interaction. Failure to develop interactions in the typical fashion results in a child that is unable to learn, progress, and become independent. Two populations of students with language-based disorders that require specialized teacher training are children who are deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH) and children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Over 37,800 children in the United States have a hearing loss and additional disabilities reportedly impact over 39% of these children (GRI, 2011). There are additional needs to consider when a comorbid condition exists; additional needs that actually compound the impact of the disabilities. ASD is one such disability that significantly compounds a child's needs. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in every 88 children born in the U.S. will have a diagnosis of an ASD (CDC, 2012). Children who have a hearing loss and a comorbid diagnosis of ASD have multiple obstacles to overcome. Using evidence-based strategies with this population can

ultimately increase the likelihood of student success.

With that said, there are five core strategies from ASD evidence-based practices that must be considered when educating a child with D/HH and an ASD or related complex learning disorder.

Core Strategy 1: *Conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment*

Which is the fastest way to get someone's attention? Raising your hand or yelling? Many of you would probably choose to yell. Why? Because it works! **Behavior is a form of functional communication.** One important component of applied behavior analysis is the component of functional behavior assessment. Functional behavior assessment is the process of identifying the communicative intent of one's behavior. The primary functions of behavior are escape/avoidance, attention seeking, and trying to obtain a tangible item or sensory input. This process allows you to look beyond the initial behavior to see what the child is trying to tell you.

The process is important. First, you need to identify or define the troublesome behavior. Second, you need to describe the setting in which the behavior occurs most frequently. The third step is identifying specific antecedents to the behavior. What are antecedents? Those are the things that occur right before the behavior happens. The fourth step is identifying the consequences of the behavior. Once the child exhibited the behavior what happened? The fifth step is describing any environmental variables that might impact the behavior. Environmental variables can be anything from the child's diet; to the amount of sleep he's getting, to an ear infection, to a dead hearing aide battery. And finally, you need to develop your hypothesis. Why do you think the behavior is occurring? Once you've figured out the function of the behavior you can develop a plan of intervention that matches the communicative intent of the behavior.

Core Strategy 2: *Teach Functional Communication*

Functional communication is an intervention designed to decrease unwanted behaviors by replacing them with meaningful or functional communication. In other words, rather than students having a tantrum or using their behavior to have their needs met, learners are taught to communicate their needs in a more socially acceptable way. We would much rather see a student use an alternative communication system or gestures, such as pointing. The **emphasis of the communication is on functionality as opposed to form**. Deaf education often focuses on the form, as illustrated in the ongoing debate of sign versus oral instruction. Functional communication training relies on an accurate

understanding of the function behind the problem behavior (attention seeking, access to preferred items, escape/avoidance, etc.) in order to effectively eliminate it. It is always implemented after a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) has been conducted to identify the function of the unwanted behavior. For example, a child screams loudly multiple times a day. An FBA is performed and the results show that the student is yelling to escape the environment, the teacher implements a take a break card that the student is taught to hand an adult in the environment. The take a break card is considered the FCT.

Core Strategy 3: *Identify Effective Reinforcers*

Would you faithfully go to work every day if you did not receive a paycheck at some point? Your paycheck is a payoff. Much of what we do in everyday life is driven by reinforcement, the payoff. What is reinforcement? Reinforcement is anything that increases a behavior. Positive reinforcement is something you like or enjoy and when behavior is followed by something you enjoy, you are likely to repeat the behavior. Primary reinforcement is considered to fulfill a basic biological need. Examples of this include food and sleep. Secondary reinforcements include social praise, engaging in preferred activities, or receiving a token or tangible item. Don't assume that you know what a child likes. It is important to ask a child, observe a child, or perform a preference assessment. It's equally important to **think outside the box when selecting reinforcements**. Not every child wants an M&M or a goldfish cracker—even deaf children can like music.

Core Strategy 4: *Use Visual Strategies and Environmental Supports*

What would you do if all the visual supports were removed from your life? No road signs, no calendars, no clocks, no store signs, no boy/girl bathroom signs, no labels... what would you do? How do you look at the world? Many children with D/HH and an ASD view the world with their eyes just like you and I do.

Visual strategies and environmental supports take auditory information or inherent expectations and place them into a visual picture for the child to understand.

There are many different types of visual and environmental supports that are considered effective. These include, but are not limited to, visual schedules, calendars, task organizers, and visually-based management systems. They can also include visually-based environmental supports such as labeling the environment, creating boundary settings and using color coding. Deaf educators often equate visual support to sign language. The visual supports mentioned here differ from sign language in their saliency.

When using a visual or environmental support, how do you know if the child understands? You can always risk removing it from the environment to see what happens; however, we don't recommend you doing that. Instead monitor the child's behavior as well as the child's comfort within the environment. These two things should be clear indicators.

Core Strategy 5: *Provide choice-making opportunities*

Can you imagine life without choices? Would you appreciate being told what to eat, what to wear, where to go to college, who to marry, whether or not to have

children? We may suffer this as children if we have parents who are controlling but more often than not, we will rebel and say enough! That "enough" may come in the form of standing up for ourselves and saying "NO!" For children or adolescents with D/HH and an ASD this "enough" is seen through their behaviors such as dropping to the floor in the hallway of school, turning off hearing aides, or closing their eyes. Often times, **simply providing the child with choices may eliminate some of the inappropriate behaviors.** Choice-making is an essential element in programming and can be embedded into daily activities.

Choice-making allows the child to express self-determination in an acceptable manner. One of the simplest forms of choice making can come in the form of a visual (actual object, photograph, icon) board of reinforcements. Allowing a child to choose what is most pleasing to them at a given moment, affords them the same courtesy that we have when we choose which snack to eat when we're hungry or which car we drive. Choices need to be presented throughout the day, providing multiple options for each activity.

The Core Strategies are not meant to be all encompassing, rather a starting point for teachers supporting children with a D/HH and an ASD. Once these strategies have been implemented with success, it is vitally important to further support the child with evidence-based practices that are known to be effective.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012). *Autism spectrum disorders (ASD)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html>

Gallaudet Research Institute (April, 2011). *Regional and National Summary Report of Data from the 2009-10 Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: GRI, Gallaudet University. Retrieved from http://research.gallaudet.edu/Demographics/2011_National_Summary.pdf

Direct link to our website:

www.KansasASD.com

www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com

DECEMBER TRAININGS

December 3, 8:30-10:00

ADT Webinar: ADOS-2 Module 2 Practice Webinar

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KHCZ9VZ>

December 11, 3:30-4:15

Impact of Deafness on the Use of EBP's in Children with ASD: Part 1

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TASN-ATBS-web6>

December 12, 3:00-4:30

ADT Webinar: ADOS-2 Module 3 Practice Webinar

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K6FLZ2D>

December 18, 3:30-4:15

Impact of Deafness on the Use of EBP's in Children with ASD: Part 2

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TASN-ATBS-web7>

TIPS FROM THE CORNER:

Behavior is Communication! A lot of our students do not have the verbal skills to express their needs, wants and desires. Just think if you had a headache or the tapping of someone's pencil was driving crazy and you had no way to share your feelings. You might bang your head or take the pencil and jab the closest person you can find. It is import to offer students ways to communicate what they need either through visuals, at devices, or signs and gestures.

I Check out these simple examples to get you started. <http://considerateclassroom.blogspot.com/2013/07/individualized-first-then-visual.html> and <http://considerateclassroom.blogspot.com/2013/02/greetings-to-all-my-new-northwest.html>

Also remember when a child is upset they are functioning in their brainstem. When functioning in the brainstem they lack the ability to verbally communicate so even if you are working with a highly verbal student in a moment of upset visuals can be helpful. I would much rather have a student communicate I need a break or I am not ready by pointing to a visual or touching a switch then having hit, kick, or throw to get their point across.

