Visual Schedules & Priming Strategies: Integrating Behavioral Strategies in Transition Support for Persons with ASD at Misericordia Home

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PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS PROGRAM

The Personal Effectiveness Program (PEP) is a developmental training program in Misericordia that was developed for those who aren’t able to properly adapt to the demands of a typical occupational or vocational setting. The program and its environment are designed to appropriately cater to the behavioral needs of residents, while also promoting improvement in adaptive behaviors that are necessary for efficient participation in residents’ various training programs. The instructors and interns in this program help in enhancing various skills in residents (e.g. decision making, concentration, help-seeking behaviors, etc.) with the help of interactive and sensory-based technology.

VISUAL SCHEDULES

These activity schedules are usually used as a support system that feature various images in chronological sequence of the individual’s daily routine. This method has been promoted more than other behavioral strategies because it can contribute to the predictability of the individual’s day, while also benefiting from the visual-learning skills present in a number of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Sevin et al., 2015).

In order to maximize the efficacy of this strategy, instructors avoided using verbal cues, so schedule-following would only occur upon being exposed to the stimulus, which was only the schedule. As a result, on-task and on-schedule behaviors rose significantly with the addition of the visual schedule. Additionally, the schedule-following actually generalized, becoming independent of a specific order in event sequence, while still not requiring any additional verbal cues (Sevin et al., 2015).

Individuals with ASD also responded to visual schedules by having more frequent, self-initiated looking at the schedules, and they showed an increase in both approach behaviors and positive vocalization toward the schedule. In tandem with those results, there was a more than 50% reduction in tantrum behaviors at transition periods after introducing the visual schedules (Sevin et al., 2015).

In addition, there was incredibly positive evidence supporting the efficacy in incorporating visual schedules across a variety of settings, which included regulation in challenging behaviors, play, transition and independence. Overall, there were no differences in the function of the target behavior, the severity of the individual’s ASD, communication abilities, or even the method of presenting a primer, which was only the schedule.

PRIMING STRATEGIES

Within priming strategies, a person is exposed to components of an upcoming event or task prior to the actual execution or participation. In certain cases, the demonstrations can occur in a different setting, and in other cases, there may be a pre-activity demonstration of the transition setting in which the activity will occur later on (Sevin et al., 2015).

Instructors and caretakers can utilize various modalities of presenting a primer, which can benefit from the strong visual learning abilities in certain individuals with ASD. A video priming procedure was developed to demonstrate activities being done in the point of view of the individual with ASD, which was mainly used to support those that exhibited disruptive/problem behaviors while transition in their daily routine. They were exposed to recorded videos prior to going into transition periods and received a reward for watching the video, e.g., toys, praise, etc. (Screibman et al., 2000).

In the case of using the video priming procedure, there was a significant decrease in tantrum behaviors when including the video method into instruction. There was rapid, positive response to this modality in some cases, and in others, there was a need for a larger volume of exposure to the recorded videos; however, both resulted in positive results overall for all of those being observed (Screibman et al., 2000).

Within priming strategies, researchers recommend that priming sessions be completed before the actual event, that there should be a relatively low demand while engaging in the priming session, and that there should be a potential source of reinforcement involved in the priming session (Zanolli et al., 1996).

SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The SJI Program is an experiential learning opportunity for students interested in serving the Chicago community at multiple sites. The program emphasizes the values of social justice and community development. Interns spend around 250 hours between their internship sites or in class, examining how to become more proactive in understanding societal structures and dynamics. In class, we look at topics like intersectionality, effective leadership and ally-ship as means of addressing the need for social justice across several dimensions of contemporary society.

REFERENCES


STRATEGIES & PEP

After being provided with the training to grasp these concepts, I was able to understand how the personal effectiveness program integrated empirical strategies to supplement the developmental training for residents, especially since most residents in PEP have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- I learned about the importance of understanding the behavior support plan implemented in each resident’s profile when it comes to becoming familiar with target behaviors and challenging behaviors, e.g. escape, avoidance.

- I learned how to navigate working with residents on a very extensive spectrum based on individualized approaches set by the behavior analysis team; this required utilizing visual schedules and priming strategies, or even both throughout the day in order to facilitate their development of vocational and occupational skills by utilizing the two empirically effective strategies.

- Lastly, I’ve learned how challenging it can be to obtain substantial results in positive behaviors as a result of the level of support that the resident is receiving as well as the amount of time they are being conditioned to respond to these behavioral strategies.

REFLECTION

During my time as an intern at PEP in Misericordia, I learned that it is absolutely imperative to withhold qualities of empathy and patience, especially in regard to working with vulnerable communities. While furthering the development those qualities in myself, I grew to appreciate the uniqueness of each resident and how that uniqueness manifested itself because I was provided with personal interactions I hadn’t had the opportunity to work with before.

I have gotten to understand that Misericordia as a whole values every single resident and employee, making my time at this internship immensely enjoyable and memorable. I knew that I have acquired the necessary foundational skills to serve the differently abled community in the future when I eventually become a doctor, and this was all made possible by the Social Justice Internship Program.

Interested in learning more about my work as a Social Justice Intern? Contact: amedina9@luc.edu