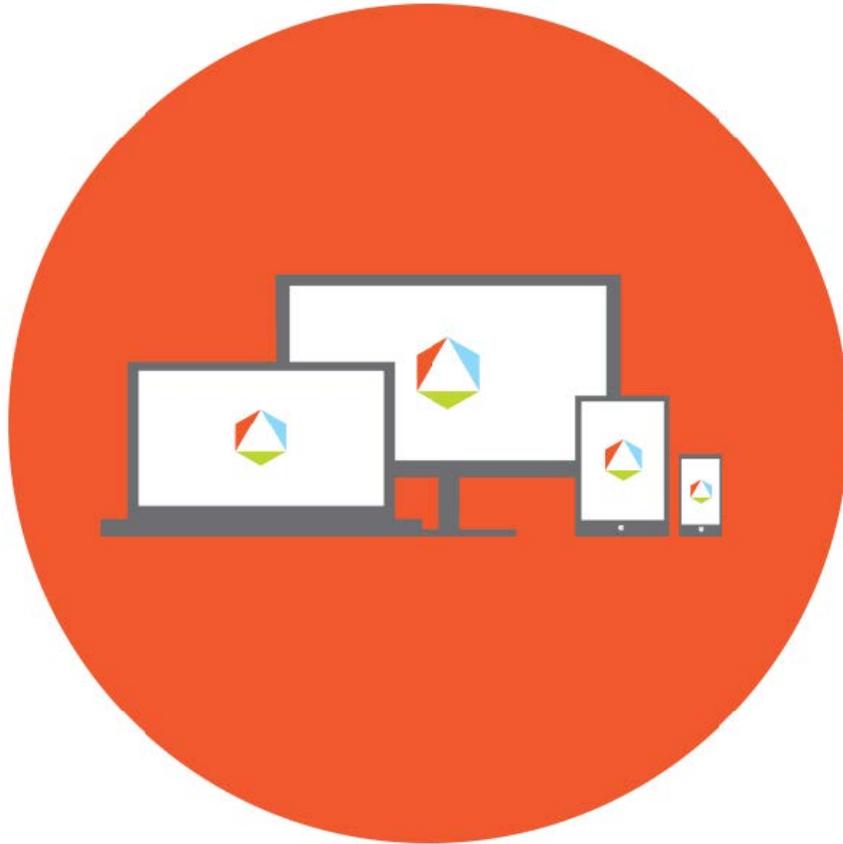




FIRSTPATH
AUTISM



Lesson Guide

46. Expanding conversations (Measuring Exchanges)

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Expanding conversations (Measuring Exchanges)

Overview

<p>Teaches:</p>	<p>Continued expansion of conversation skills. Specifically, this lesson records the content and number of conversational exchanges that occur, as a way of measuring the child's increasing ability to maintain and sustain a relevant, on-topic conversation.</p> <p>At this level, much of the teaching occurs naturally and is based upon the deficiencies noted when analyzing the data (deficiencies which will vary from child to child). For some children, it may become apparent that their primary difficulty is staying on topic; for others, they cannot maintain a conversation for longer than a few exchanges at a time; for others, they might have difficulty with interrupting their partner. This lesson seeks to measure and address each of these issues, as applicable.</p>
<p>Before beginning:</p>	<p>Prerequisite basic conversation skills, as taught in the lessons of <i>Asking/Requesting</i>, <i>Answering WH Questions</i>, <i>Personal Info</i>, <i>Simple Statements</i>, <i>Q-S-Q</i>, <i>Q-S-S</i>, and <i>Asking WH Questions</i> are essential prior to introducing this lesson.</p>
<p>Why it's important:</p>	<p>Ultimately, each child needs to be able to converse with others in order to communicate wants and needs, gain access to reinforcement, gain information as necessary, and participate in social interaction. While many of the prerequisite lessons teach small portions of the required skills, this lesson helps to combine and expand those skills, as well as identify any remaining deficits that exist.</p>
<p>Materials needed:</p>	<p>Typically, no physical materials are required to conduct this lesson, as it is vocally-based.</p> <p>Some teachers may find that for their student's particular deficit, a visual cue may be effective in prompting the correct response. For example, if the child's primary deficit is interrupting, the teacher might choose to hold up a "stop sign" visual each time the child starts to interrupt. <u>Visual prompts</u> can be especially helpful in this lesson, where vocal prompts can easily disturb and confuse the flow of conversation.</p> <p>For data collection, some teachers may find it helpful to use an audio recording device, rather than attempting to write</p>

	<p>down or type in each vocal exchange as it occurs. This is especially true for older or more advanced students, whose utterances may be longer or occur more quickly than can be accurately recorded. If an audio recording device is used, the teacher should still go back at a later time and transcribe the exchanges in written form.</p>
<p>Generalization activities:</p>	<p>Conversations with a variety of familiar and novel people. Book clubs, scout meetings, or other venues where discussion is encouraged as a primary part of the activity are ideal for generalizing conversation skills. For some students, conversational media such as a video chat/FaceTime could be utilized, as eye contact via computers or phones is sometimes less intense and intimidating for an individual with autism.</p>

Steps

Prepare

1. Since this lesson is very unstructured and often initiated by naturally occurring circumstances, there is minimal formal preparation to be done.
2. However, the teacher should strive to be constantly aware of natural opportunities as they occur, as conversations are a natural byproduct of interesting things/people/places/events, and most easily develop when the child is already attuned to and interested in a particular subject.
3. Contrary to many other lessons, this lesson will not always occur "in a quiet place free of distractions". Initially that type of environment may be necessary, but holding conversations is a life skill for which a moderate amount of distraction will usually be present.
4. In lieu of a structured reinforcer assessment and delivery of highly preferred items as a reward for desired behavior, the teacher should begin to consider more natural means of reinforcing the child's conversation skills. Social praise and positive attention should certainly be an important component of this lesson. In addition, an especially reinforcing activity or environment might be utilized to make this activity "special" to the child and socially relevant: for example, enjoying a glass of lemonade/coffee/other favorite beverage while talking on the porch or at a café; going out for lunch or ice cream and having special conversation time; taking a picnic to the park; talking while playing miniature golf, catch, or other athletic activity; going to see a movie and then stopping to grab a bite and discuss the movie. Get creative and help make this an enjoyable activity for the child!
5. Particularly at the outset of this lesson, data collection continues to be important. Make sure that you have a means of collection available that does not greatly interfere with the flow of the lesson.
6. As the child's skills increase and he requires less redirection and prompting from the teacher, then data collection should certainly be as unobtrusive as possible; utilize audio means of recording, sampling (data recorded on some, but not every single, occasion), and/or summaries compiled immediately after the conversation ends (rather than line-by-line recording).

Teach

1. In this lesson, teaching mainly consists of participating in the conversation in a manner as naturally as possible.
2. Teaching also consists of being aware of deficits/errors as they arise, so that they might be corrected. Correction will typically take the form of brief verbal redirection, and may sometimes consist of visual cues (only if necessary).

3. The conversation may be initiated by the child or by the teacher. It is best if it starts naturally--a "captured" situation--rather than trying to contrive something to talk about (though that is sometimes necessary).
4. At first, it is also best if the conversation centers on a topic that the child finds stimulating or interesting, as he will naturally be more likely to talk more about something he finds interesting.
5. However, as the lesson advances, special attention and effort should be given to ensuring that the child also has the ability to sustain a conversation for which he does not have special interest. This helps promote social courtesy and selflessness, behaviors that will directly increase the child's access to reinforcement from others.
6. In this lesson, reference to a single "conversational exchange" means the completed cycle of one person speaking and the other person responding. Each time one person speaks and the other person responds, it is counted as "1 conversational exchange".

Examples

Correct response	Incorrect response	No response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher: "Hey, what are you drawing?" • Child: "An octopus." • (1 exchange) • Teacher: "Oh, cool. How many legs does an octopus have?" • Child: "Eight legs." • (2 exchanges) • Teacher: "I wish I had eight legs." • Child: "Me too! Then I could run really fast." • (3 exchanges) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher: "Hey, what are you drawing?" • Child: "An octopus." • (1 exchange) • Teacher: "Oh, cool. How many legs does an octopus have?" • Child: "What's for snack?" • (error--ignored question) • Teacher: "I don't know." • (brief response; followed by redirection & restarting exchange) • Teacher: "I asked you about octopus legs! How many legs do they have?" • Child: "Eight." • (2 exchanges) • Teacher: "I wish I had eight legs." • Child: "Me too! Then I could run really fast." • (3 exchanges) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher: "Hey, what are you drawing?" • Child: "An octopus." • (1 exchange) • Teacher: "Oh, cool. How many legs does an octopus have?" • Child: "Eight legs." • (2 exchanges) • Teacher: "I wish I had eight legs." • Child: (no response) • (this interrupts a successful full exchange, and requires Teacher to redirect & restart exchange) • Teacher: "What about you? Do you wish that you had eight legs like an octopus?" • Child: "Nah. I would trip a lot." • (3 exchanges)

NOTE: In addition to measuring the total number of successful exchanges, the teacher will want to note, when analyzing data, how many exchanges can occur consecutively before redirection is required. For example, in the examples above, even though each situation depicts the same total number of conversational exchanges (3),

- The “correct response” conversation is clearly the strongest demonstration of skill, since 3 full exchanges occurred without any teacher redirection/correction required.
- In the “no response” example, a full 2 exchanges occurred before redirection/correction was required.
- In the “incorrect response” example, only 1 exchange was completed prior to correction, but was successfully followed by 2 exchanges.

Being able to identify and recognize these nuances is critical as a child's conversational skills increase, as it will allow for more precise targeting of deficits.

Typical order of learning targets:

(Suggested targets; may be modified based upon needs of the student)

1. Measuring exchanges: conversation of 3 full exchanges
2. Measuring exchanges: conversation of 6 full exchanges
3. Measuring exchanges: conversation of 10 full exchanges
4. Measuring specific identified deficits by frequency of occurrence during a specified quantity (# of exchanges) or duration (# of minutes) of conversation (Examples of deficits: interrupting, staying on topic, etc.)