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SPEAKERS

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Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Hello, friends. I'm Dr. Christine Reeve, and I'm your host, and you are listening to the Autism Classroom Resources podcast.

For those of you who don't know me, I have my doctorate in clinical psychology. And I have been a BCBA for longer than the national BCBA has been around. But although my background started in research, my focus has always been on taking research and making it accessible and useful in the real life classroom. Because as my aunt, the preschool teacher, used to tell me, don't go sit in your ivory tower and tell me what to do in my classroom unless you've been in my classroom. And she was exactly right.

You are listening to Episode 208. And we're in the midst of a behavioral series talking about replacement behaviors. My last two episodes have focused on escape related behaviors. And this week, I'm going to make a shift and talk about behavior that is to get an item or an activity. Sometimes behavior analysts call it a tangible function, meaning they get something.

Now if you haven't listened to it, you may want to hop over to autismclassroomresources.com/episode206. To hear more about the functional communication training process. I talked about how to make it work in the classroom and the steps that we need to take. It's a little long, but it covers a lot of information.

Now this week, we're going to talk about teaching requesting as a replacement skill. And I've talked about how to do that when I talked about teaching initiation in Episode 60. And you can find that at autismclassroomresources.com/episode60.

But today, I'm going to focus specifically on what happens when behavior problems erupt from a student learning to communicate at a time when he can't have what he wants. Let's face it, we all kind of face that feeling when we can't have something that we want. The difference is whether or not we act on that. Truly, wouldn't we all eat ice cream all the time? If we could? Or maybe that's just me, okay.

So either way, we have to teach many of our students when they can't have something. And I've got some do's and don'ts to help with that. So if you have a student who is struggling with behavior, when you can't give them what they really, really want, this episode is for you. So let's get started.

One of the questions that I get frequently in the academy or doing training that I'm doing or on social media, is how do you handle teaching a student who is learning how to request things that he can't have something he asked for. And that happens frequently, we all ask for things we can't have. The difference is whether or not we can tolerate understanding that.

Let me give you an example. Jeremy's learning to make requests with the speech generating device, he asked for things that he usually wants, and he really likes the iPad. And your classroom only has two iPads that are rotated among your students. So of course, it's not always available. And when he asks for it, he's still at the stage where he always is getting what he wants consistently and quickly so we're reinforcing that initiating and that requesting.

But in real life, we know that he can't always have the iPad, sometimes the batteries are dead. And then you worry about whether you're extinguishing his communication, because you can't give it to him. Or he goes into a 30 minute episode of challenging behavior, because he didn't get what he wanted or needed. So what do you do?

And I think we've all experienced this at some point when we've been teaching students who are learning to communicate effectively. And if we have students like Jeremy, whose challenging behavior is serving to get a tangible item, or an activity, or access to a person or something like that, they're trying to get something, then we're going to run into a situation where we don't have access to it, or we've run out of what the student asked for, or the person that he really wants to see is absent today.

So other times, if we have a student who's requesting food, I've had students who go on restrictive diets and we can't give them that food anymore. And that becomes an issue. And the behavior that ensues is sometimes related to frustration. And sometimes it's related to the fact that I don't think he

truly understands. I used to ask for this and I don't get it. I'm asking for it now. Why am I not getting it?

You know, if you can't give it to him, or you won't give it to him. And in the past, based on the fact that he is a student with challenging behavior in his history, then maybe he's persisted and have escalated challenging behavior and that item has suddenly become available for whatever reason. And then we've reinforced the behavior when it's more severe.

So to address all of these issues, because I think this is a huge thing that we really struggle with, I thought I'd talk a little bit about what we can do or what we might not want to do when a student asks for something that they can't have. Sometimes they ask a million times, I know.

So, here's a few things that I would not do. One is don't remove the communication item off his communication device.

If it's a choice board, then you can regulate what the choices are. But his augmentative device, or his PECS book, or something that he uses to communicate is not a choice board. It is his voice. And just like I can't reach in and remove those words from his voice, I really should not be able to go into his device or onto his book and remove the visuals that make it happen. It might be easier to do this, because we think that we're avoiding a problem. But it's not teaching. Essentially, ethically, we're taking away his voice. And imagine if this was a student that you were teaching to speak, you wouldn't be able to take the name out of his vocabulary, once he has it. The same reasoning should apply to a student who's using augmentative communication.

Another thing that we shouldn't do is we shouldn't put his augmentative communication tools out of reach. Again, it's really easy to think, well, he can't ask for anything that's there. So I'm just going to move it where he can't get it. Part of learning to communicate is learning when you can't have something that you're asking for. Think about two year olds, that's when they're learning. That's why no and refusing things is partly one of the reasons that they're starting to assert their independence. One and two year olds are learning that they can't always have everything they want. And that's why we get tantrums during that time.

So students should ethically have access to their voice throughout the day, we have to find ways to teach them to use them responsibly.

If you can help it, and sometimes it's better just to give it to the student. But unless we factored that into his instructional plan, then we don't just want to continue to give him the item.

Now, again, if we are saying, well, we're focusing on something else right now, so we're not doing

we're not fighting this battle, that's okay. But you have to recognize that you can't avoid the problem forever, eventually, you need to teach him that everything isn't available all the time. But if he's just emerging with the skill, then I might consider giving it to him every single time he asks for it, or setting it up the instruction at a time that he can do this. And I'm going to get into that in the next set of things where I talk about what we should do.

So one thing we should do is set up situations I talked in two episodes ago, I'm sorry, sometimes I lose track, about using strength training. I talked in Episode 206, about setting up bouts of strength training, little teaching sessions where you're getting lots of opportunities to practice a skill. That's what I would do here. Set him up to teach this lesson explicitly. Set up times where you can manage the behavior when you don't grant his request. And set up short times that he can't have it. Make them short so that you don't have the prolonged behavior. You don't want to set him off for the rest of the day. But this way, you set aside time to wait out the behavior if you have to, and reinforce it with the thing that he wants when he asks periodically. So it's not just no, no, no, no, you want to mix it up. And you want to start with shorter times that he can't have it and maybe set a timer. There's some different ways I'll talk in just a minute that we can use to make that instruction a little bit easier.

One is that we want to start with less preferred items. So start your instruction about not getting something that he asked for something that he's waiting for, with things that aren't his absolute favorite thing.

You know, maybe you want to do it with me with jelly beans instead of chocolate. I'm not as attached to jelly beans as I am to chocolate. So when you tell me no, it's not going to be that big a deal. Do it with ice cream, we're going to have a problem. But this way the behavior may not be as severe when it happens. And it's a really good way to teach him that there will be a time he can get it, it's just not now. So that may be a way to help it.

Another way is we're teaching him to wait for something, instead of just not having it at all. That way, you can give it to him for shorter periods of waiting and slowly increase that waiting time. Next week, I think I'm actually talking about waiting. So I'll talk more about that. But you may want to just, you know, can't have a right now. And maybe we set a timer so that he can see when he's going to be able to get it. When the timer goes off, you can have it then. So it makes it a little bit more concrete.

And finally, one of the things that we can also do is use concrete signs that something is not available. So we could show him an empty container of a food that he likes, he's asking for chips, I can have an empty bag of chips, hold it upside down, I don't have any more. So he can see I literally keep empty containers around just so I can do this. Maybe I have plenty of chips, but I keep that on their site, and I pull the empty bag out and go sorry, I don't have any more. We'll have to make another and usually I'll redirect to another choice at that time too. So I'm giving him a substitute in place of that.

And maybe this substitute as you can have apples, or an orange or orange slices. And that may help him understand that it isn't something that you're choosing to do. It's something you just don't have. You can let him hold and inspect the container, turn it upside down, all those kinds of things to try to help him understand it.

You know, if it's the iPad, or the computer, especially if it's an iPad or an iPhone, try putting it in a parking lot, a parking lot is where I've literally just put it in a box where he can see it. He knows it's there. And he knows he's gonna get it back. And so again, I might use a timer, you can have it back in this amount of time, or I'll put it on his schedule you can have the iPad will be available at this time, so that they can see what the expectation is.

Now, if he is a student who uses augmentative communication with pictures that you can manipulate, you might try putting an X over the picture on his PECS book, for example, so that he still sees it, it's still there, he can still ask for it by taking the picture off and giving it to you. You're not removing it from his vocabulary, but you are showing him that it's not available right now. And then you would practice that until they can handle not getting those less preferred items, and then gradually increase up to more preferred items.

So there's lots of different things that we can do to show students that something isn't available and that they can't have it. But we want to make sure that we're doing it in the context of explicit instruction, where we're teaching them to wait, or to handle the fact that it is not available.

And as I said, I will talk next week about teaching waiting, I'm going to talk about it then in the focus on attention. But it's very, very similar. You're going to do exactly the same way, you're going to wait for five seconds, and then 10 seconds, and then 30 seconds, you're slowly going to increase that amount of time.

So if you are looking for tools to help students with augmentative communication needs in general, you can check out my augmentative communication boards. They're designed to help engineers a classroom for communication. There are core words on it, as well as specific images for specific classroom activities.

So one's for worktime, one's for snacktime. There's one for playtime, there's one for recess, those kinds of things. And they're really great if you have a student who needs picture support, but they aren't yet able to handle a full device or maybe they're still being evaluated for full device, or you just don't have access to it or the batteries are dead or whatever the main problems are with devices. Or if you have a student who using the picture exchange communication system that I talked about in episode 197 but they aren't quite ready to travel yet with their book, and you want to make sure that they have access to communication throughout the whole classroom. You'll find them in my store, autismclassroomresources.com/aacboards.

And finally, if you would like some tips on preventing challenging behavior rather than responding to it, you can check out our free webinar at autismclassroomresources.com/behavior-webinar.

That's it for this week. I think that was enough. I will be back next week when we're going to shift gears a little bit and talk about attention seeking behavior.

If you are enjoying the behavior series on the podcast, don't forget to hop over to Apple podcasts and leave a rating and review. It really helps people to find me and it helps me to reach more teachers and more educators who can use help, and I'd love to hear from you. I'm also going to set something up on Spotify with a question of how you teach students that something isn't available. So if you have thoughts and you use Spotify, leave a comment there. All right, talk soon.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at autismclassroomresources.com/free. That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.