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SPEAKERS

Veronica

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.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Dr. Christine Reeve, I'm your host of this podcast. And today you are listening to Episode 210. And today, we are focusing on attention seeking behavior.

I talked last week about situations in which the student gets so much attention but they still have attention seeking behavior. And so this week, I said that I would talk about how we actually teach a student to make a request.

So I want to talk about how we teach an individual to use an appropriate way to communicate to get other's attention. Now you can teach attention in a variety of ways from teaching a student to tell a joke that gets a big reaction from the environment, to initiating interactions in a play activity with a peer if that's whose attention they are looking for, or initiating conversations with others.

And those work really well for students who have some communication skills but they aren't either using them effectively, or they aren't getting the effect of gaining that attention on a regular basis. But today, I'm going to focus more specifically on the real down and dirty basics of a student who doesn't have effective communication to gain attention in a more appropriate way. So let's get started.

As I said, you may be working with students who already have some communication skills. But I'm going to focus more on students who need us to teach communication skills for seeking attention from the very beginning. So they might be nonverbal or have limited communication skills, or they might be verbal, and they don't use their language effectively, or communicatively.

So think about a student who has really extensive echolalia, so he can tell you all the commercials that were on television, but he doesn't ask for something to drink when he's thirsty. And these are students who really need the basics of communication specifically focused on gaining the attention that their challenging behavior is serving for them.

So this is really going to be kind of a basic, but you can take this basic and build it into a more extensive type of instruction. So obviously, you're going to do this type of intervention for students whose functional behavior assessments show that attention is the primary function of the challenging behavior. I'm going to give you the highlights, and then I'll share a product with you that actually has a protocol in it.

But let me start by saying, if you have never done this before, I highly recommend collaborating with a behavior specialist or behavior analyst, and or a speech pathologist who can help you set it up to be successful. They can help you figure out what the communication might look like for the student, they can help you figure out what your response might be to be most successful based on the data from a functional behavior assessment. So I'm going to provide you some guidance and an overview, but it's not in any way meant to replace working with someone who is skilled and how to do this.

So our first step is to choose the communicative form. So we want to pick a communication mode that's easy for the person to use, that's quick for them to use and get a ready response quickly from their environment. And we want it to be clear to other people so that it's going to generalize as well as possible. I've talked in the past about response efficiency, and the fact that we want to choose something that gets the student reinforcement quickly, easiest, and with little effort. And that's what you want to think about when you choose your communication response that you teach.

It could be a picture or word on a communication board that they exchange, it could be raising their hand. Just think about whether or not people generally respond with attention every time someone raises their hand, it might be tapping your shoulder. It might be calling your name, if they are verbal. It might be using a speech generating devices says, "Hey, come talk to me."

You want to choose a form that if you can, that the individual already has in their repertoire, something they already do, because that's going to allow you to make faster progress, but make sure that what you're choosing is also something that other people will understand. Other people have to know what they're asking in order to give them that attention.

So for instance, if I choose a very idiosyncratic sign, manual sign that other people aren't gonna recognize, even if they knew sign language, it may not get the response that you want them to in more general environment. So if we teach something like a speech generating device where we hit a button that has a message, that can be really helpful, because it's going to capture the attention wherever they are, and get people to come to them. If we're teaching a true picture exchange communication system, which I talked about in an earlier episode, and I'll make sure the links to the earlier episodes are in the show notes, then, the good thing about it is that you have already taught him that he has to give the item the picture to you in order to get your attention. So you've already started this process with those students.

So you also want to choose a form that's going to be suitable to be manually prompted. So you want it to be something that you're going to be able to prompt them to do. I don't want to do that long term. If I can get him to do it because he's enticed to instead of actually prompting him, I will do that. But if he is not engaging in any kind of communication behavior, I'm going to have to start with some kind of prompting.

So I often will start off with a nonverbal communicative form, like a picture, or speech generating device, even if the student is verbal, because even if they're verbal, they're going to quickly learn as a whole lot faster to tell you what I want them to find that switch and hit it. So it just gives them a model. That's another advantage. So the communication is really key to this was more than actual speech.

So generally, what I will do in a very basic setup, is establish a teaching situation of like a short one to one period, maybe five minutes, maybe 10 minutes, where he can gain my attention an indefinite number of times without disturbing other students. This is one of the reasons that I talked in earlier episodes about the importance of putting this type of communication strategy in their IEP so that it is clear that you are spending time teaching their IEP because this is a really critical skill, it's a skill that's going to last a lifetime.

So I often will give them a task that they can kind of complete independently while I supposedly am doing my own work. And that's going to provide you with opportunities for the students to get your attention. If the functional behavior assessment indicates that attention seeking challenging behaviors occur mostly when you're working with another student, then I might set it up instead of one to one, I might set it up where I have another student in the work setting, you just want to be careful that you have safety addressed. And keep in mind that that might not be the best time to really get a lot of work done with the other students.

So you're probably not going to get a lot of work done with that student, because your focus is on getting the student that you're trying to teach the communication to, trying to get them to ask for your attention, which means your attention is going to be focused on them.

In reality, when you work with dyads, if you have a student who has attention seeking behavior, and a

student who doesn't have problem behavior, you likely are spending more time doing real attention to the attention seeking one. But that's a whole other topic that I'll cover in a future episode. But I think it's important to recognize that if you're doing this, you're not necessarily setting it up so that you're going to get a lot of work done with the student that isn't the focus of your instruction. So you might want to use an adult or you might want to use some other way.

Generally what I will do if the FBA didn't say that it was because you are attending to another student, I will do something where I'll say I'm gonna do my work, and I need you to do your work. And so I then turn my gaze and my focus away from the student and I focus on what I'm doing. If it is, and I'm talking to somebody else, I might call out or talk to someone in the ether on my own, I make up a lot of things. And you know, Hey, Miss such and such, don't forget to duh duh duh duh. And I just tell them to ignore me. So that it looks like I'm talking to somebody else, but they're off doing their own thing. Again, the work that you are attending to is really just a ruse to pull your attention away from the student.

So then we're going to give a brief overview depending on your student. For some students, you might be able to use social story that talks about when I need attention, this is what I can do. Here's a strategy that I can use. For other students, you might just give a simple explanation of, remember if you need to talk to me, you can tap my shoulder, tell me with the switch, tell me with a picture, whatever the communication strategy is Give them a brief overview of what's going to happen in the session, and then give them their work and then I'm going to work on mine.

I have a social story that kind of covers this was some visuals than other things and I'll give you a link for that at the end of the episode.

But based on your knowledge of the individual try to predict when the behavioral problems might begin. For some Some of your students, it might be as soon as you turn away, in which case, I'm literally going to turn away and turn back around and prompt them as quickly as possible. I want to try to get them to make the request for attention before any kind of behavior happens.

And so if I know that that happens as soon as I turn away, then that's going to tell me I'm going to, I'm going to do my work. And then I'm going to immediately prompt them to ask for attention. I'm going to try to do that prompting non verbally, I might point to a picture, I might manually prompt them and then give them that attention. Because I don't want to give them the attention as part of the prompt.

So if they can typically do a small amount of work before they need attention, I'm going to start watching for signs, and I'm going to have some idea of how long that's going to be, might be a minute might be two minutes, and then immediately prompt them to ask for attention.

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So I'm trying to catch them before the behavior problems happen, prompt them to use the communication, and then reinforce them with the kind of attention that they really seem to like. Whether that's a big reaction, or a small reaction, or a touch or not a touch, or laughing, or pointing something out in their work, whatever you know is what the kind of attention is that the student wants. Hopefully, your FBA has given you that information.

If behavior problems occur, and I don't catch it early enough, then I'm going to try to not attend to them as much as possible, got to make sure everybody say, and I'm just not going to give them a lot of individual attention, I'm just going to prompt them to ask me for the request for attention. When they asked me, they get attention.

Now, I'm not, you know, putting them in timeout or anything like that, if they're in danger of hurting themselves or others, then I'm going to deal with that according to our crisis plan. But if you have to say something, then you know, just describe what you are doing rather than talking about their behavior. And then I'm going to prompt them to ask me for attention and give them that attention based on that response once I get it.

When I go to respond to requests for attention, I'm going to give it to them in whatever way the FBA says. So whether again, whether it's a lot of if it gets people to stop and stare and talk to him, then I'm going to try to use a lot of high affect praise of talking to him, telling him what he did well, really focusing on what's going on, take an interest in what he's doing, talk about it for a few seconds. Attention doesn't necessarily have to be long or drawn out, it can be just, you know, 30 seconds or a minute, but it needs to be enough to actually meet the needs of this specific student. And again, your FBA should give you that information.

After that, after I've given that response, I'm going to turn back and do the same thing over and we're gonna do it over and over. Remember to call my name if you want to talk to me. And then I'm going to go back to work. And I'm going to repeat. So we're going to rinse and repeat so that they get lots of practice.

Think give your sessions like math or reading sessions where you're providing explicit instruction. Here, you're providing explicit instruction for communication. The more opportunities to practice, the faster the skill is going to be acquired. So you can do it for five minutes, you might have a 10 minute session depends on what will fit into your day and what works for the student. If it becomes too frustrating for the student, maybe do multiple shorter sessions throughout the day, you're not going to have to do it forever.

Because once they start to independently request attention consistently, then you can begin to teach them to wait for a short time. And you want to do this really gradually. So I might say thanks for asking, I'll talk to you in just a second. And then literally after one second, I will count to myself. I give them that kind of attention. And then gradually over time, we're going to increase how long we wait for that.

I might start with one second, then it's two seconds, then it's four seconds and slowly increase that. I'm not going to require them to ask more than once though. Once they've asked for attention, I've said just a second. They don't have to ask again. I'm going to respond, I made a contract with them. So it's not like when we tell little kids later and it kind of means I'm going to forget about it. So you want to make sure you know if you're doing something where now it's like just a minute, making them ask, Wait for a minute, they don't have to ask me at the end of the minute to get my attention again, I'm giving it to them.

One way to help them understand that is to use something like a wait card, where you give them a card that says wait that helps them understand that you're changing the rules. And I just hand it to them without saying anything. So I'm not giving them attention. And it lets them know that I've got this card and when I turn around to attend to them, I take the card back. So they know they have a tangible thing that says she's going to talk to me and now I'm giving it back then I get her attention. I generally will make the wait card look different than other communication visuals just so that they can focus on it.

And then once the students able to do this for short periods of time, in this kind of one to one or small group session, then I'm going to start really building that communication outside of that instructional situation if that hasn't already occurred.

For some students, they will take this and run with it. And you will not have to teach them delays, they will get the idea very quickly. For others, they're going to need you to teach each individual step and you're going to know who those are based on your experience with them.

But if the student is using the attention seeking communication outside the setting, I do want to try to reinforce it whenever I can. If I can't, I might have a way of telling them that this is not available, you know, Miss Reeve is not available right now might be a picture of my picture with an X over that just says she's not here to talk to you right now. Because there will be times that they'll ask for attention that they can't have it and I don't want to sabotage what we've been doing in our small group sessions.

So that is a really quick and dirty overview of teaching this skill. Those are the basic steps, they are basic, and they're going to be different for every single student. But it's important that we really do understand the basics so that we can then elaborate on them with our students.

And so basically it's just a, it's almost like a discrete trial approach but it's really not, it's just creating those opportunities in a more artificial environment, or more contrived environment, so that I have control over all the variables. Because if I were just to wait for the student to engage in this behavior

in the real environment, I might not be available to attend to them. I might not be available to attend to them immediately. I might not be able to give them the number of repetitions that they need in order to be successful. So that's why I pull it out to do this kind of strength training approach.

So I do have some social narratives and visual supports that can help you introduce the instruction for some of your students and help students who already have some appropriate functional communication, but they're not using it effectively to gain attention. Because you will have students that they already have the ability to ask for somebody to attend to them, it doesn't work. Because a kid who walks around doing things to try to get people to attend to them, the negative behavior is probably more effective, gets it faster than asking somebody.

And so you will have students who are going to be able to get it with just an overview and some basic practice. But for some students, you're going to have to do the more concentrated type of instruction.

So this kit has some social stories that kind of walks them through asking for attention, walks them through how to wait and waiting. And you can find it at autismclassroomresources.com/attention. It also has teaching protocols that will walk you through the steps that I've covered today in a bit more detail.

So I hope that gives you some really good ideas of things that might work for your students, some things that might refresh some of your instruction of why maybe it's not working quite as well as you would like it to. I will make sure that some of the links to earlier episodes are in the show notes.

And I would love it if you could help me out and if you are enjoying the podcast hop over and leave a rating and possibly a review on Apple podcasts. That helps me to reach more educators that are supporting the students that we work with.

And I will be back next week to talk about sensory functions of behavior. And I hope you'll join me then to. Til then talk to you later.

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.