

REDUCTION IN VERBAL REFUSAL AND MILD PHYSICAL AGGRESSION BY TEACHING A CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROTOCOL AND SYSTEMATIC REINFORCEMENT

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Introduction

This case study examines the effectiveness of teaching a conflict resolution protocol and utilizing a systematic reinforcement system to decrease inappropriate behavior. The subject is a fourteen year old male, with a diagnosis of autism, living with his family, and attending his local public school. Duration of target behaviors is problematic, as some episodes of behavior are on-going, even into the next day. The overall goal is to teach Bob how to effectively cope and resolve personal conflicts that he may experience with scheduling (changes, transitions), with environmental variables (noise, distractions, altered physical setting), and/or social interactions (obtaining attention, expressing how he feels, communicating appropriately and with respect). Once Bob learns to effectively resolve personal conflicts, it is expected that duration and intensity of target behaviors will decrease significantly.

Method

Participant and Setting

Bob is a 14 year old male with a diagnosis of autism. He began receiving Intensive Behavioral Therapy (IBT) services in the home, from Children's Care Hospital and School Outreach Department. Bob attends a local public school where he receives 1:1 paraprofessional assistance with academic and interpersonal interactions. Bob resides with his parents and 16 year old sister. He participates in adaptive aquatics and Tae-Kwon-Do weekly, and has a personal care assistant with him approximately two times per week for a total of eight hours, and receives IBT services six days a week for approximately 15 hours.

Bob has difficulty coping with changes that may occur to his daily routine and will engage in verbal refusal and mild physical aggression when he is not able to get what he wants, is upset with a change in routine, or does not want to do what is asked of him. Bob's verbal refusal is in the form of stating that he does not want to do something, and verbal perseveration over a topic he is upset about. Bob's mild physical aggression is in the form of grabbing and/or pushing others, profanity, and dropping to the floor.

Procedure

The results of the functional assessment indicated that the target behaviors of verbal refusal and mild physical aggression are likely elicited as social negative reinforcement (escape) in the form of refusal, dropping to floor, and/or mild physical aggression. The target behaviors are multiply maintained by social negative reinforcement (escape) and social positive reinforcement (attention).

A conflict resolution protocol was developed to help Bob acquire critical problem solving skills which will allow him to independently cope with changes to routines and social dilemmas.

- Treatment 1: Teaching conflict problem identification in structured IBT session.
 - o Bob will identify scenarios which present potential problems. Problem situations are defined as those situations that Bob may encounter which can be successfully resolved independently by him.
 - o Bob will generate answers when asked "W" questions (who, what, why, where, etc) to scenarios with potential problems.
 - o Bob will respond to multiple social scenarios to expand his repertoire of solutions to every day social dilemmas.
- Treatment 2: Teaching advanced conflict resolution skills to Bob.
 - o When provided with a scenario about a conflict or social dilemma, and prompted with an oral script, "What's wrong with this and how can we fix it?", Bob will participate 100% of the time.
 - o Bob will provide at least one viable solution for each conflict or social dilemma.
 - o Parent training of delivering oral script with supportive prompting of problem solving program will occur during Treatment 2 to plan for eventual generalization of skills across multiple people and settings.

A systematic reinforcement system was utilized during sessions, as well as providing Bob with access to a highly preferred activity at the conclusion of IBT sessions.

Baseline and treatment data were collected on duration of verbal refusal and mild physical aggression and percent correct of conflict resolution skills.

Results

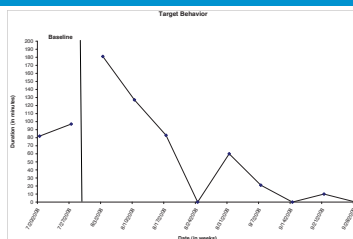


Figure 1. Duration of verbal refusal and mild physical aggression

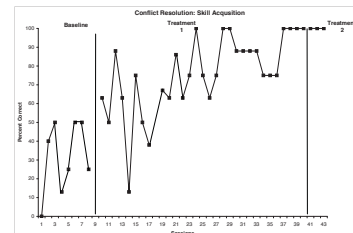


Figure 2. Percent correct of conflict resolution skills

Discussion

Early indications from this study are encouraging as Bob has shown significant improvement in independently utilizing problem solving skills to address potential conflicts in sessions. Also noted is a daily gradual decrease in verbal refusal and/or mild physical aggression towards others. At this time, there is insufficient evidence to attribute decreased mild physical aggression as an outcome of teaching conflict resolution skills, as there are variables associated with the home environment that can not be controlled for. The study is ongoing as the next treatment phase is to generalize Bob's conflict resolution skills to other people and settings.

References

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For Further Information

Please contact (605) 782-2300. More information on this and related projects, plus a PDF-version can be obtained at www.cchs.org.

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