

Coaching Parents to Implement Play Engagement Strategies in the Home Setting



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Introduction

- What is engagement?
 - “The amount of time children spend interacting with the environment in a developmentally and contextually appropriate manner, at different levels of competence” (McWilliam & Bailey, 1992)
- Engagement has been the focus of a number of recent early intervention studies.
- Effective engagement has been found to increase compliance, free play, cooperation and language use in toddlers (Kwan, A. et al).
- Improving engagement can have positive effects on children’s behavior thinking and reasoning skills and peer interactions (McWilliam & Casey, 2007)
- Children with disabilities tend to spend less time engaged with adults, peers and materials and more time non engaged than children without disabilities (McWilliam & Casey, 2007)
- “When children are actively engaged with their environment, they interact with others more, manipulate materials more and therefore learn more” (McWilliam & Casey, 2007)
- Nonengagement behaviors are the least complex behaviors in a child’s repertoire. Improving engagement relies on decreasing the amount of time the child spend unengaged (McWilliam & Casey, 2007)
- Caregiver facilitated engagement strategies have proven to increase engagement levels in toddlers (Kasari et al, 2010)
- Early Intervention providers can benefit from utilizing coaching strategies to help caregivers implementing engagement promoting strategies in the natural environment.

Methods

- **Participants:** Toddler diagnosed with Down Syndrome and the parent
- **Setting:** Home based free play activity
- **Intervention Strategy:** Caregiver facilitated engagement strategies with positive reinforcement with a given set of desirable materials
- **Engagement Strategies (IV) Include:**
 - Following the child’s lead (do what the child is doing, play what the child is playing)
 - Modeling (play appropriately with the toys/materials when the child is watching you, narrate what you are doing while you are doing it)
 - Commenting (consistently talk about what your child is doing, as if you are narrating your child’s actions, “wow, you are shoveling the sand”)
 - Labeling (Say actions your child is doing “stack, stack, stack” or identify objects around them “blocks”)
 - Expanding (child says “bucket”, you say “yes, *blue* bucket”, with an emphasis on the new word)
 - Decision Making (Allow the child to chose from a set of activities or materials)
- **Operational Definition of Engagement (DV):** The child is appropriately following the normal sequence of the activity and has their eyes on the person or materials involved in the activity for at least 75% of the time engaged.
- **Coaching Strategy:**
 - Step 1- Operationally define engagement strategies and give examples for caregiver understanding
 - Step 2- Choose a set of desirable materials/toys
 - Step 3- Post intervention strategy checklist to ensure intervention fidelity
 - Step 4- Model strategies
 - Step 5- Caregiver practice strategies
 - Step 6- Provide feedback
- **Data Collection Procedure:** Videos coded for length of time spent engaged during a 10 minute free play activity at home

Results

Baseline

During the baseline, the target child remained engaged for less than two minutes during a designated free play routine.

Intervention

During the intervention, the caregiver facilitated joint attention strategies and the engagement time of the target child increased.



Existing Research

Author	Purpose	Primary Findings
DiCarlo et al., 2006	Effects of modifying the classroom environment on toddler engagement	Increase in engagement mastery play
Garfinkle et al., 2002	Peer mediated intervention to increase interaction	Increase in peer interaction
Kasari at al., 2010	Caregiver facilitated intervention to increase toddler engagement	Increase levels of joint engagement between people and objects
Cardona et al., 2000	Use of computer activity to increase engagement	Improvement in level of visual attention
Krstovska-Guerrero et al., 2012	Prompt intervention to increase joint attention	Children increased “gaze-shift-smile” behaviors
Isaken et al., 2009	Operant conditioning intervention to increase joint attention	Higher scores on the Behavioral Assessment of Joint Attention

Discussion

Why is engagement important?

- Childcare programs that promote engagement are considered high-quality (Aguiar C. & McWilliam, 2013)
- Child engagement is considered a necessary condition for learning to occur and also a mediator of learning (McWilliam & Bailey, 1992)
- Children with disabilities have shown to be less engaged than their typically developing same aged peers (McWilliam & Bailey, 1992)
- Children that spend more time engaged show less undesirable behaviors and are more likely to meet developmental outcomes (Aguiar & McWilliam, 2013)

Alignment to Research- This findings align with existing research. Engagement strategies just as; following the child’s lead, modeling, commenting, expanding, positive reinforcement can improve engagement in young children in the natural environment.

Practical Implications- Relevant intervention protocol for professionals in early intervention. The engagement strategies can be implemented across variety of typical daily routines and activities and settings. Caregivers and parents are in a key role for fostering child engagement. Coaching strategies and transfer of skills and knowledge.

Unique Contributions- Increased positive attention from the caregiver and the increased quality of the adult child interaction. Increased use of positive reinforcement and mutually enjoyable experiences shared between child and caregiver. The quality of the play routine increased and level of stress decreased.

Future Directions

- More research needed in EI for strategies that foster joint engagement
- Identify the most successful strategy within the set of strategies
- Examine the effects of environmental arrangement and materials/toys
- Evaluate a n intervention plan that supports generalization of the skills across settings, materials and people

References

- Aguiar, C., & McWilliam, R. A. (2013). Consistency of toddler engagement across two settings. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 28(1), 102-110. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2012.08.006
- McWilliam, R. A., & Bailey, D. B. (1992.). Effects of classroom social structure and disability on engagement. *Pro-Ed*, 15(2), 123-147.