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PROJECT ACCESS
Missouri's educational leader in autism support

Modeling

Are you like some of us at Project ACCESS? When we are stumped using technology, we like to be shown what to do rather than read the directions or have someone just tell us what to do. When we're shown how to share a Google Doc or build a table on Microsoft Excel, shown how to use the snipper tool, we have benefitted from modeling. Many of us learn tasks best when they have been modeled for us.

What is Modeling

Modeling is an evidence-based strategy. When we show someone what to do, we have modeled the behavior. Often, we use modeling as a reactive strategy, finally showing a learner what to do after multiple failed attempts. We are suggesting using modeling as a proactive strategy for priming and prompting learning. Research has given us examples of modeling which are effective for teaching social, communication, play and vocational skills. Additionally, it has been shown useful for teaching joint attention and school readiness. Studies were completed for learners from zero to 22, but experience and real-world practice indicate modeling is a widely useful strategy for support throughout the life-span.

- Priming involves getting the learner ready to complete a task or activity. For example, a preschool teacher wants her class to match colored plastic cubes. She introduces the activity by verbally giving directions for the task, but she also shows them what to do by matching cubes herself. Most students in the class respond to the teacher's model and complete the task successfully. There are two or three learners who remain confused about what to do and need a prompt. The teacher individually goes to these students, gives the direction, models the expected response, then the learner follows the direction. This is prompted modeling. The teacher reinforces the students who complete the task with the primed modeling, and also reinforces the learners who complete the task after a modeled prompt. This teacher knows learning occurs when reinforced. She likes to use errorless learning involving a variety of prompting techniques including modeling that prevent incorrect responses. She knows errorless learning provides her students with multiple

opportunities for reinforcement. A modeled prompt prevents the learner from making errors ensuring reinforcement is available. This great teacher realizes that reinforced, prompted responses support learning better than correcting failed attempts.

- Modeling for social situations might include role playing where a therapist shows the student how to ask if he can play with friends. The therapist goes to a group of friends who have been recruited for practice and says, "Hi! Can I play with you?" Then she has the learner try it. (The recruited students know to let the learner play, thus reinforcing the modeled response!)
- Job-readiness is an area where modeling is often used. Assembly and janitorial jobs are especially amenable to the use of modeling techniques.
- Joint attention is a foundational readiness skill that is so important for further learning. This involves attending to something or someone along with another person. When the learner is focused on the lesson presented by the teacher, she is engaging in joint attention. When a preschooler attends to the same toy as a classmate, they may play with it together. Modeling this skill is one key to further learning.

Again, it is best to be proactive when using modeling. Look at the learner's skills and determine missing skills. Plan time to model and practice those skills, so they will become part of the learner's repertoire. Be aware that modeling is often used along with other evidence-based practices such as reinforcement and prompting as in the above examples.

A helpful resource is the AFIRM Module on reinforcement produced by researchers at the University of North Carolina. It is cited below, and provides a step-by-step guide to the use of modeling.

Suggested citation:

Sam, A., & AFIRM Team. (2016). Modeling. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, FPG Child Development Center, University of North Carolina. Retrieved from http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/modeling