

Pivotal Response Training (PRT)

What is Pivotal Response Training?

Pivotal response training (PRT) is a behavioral treatment intervention based on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and derived from the work of Koegel, Schreibman, Dunlap, Horner, and other researchers. It is a composite of the research on task interspersal, direct reinforcement, and role of choice. Key pivotal behaviors have been identified for children with autism: motivation and responsivity to multiple cues (Koegel & Koegel). PRT has demonstrated positive changes in these "pivotal behaviors" exhibiting widespread effects on many other behaviors associated with language and social interaction. Pivotal Response Training (PRT) provides a guideline for teaching skills and has been most successful for language, play and social interaction skills in children with autism.

The main components of PRT:

- Choice (shared control to increase motivation)
- Clear and uninterrupted instructions or opportunities (make sure child is attending)
- Reinforcement of approximations/ attempts
- Reinforcement has a specific relationship to the desired behavior natural reinforcement ("ball" gets ball, not praise. Child chooses object for instruction and that object is used. This is done to increase motivation)
- Multiple examples or multiple components presented (e.g., use two different objects but same verb such as "roll car" and then "roll ball" then "throw ball." Multiple components also means using "new pants" or "red suite" versus just "pants" or "suit." This is done to increase responsiveness to multiple cues. (<http://www.spectrumcenter.org/autismplanning.html>)

Pivotal Response Training and Social Skills

Social skills deficits are a hallmark feature of children with autism, particularly in areas of shared engagement with peers.

Learning the rules for engagement for successful interaction with children of their own age is extremely difficult for children with autism. "The rules of engagement; of knowing how to enter a group of children; how to join in with their activities; and how to talk to them, are all highly complex, unwritten, and generally poorly understood" (Howlin, 1998). PRT is also an intervention that typically developing children can use to assist their peers with autism to attend to and maintain effective social interactions.

Pivotal Response Training (PRT) involves teaching typical peers to use strategies to:

- Gain attention
- Give choices to maintain motivation
- Vary toys
- Model social behavior
- Reinforce attempts
- Encourage conversation
- Extend conversation
- Take turns
- Narrate play (Teaching Students with Autism: A Guide for Educators)

Generalization to new toys and new adults as well as the maintenance of improved play behaviors has also been seen in children who have participated in PRT (Schreibman, Stahmer, & Pierce, 1996).

For More Information

Please visit one of the following websites:

<http://psy.ucsd.edu/~vcestone/PRT2.html>

<http://www.users.qwest.net/~tbharris/prt.htm>

http://www.bbbautism.com/ther_prt.htm

<http://www.spectrumcenter.org/autismplanning.html>