



Group Therapy for Children with ASD to Improve Social Participation

Gloria Bacciarini, MOTS¹; Alyssa Guidero, MOTS¹; David Terpstra, MOTS¹

Faculty Adviser: Tracy Jirikowic, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA¹

Community Mentors: Ashley Anderson, MS, CFY-SLP²; Megan Eastman, MOT, OTR/L²; Shelley O'Donnell, MS, OTR/L²

Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Washington¹, Seattle, WA, Seattle Therapy Services², Seattle WA.

INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by two core deficits: social interaction and communication.¹ These deficits interfere with play and social participation as important childhood occupations. Structured and facilitated group interactions can address children's social participation and communication.

PURPOSE

We created a group protocol, 'Fun with Friends,' for Seattle Therapy Services. This group was designed for young children with ASD who also have limited verbal ability, in order to increase and improve social participation and engagement.

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

Three children ages 5-7 years, who demonstrated needs similar to the goals of the group, participated. The group met for ten consecutive weeks, for one hour each week.

GROUP GOALS

1. Encourage social participation and related skills for children on the autism spectrum.
2. Encourage communication and social communication for children who have limited verbal ability or use an alternative communication device.
3. Give children and parents beginning skills to engage in a play date outside of scheduled group time.

ASSESSMENT METHODS AND DATA COLLECTED

We assessed the children's progress through weekly observation and documentation of the following social behaviors:

- **Greetings**
- **Engagement**
- **Imitation**
- **Eye Contact**
- **Making Choices**

	Greetings	Engagement	Imitation	Eye Contact	Making Choices
Greetings-Hello:	I V Ph VC			I V Ph VC	
Goodbye:	I V Ph VC			I V Ph VC	
Activity #1-Song		Time: I V Ph VC	Time: I V Ph VC		Time: I V Ph VC
Activity #2-Obstacle Course		Time: I V Ph VC	Time: I V Ph VC		Time: I V Ph VC

Coding Key: I= Independent V=Verbal prompt VC =Visual Cue Ph=Physical Prompt

BEHAVIORAL DATA

When comparing changes in prompting levels during greetings from weeks 1-4 as compared to weeks 5-8, we saw a significant decrease in the amount of physical prompting.



PARENT HANDOUTS

To increase skill generalization we created a series of parent handouts, designed to assist in the implementation of a play date outside of the group intervention within the clinic. The topics included:

- **General Tips for a Successful Play Date**
- **How to Increase Language During a Play Date**
- **Ideal Structure of a Play Date**
- **Turn Taking During a Play Date**

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT

Environmental Adaptations- Planning the environment in advance is best practice. The physical environment highlighted the center of focus for each child. Visual and auditory distractions were limited.²

Visual Supports- Visual cues and supports were used as tools to create meaning and predictability. Visual schedules were used to help with transitions and as a means to increase independence.²

Video Modeling- Video recordings of adults demonstrating the completion of new tasks were used as a way to teach new activities. The children responded well to this teaching model by learning quickly what was expected of them.³

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our behavioral data, as well as post-parent survey, we analyzed the children in the group to have improved in most behaviors tracked. We conclude that children with ASD can benefit from a structured group intervention that uses sensory and visual supports, as well as video modeling, to enhance their social participation skills.

REFERENCES

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