



# Teaching Adult Social Skills/Soft Skills for Employment

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# Agenda

- What is Autism?
- Behavior Principles
  - Reinforcement & Extinction
- What are Social Skills?
- Teaching Social Skills
- “Soft Skills” for Employment



“If you’ve met one person with Autism, then you’ve met one person with Autism.”

~Dr. Stephen Shore

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

## DSM 5 Criteria

- ***Diagnostic Criteria for 299.00 Autism Spectrum Disorder***
- ***Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):***
  - 1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
  - 2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.
  - 3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding of relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.



# Autism Spectrum Disorder

## DSM 5 Criteria

- **Severity is based on social communication impairments and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior.**
- **Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by at least two of the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):**
  - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypes, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).
  - Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, need to take same route or eat same food every day).
  - Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g., strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests).
  - Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g. apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).



# Social Skill Goals

- **Communication Goals:**

- Greetings
- Initiating conversation
- Responding to others
- Responding on topic
- Sustained reciprocal conversation
- Asking questions/asking follow up questions
- Ending conversations
- Tone, voice volume
- Shifting topics within conversation

- **Executive Functioning Goals**

- Problem Solving
- Perspective taking
- Behavioral Flexibility
- Discriminating Figurative vs. Literal Language
- Predicting Outcomes
- Acknowledging Own Mistakes
- Tolerating Feedback
- Recall & Restate Information
- Planning & Organization



# Social Skills Goals

- **Interpersonal Skills**
  - Eye Contact
  - Identify Interests of Others
  - Appropriately Entering/Exiting Conversations
  - Maintain Appropriate Personal Space
  - Identify and Appropriately Respond to Social Cues
  - Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Flirting Behavior
  - Identify Public vs. Private Behavior
  - Sharing contact information
  - Self disclosures



# Key Concepts for Applying Interventions

- Reinforcement
- Extinction





# Reinforcement

- The most important principle of behavior (Cooper et al., 2007).
- It is a key element of most behavior change programs designed by behavior analysts (Cooper et al., 2007).
- ***The principle of reinforcement is also a law*** (Martin & Pear, 2011).



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# 2 Types of Reinforcement

## Positive Reinforcement:

- Occurs when a behavior is followed immediately by the presentation of a stimulus and, as a result, that behavior occurs more often in the future. (Cooper et al., 2007, P. 701)
- Roughly synonymous with the term “Reward” (Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 32)

## Negative Reinforcement:

- When the frequency of a behavior increases because past responses have resulted in the withdrawal or termination of a stimulus (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 292)
- ***Both types of reinforcement increase behavior***

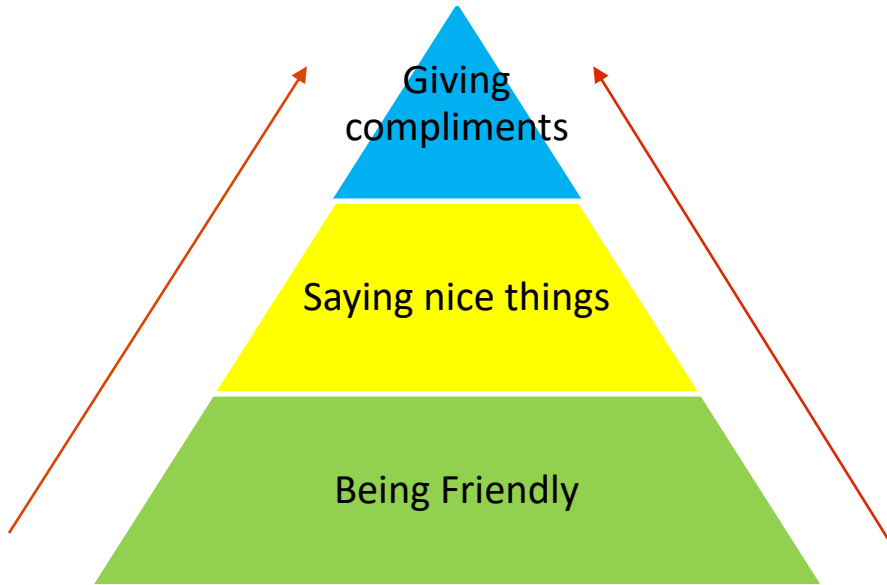


# 2 Types of Reinforcement

- The terms “Positive” and “Negative” do not correspond to the everyday use of the words.
- Positive = Adding something to increase a behavior
- Negative = Removing something or taking something away to increase behavior



# Choosing a Behavior to be Reinforced



- Choose a behavior that is socially relevant and will aid the learner in developing meaningful and useful skills.
- Be specific about the identified behavior instead of choosing a broad category such as “being good” or “being more friendly” (Martin & Pear, 2011)
- This helps you to reinforce the identified behavior more consistently (Martin & Pear, 2011)



# Choosing Reinforcers

- Unconditioned Reinforcers:
  - Do not require previous learning history to be reinforcing.
  - These are reinforcers for virtually everyone
    - Examples: Food, sleep, water, and oxygen
  - You can usually count on these items to be effective reinforcers



# Conditioned Reinforcers

- Require previous learning history and are not inherently reinforcing
- Examples: Praise, toys, and access to activities



# Reinforcers for employers in a variety of work settings

- Special Attention Reinforcers:
  - Praise
  - Praise in front of others
  - Special work assignments
  - Reserved parking space
  - Choice of work attire
  - Invitation to higher level meetings
  - Solicitation of opinions and ideas



# Reinforcers for Employers

- Company-Time Reinforcers
  - Time off for work-related activities
  - Time off for personal business
  - Extra break time
  - Extra meal time
  - Choice of working hours
  - Days off





# Reinforcers for Employers

- Monetary Reinforcers
  - Promotion
  - Paid days off
  - Company stock
  - Pay for overtime
  - Tickets to special events
  - Free raffle or lottery tickets
  - Personalized gifts
  - Business cards



(Martin & Pear, 2011)

# Reinforcers for Employers

- Participation Reinforcers:
  - Voice in policy decisions
  - Helping to set standards
  - Increased responsibilities
  - Opportunity to learn new skills

(Martin & Pear, 2011)



# Choosing Reinforcers

- Be sure to identify effective and potent reinforcement for your learner.
- What's effective for one person may not be effective for another.
- Take note of what your learner is motivated by and use deprivation (restrict access) in order to increase effectiveness and potency of that reinforcer.



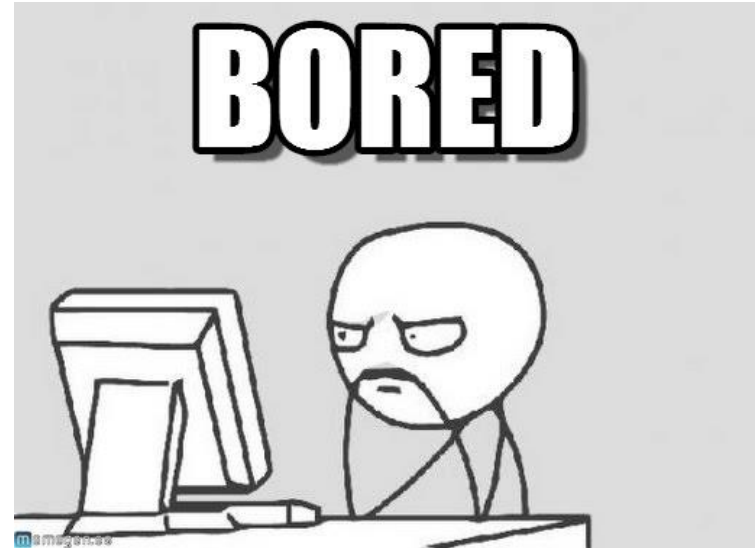
# Deprivation

- Deprivation: Restricting or limiting access to reinforcers increases their value
- Increases motivation to gain access to the reinforcer.
- Implement this by restricting free access to the reinforcer.



# Satiation

- Satiation: Condition in which an individual has experienced a reinforcer to such an extent that it is temporarily no longer reinforcing.
- Decreases motivation to gain access to the reinforcer.
  - Be mindful of satiation effects. If the learner has had access to a reinforcer continually, they are less likely to be motivated to earn it.



# Tips for Choosing Reinforcers

- Be sure to vary the reinforcers and avoid using the same ones over and over again.
  - Over time, a person becomes less motivated to earn the same reinforcers over and over again.
- You can offer the learner choices between reinforcers they can earn (e.g., Reward menu).
- Collaborate with the learner to identify reinforcers (preference assessments)



# Reinforcer Immediacy

- For maximum effectiveness, a reinforcer should be given immediately after the desired response (Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 42).



# Fading to Natural Reinforcement

- Keep in mind that reinforcement programs should be faded over time.
- The intent is to transition to natural reinforcement.
- Natural reinforcers are consequences that follow behaviors in the course of everyday living (Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 45).

Turning  
on tap  
water

- Water flows
- Access to Water

Flip on  
light  
switch

- Light comes on
- Access to reading



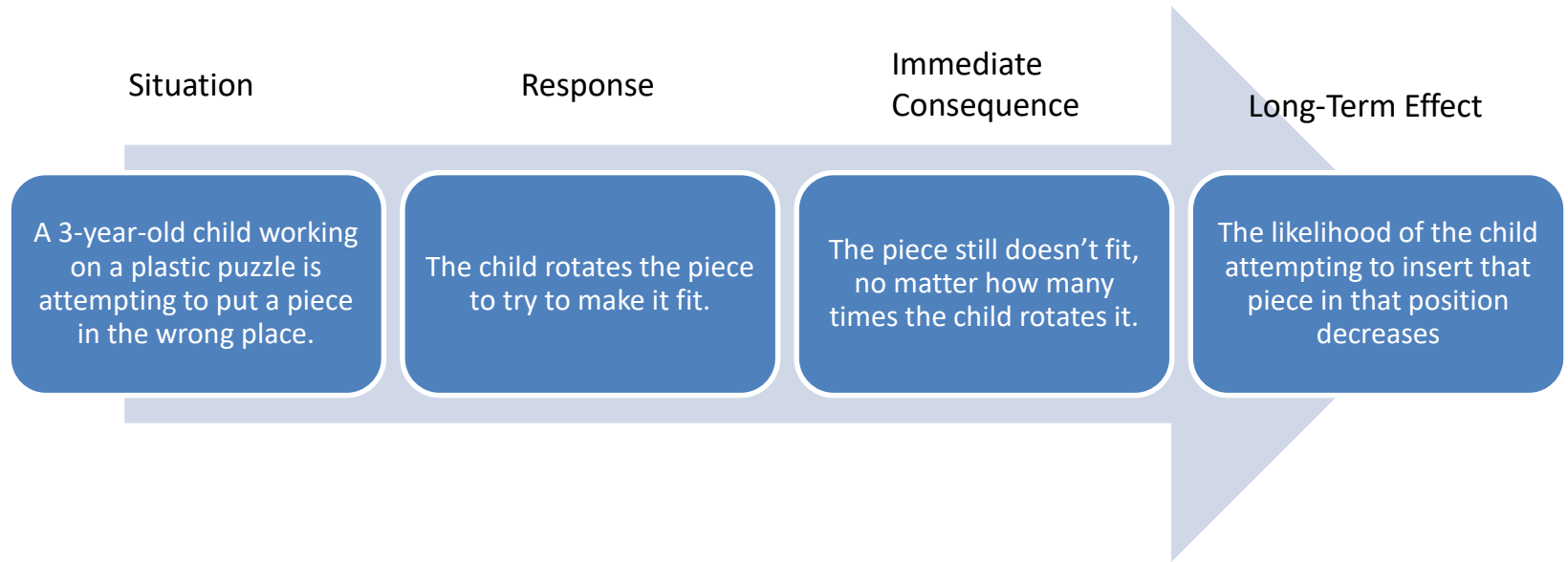


# Extinction

- Extinction: Reinforcement for a behavior is withheld, thereby decreasing the frequency of that behavior.
- Some learners engage in behavioral excesses that require training to decrease (e.g. Attention seeking behaviors)



# Example of extinction



(Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 62)



# Controlling Reinforcers

- Reinforcers presented by other people or by the physical environment can undo your good efforts at applying extinction. (Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 63).
- Unfortunately, it is often difficult to convince others of this if they are not familiar with the principles of positive reinforcement and extinction (Martin & Pear, 2011, p. 63).
- Examples of inadvertent reinforcement:
  - A person giving candy to a child to stop them from crying.
  - Offering an iPad to a child that is screaming and crying.
  - While you ignore a behavior, someone else enters the environment and offers attention.



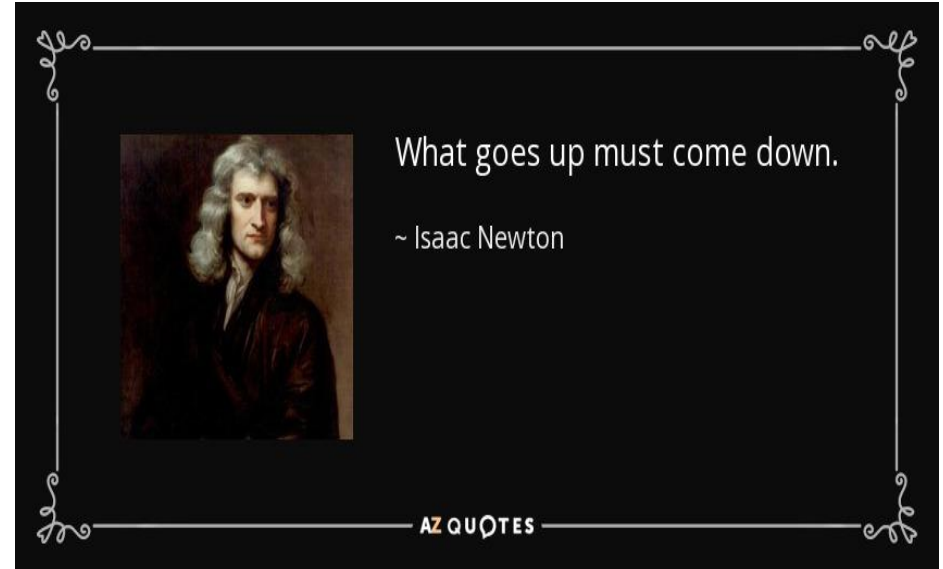
# Extinction Considerations

- Extinction linked to automatic reinforcement is not a recommended treatment option for problem behaviors. (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 460)
- Escape Extinction procedures can be considered unethical.



# Extinction Bursts

- Extinction Burst: A general effect of the extinction procedure is an immediate increase in the frequency of the response after the removal of the positive, negative or automatic reinforcement (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 462)
- In other words, behaviors are likely to increase in intensity and frequency as soon as the reinforcement is withheld.



# Extinction Burst

Example:

Everyday you take the elevator in your building. You walk up to the doors and press the button. Each day the elevator arrives and opens the doors. You get in and it takes you to the lobby. However, on this day, the elevator is broken. You press the button and the elevator doesn't come. After a while, you press the button again and nothing happens. You press the button several more times, and still, the elevator does not come. You press the button rapidly and nothing happens. You stop pressing the button. You take the stairs instead.

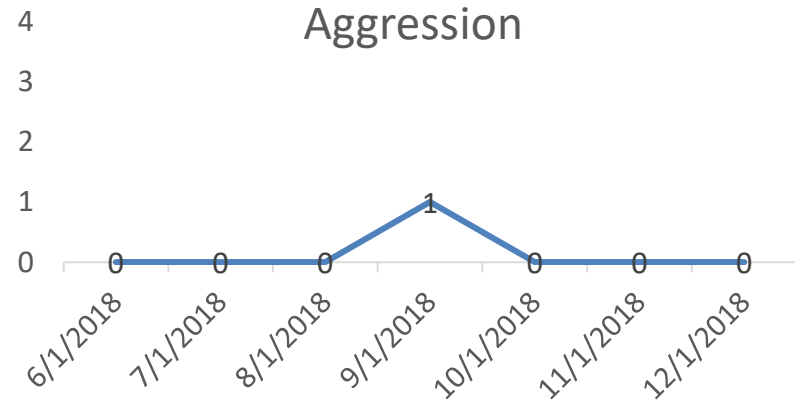
What you've just experienced is an "extinction burst". You engaged in a behavior that was historically reinforced, but was not being reinforced in this instance. The reinforcement was withheld (The elevator doors did not open). The behavior of pressing the button stopped and an alternative behavior took its place (you took the stairs).



# Spontaneous recovery

## Spontaneous Recovery:

- You might see the formerly extinct behavior reemerge after it hasn't been seen in while.



# Spontaneous Recovery



- This is a known and predictable effect.
- If the same extinction procedure is used when this behavior is observed again, then it will likely return to zero levels.
- A common mistake is to interpret the reemergence of the behavior as a failed extinction procedure.



# Beware: Intermittent Reinforcement

- Intermittent reinforcement is an arrangement in which a response is reinforced only occasionally (Martin & Pear, 2011, P. 66)
- Behaviors that are intermittently reinforced are the most difficult to extinguish.



# Guidelines for extinction procedures

- Be sure to withhold ALL reinforcers maintaining the problem behavior. (Cooper et al., 2007, P. 465)
- Withhold reinforcement consistently.
- Combine Extinction with other procedures such as reinforcement for alternative behaviors (Cooper et al., 2007, P. 465)



# **SOCIAL SKILLS**

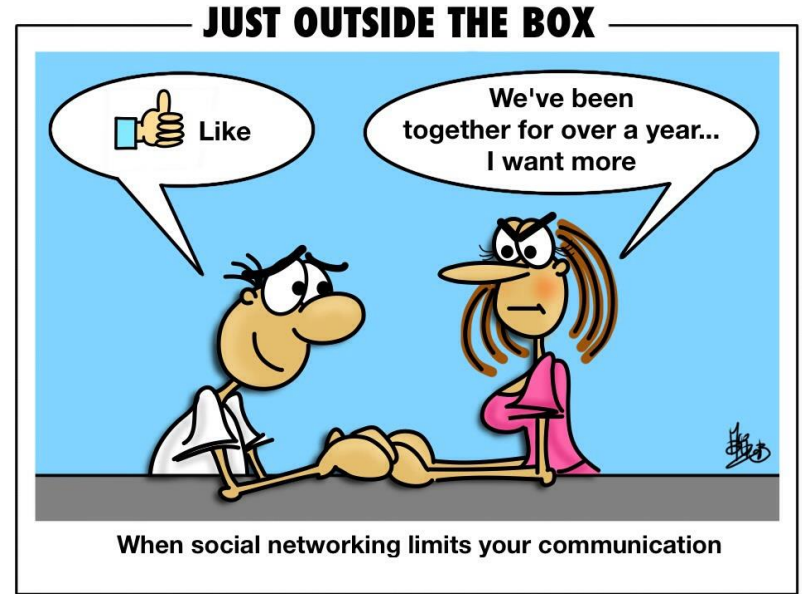
# Social Skills Training for Adults

- Start by teaching the value of social skills training:
  - Increases likelihood they will develop friendships.
  - Friendships decrease symptoms of depression and make us “feel good” (e.g., Elevates mood).
  - Friends can share your interests and you may learn more about something you like.
  - Friends can provide help and additional information when you need it most.
  - Social skills training will increase their chances at making friends, enhancing relationships with others, and teach them how to maintain these relationships over time.

# Social Skills

## What are “social skills”?

- A social skill can be thought of as any response, either verbal or nonverbal, that has an effect on interpersonal relations with another person.
- Skills we use to successfully interact with others.



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# Examples of social skills:

- Knowing how to behave in certain places
- Understanding that others feel differently
- Giving compliments
- Apologizing for transgressions
- Responding to social initiations of others
- Being a good sport
- Demonstrating empathy
- Keeping secrets
- Telling “White lies”



## Where do we Start?

### First identify learner's motivation

**Motivation:** The reason, or reasons, one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.

- You must obtain learner's "buy in" and increase overall participation in the learning process



# Motivation



- What is the motivation of the jogger in this picture?
- What is the motivation of the dog?





# Increasing motivation

- Motivation can be manipulated through the use of reinforcers
- Motivation can be increased and decreased using deprivation and satiation
- With adults, providing information and rationale for using social skills is often enough to increase motivation.





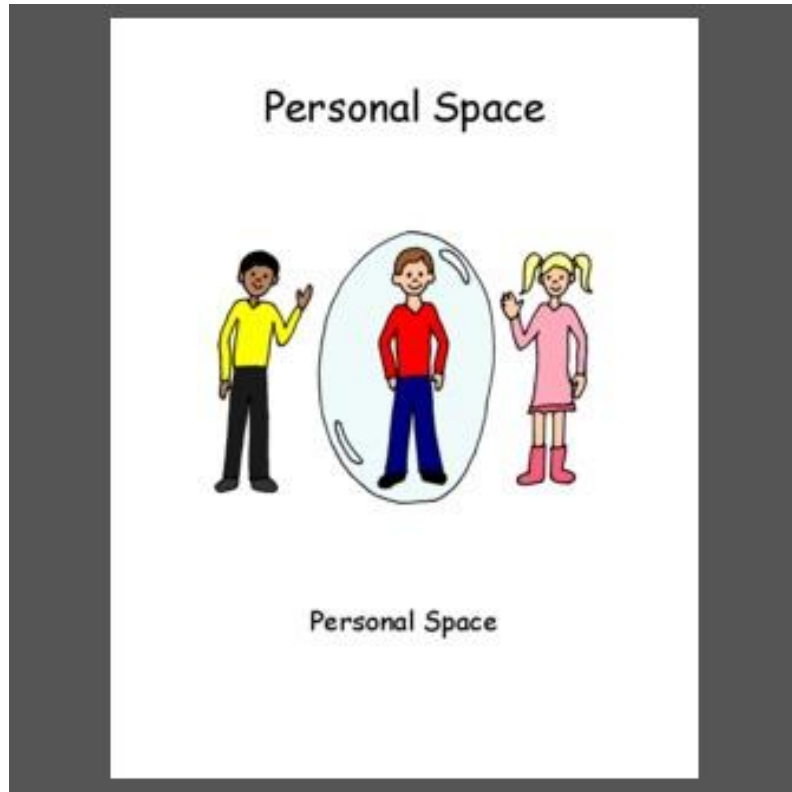
# Teaching Strategies

# Behavior Skills Training (BST)

- Primary teaching strategy used in social skills training.
- Multi component teaching strategy used to teach a large variety of skills.
- Most effective training strategy for parents, caregivers and educators.



# Important things to consider prior to using Behavior Skills Training:



## Prior to teaching (BST):

- Clearly identify the skill you will be teaching. The skill should have a concrete definition, others should be able to see the skill occurring, and you are able to measure the skill in some way, (e.g., The number of times it occurs).
- Poor example: Personal space being defined as standing too close to someone.
- Good example: Personal space could be defined as providing their peers at least 2 feet distance during conversations while refraining from unwelcomed touching of the peer

# Specific Teaching Strategy: Behavior Skill Training (BST)

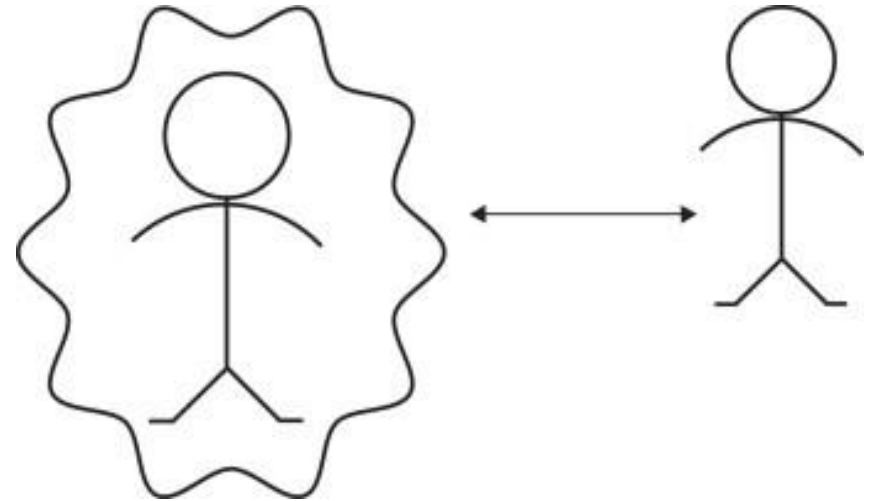
## 4 components:

- 1. Provide instruction
- 2. Modeling
- 3. Practice/Rehearsal
- 4. Provide feedback



# BST step 1: Instruction

- Describe the target skill and explain the importance of it.
- Highlight advantages of using the identified skill.



Personal Space

# BST Step 1: Instruction

- Provide the learner a description of the skill/target behavior
- Use clear and concise language
- Instruction can include verbal instructions, written instructions, pictorial instructions, etc. You can also combine these and use multiple methods as well
- Consider having the learner summarize the instructions to ensure comprehension



Personal Space



# BST Step 2: Modeling

## Step 2: Modeling

- Show the learner an example of the target social skill.
- Models can include: video model, role-plays, visual aids.
- Narrate the steps as you are modeling the skill.
- Provide modeling several times and include variations in correct responding.
- Allow the learner the opportunity to ask questions.





## Step 2: Modeling



- When providing instruction and modeling, it is ok to include both good and bad examples.

# Steps to implementing Behavior Skills Training: Step 3 Rehearsal



## Step 3: Rehearsal

- This is where the learner has the opportunity to practice the skill/target behavior
- If no natural opportunities occur for the learner to engage in the skill, you may need to contrive (set-up) opportunities.
- Remember that the learner will need multiple opportunities to practice the skill



# BST: Step 4 Feedback

## Step 4: Feedback

- Let the learner know how they did.
- Provide positive feedback for correct behaviors.
- Provide corrective feedback for incorrect behaviors.
  - Avoid providing too much corrective feedback. Focus on one or two areas.
- Provide the feedback immediately.
- Feedback should be objective and specific.



# Behavior Skills Training Considerations

- Steps will need to be implemented several times until the skill is mastered
  - You may need to start back at step 1
- Increased learning occurs with repetition. BST is most effective when the strategy is implemented multiple times (especially with the rehearsal and feedback portions).



# Specific Teaching Strategy: Visual Supports

- Auditory information is very challenging for people with ASD. However, visual perceptual skills and visual memory are areas of strength for most people on the spectrum (Schetter, 2008)
- Knowing visual perception is a strength, we can utilize visual supports.
- Visual cues can prompt the learner in the absence of a teacher.

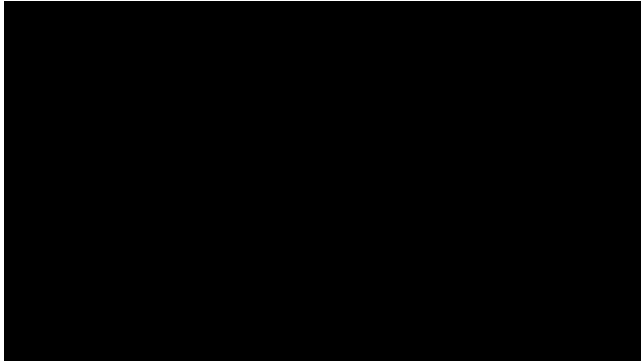


# Reinforcement Systems

- Token systems
  - Achieve specified criteria to earn tokens
- Point reward systems
- Token economies:
  - Cash in tokens for backup reinforcers



# Specific teaching strategy: Video modeling



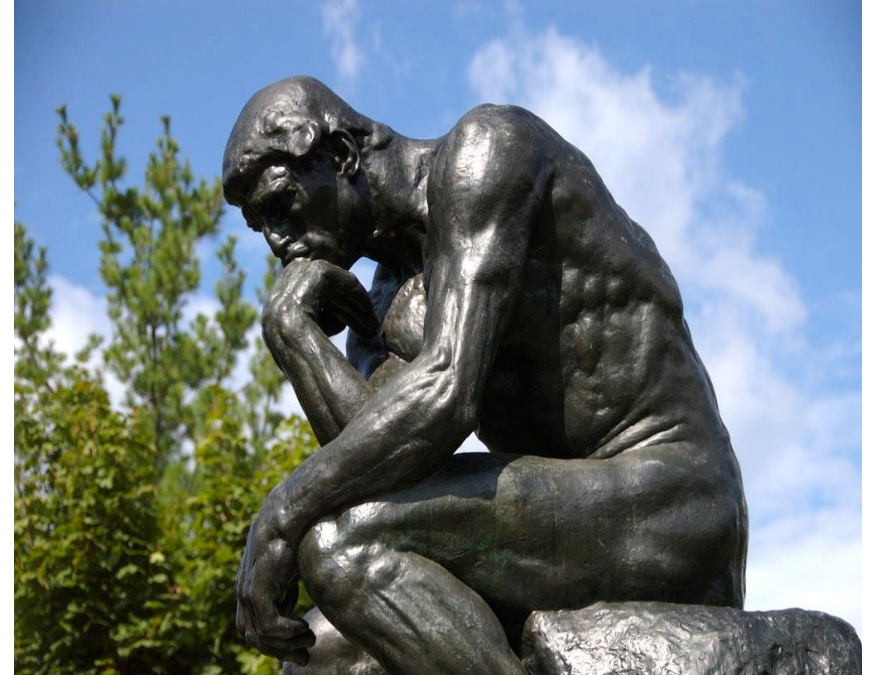
Professionalism Video by US  
Dept. of Labor

- **Video Modeling:** Using a video recording of individuals engaging in a desired social behavior to provide a model for the learner to imitate.
- Very effective because watching videos is often really reinforcing for the learner.
- Video models are great for sustained attention because distractions are limited
- Advantage: They can be viewed several times



# Teaching Considerations

- People with ASD often learn rote responses and compartmentalize new information (Schetter, 2008).
- Recall and Organization are key components in learning and are primary deficits in people with autism (Schetter, 2008).
- Temple Grandin is quoted as saying “...each new piece of information is in its own separate file. Being autistic, I don’t naturally assimilate information that most people take for granted.”





# **Soft Skills for Adults in the Workplace**

# ASD and Work

The ability to obtain and maintain employment is one likely determinant of independence in adulthood. Only 10% to 50% of individuals with ASD are employed following high school and those who are employed earn less and work fewer hours than neurotypical individuals (Grob et al., 2018)

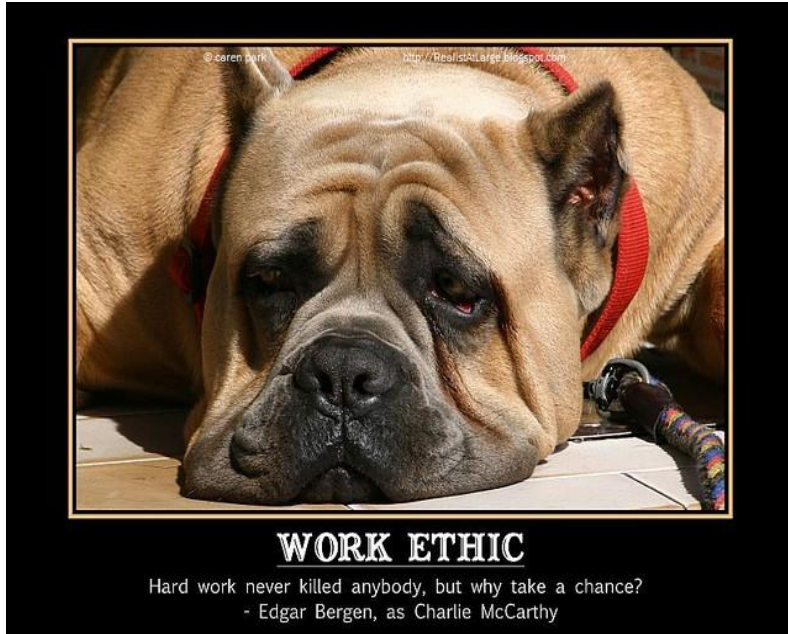


# Soft Skills

- "Soft skills" refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with (Lorenz, 2009)
- Companies value soft skills because research suggests that they can be just as important an indicator of job performance as hard skills (Lorenz, 2009)



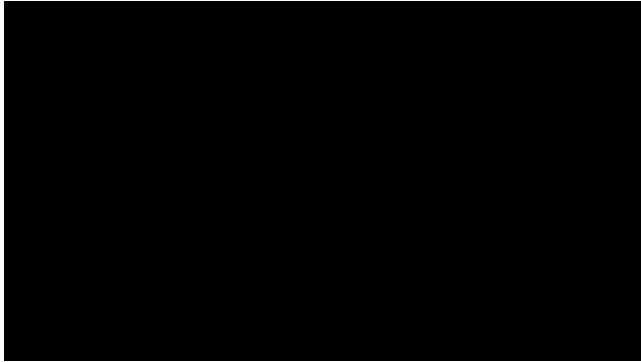
# Soft Skill Target: **STRONG WORK ETHIC**



- **Strong Work Ethic:**
  - Time Management:
    - Estimating time
    - Follow a schedule
  - Showing up to work consistently and on time.
    - Setting alarm
    - Complete pre-work routine (Hygiene, food, dressing)
    - Navigate the community
      - Bus routes
      - Driving a car
  - Completing Job Duties
    - Remain on task
    - Task Completion



# Soft Skill Target: Positive Attitude



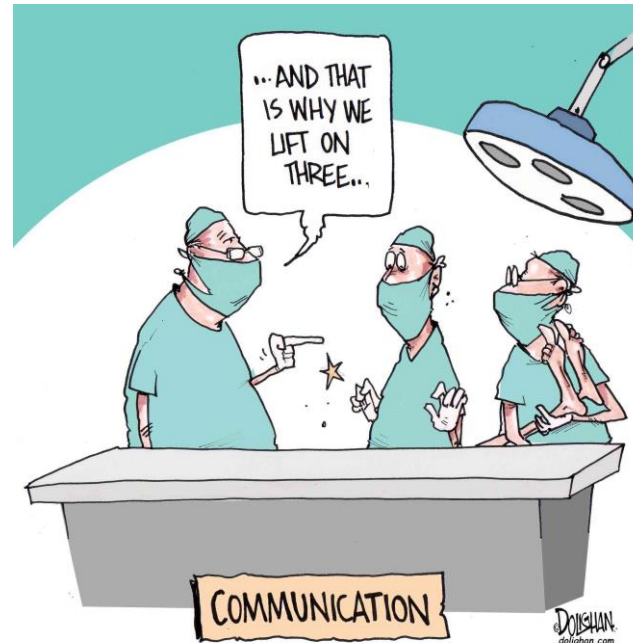
Enthusiasm and Attitude: Video by US  
Dept. of Labor

- **Positive Attitude:**
  - Nonverbal communication
    - Expressing emotions
    - Exhibit social cues
    - Reading social cues from others
  - Making affirmative statements
    - Making confirming statements
    - Recall/Restate information from supervisor
  - Being helpful
    - Awareness of how others are feeling
      - Emotion identification
    - Empathic responding
    - Anticipating needs
      - Predicting outcomes



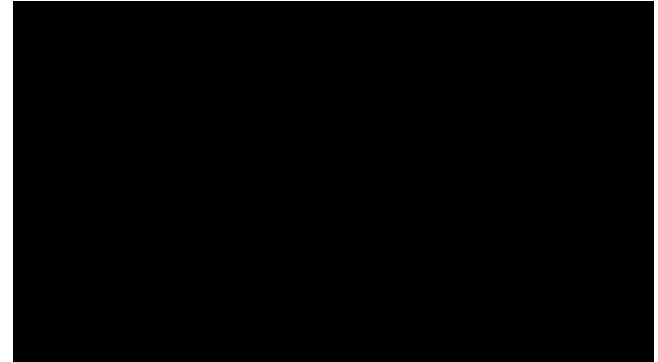
# Soft Skill Target: Communication

- **Communication:**
- Reciprocal Conversation:
  - Sustain conversation
  - Tone and voice volume
  - Initiating and Responding to others
  - Staying on topic
  - Active Listening (Recall & summarize)
- Appropriate Conversations
  - Discriminate settings for different topics
  - Avoiding certain topics in the workplace (e.g., politics, finances, religion, etc.)
- Self Advocacy
  - Asking questions (e.g., Asking for help, information, missing/needed materials)
  - Stating wants and needs
  - Asking for modifications to the environment as needed
  - Taking breaks



# Soft Skills: Problem Solving

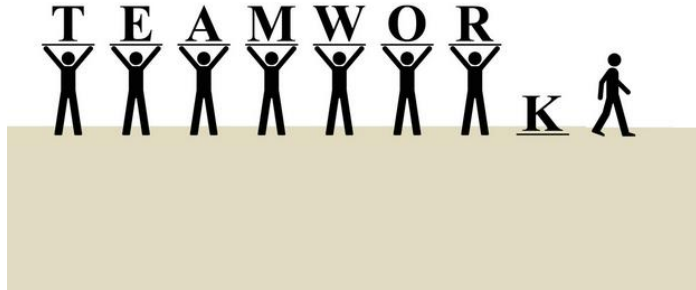
- **Problem Solving:**
  - Asking for help
    - Self advocacy
  - Being flexible with alternative solutions
    - Tolerate help from others
  - Remain calm
    - Use coping strategies (e.g., deep breaths)



Problem Solving and Critical Thinking video by the Dept. of Labor



# Soft Skills: Team Work



- Team Work
  - Tolerating Feedback from others
    - Flexibility
  - Implementing changes according to feedback
    - Self monitoring
    - Follow instructions
      - Multiple step instructions
  - Listening to others
    - Refrain from interrupting
  - Working with others to achieve a common goal (e.g., “Pulling your weight”).
    - Flexibility
    - Tolerating choices of others
    - Follow instructions





# Soft Skill: Trustworthiness

- **Integrity**: Doing the right thing when no one is watching.
  - Discriminate which behaviors are appropriate in each setting.
  - Honesty
    - Stealing vs. Borrowing
    - Telling “white lies”



# Executive Functioning

- Many of the “Soft Skills” require executive functioning skills.
- Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. Just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport safely manages the arrivals and departures of many aircraft on multiple runways, the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses (Raver, 2015).



# Teaching Executive Functioning Skills

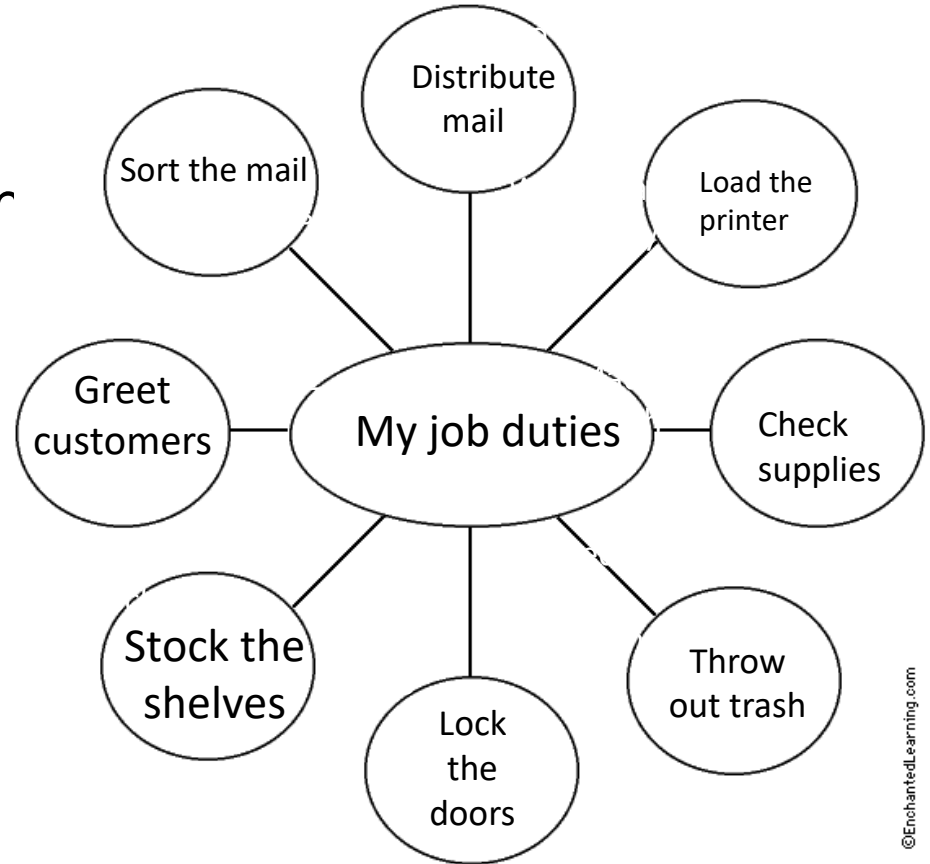


- Executive function skills in adulthood can be trained. Just like going to the gym, the more you practice in these areas the stronger the capacity is likely to become because you are strengthening those neural connections (Fisher, 2015)
- Primary executive functions are ***planning*** and ***organizing***.
- ***Recalling*** and ***restating*** information are prerequisite skills and cannot be overlooked as they are building blocks to planning and organizing (Schetter, 2008).



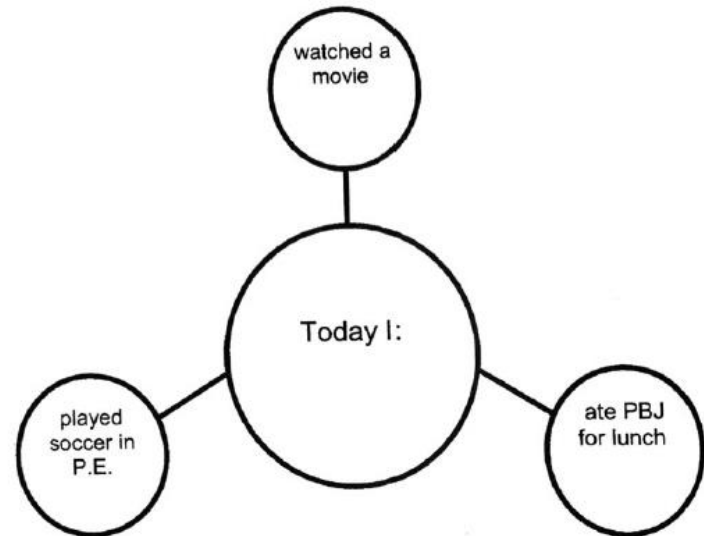
# Teaching Executive Functioning Skills.

- Auditory input is often very confusing to the learner with ASD. Many find it hard to attend to, organize, and interpret this type of input (Schetter, 2008)
- Graphic organizers are great to increase recall and helps the learner become less “prompt dependent”



# Graphic Organizers

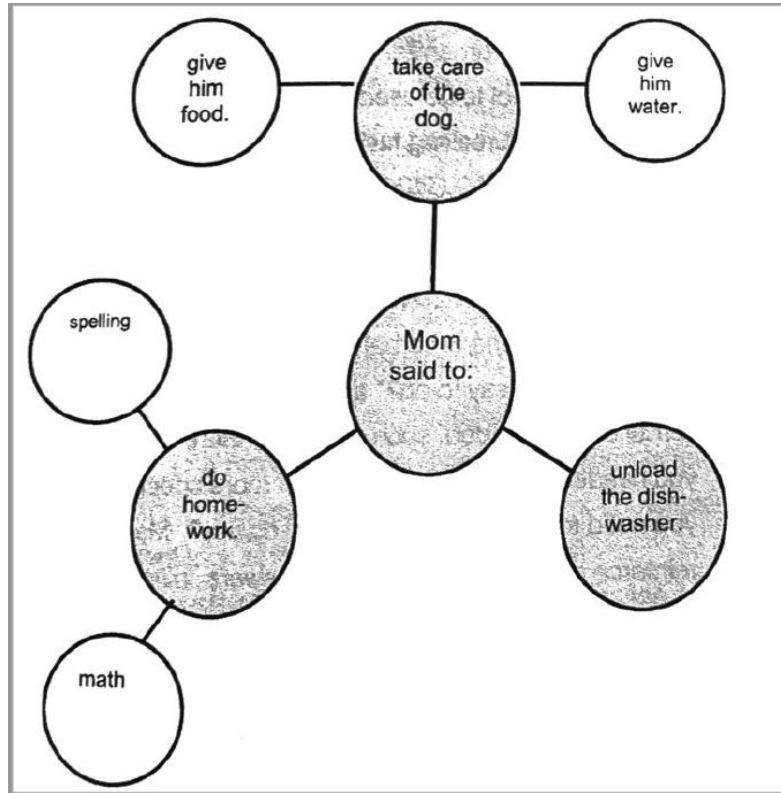
- Start teaching by explaining the rationale; What it is and the primary purpose.
- Start by filling in the topic in the middle bubble.
- Introduce immediately following the completion of ***several highly preferred tasks***.
- Start *small* and expand from there.
- Remember to reinforce approximations or any attempts



(Schetter, 2008)



# Graphic Organizers as Task Analyses



- Graphic organizers may also be used to break down tasks
- Use cluster organizers to identify specific steps in a task
- First, explain the rationale
- Start by filling in the center bubble with the information to recalled (e.g., “What did mom say to do?”)
- Draw a line and add a bubble with specific tasks to be done in order to complete a goal.

(Schetter, 2008)




# Task and Routine Checklists

- This is a strategy for teaching learners to compensate for problems with shifting attention and working memory (Schetter, 2008).
- Checklists are common and easy to develop.
- Encourages self monitoring of the learner's own behavior

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Support provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

10 Task Checklist

Task:	Done ✓
Reviewed by:	

Learning the R.O.P.E.S. for Improved Executive Function © 2004 



# Planning and Organizing

- Planning and organizing: The ability to define a goal or task and break the task down into manageable components, identify and get the needed resources and/or materials for completing the task, and completing the designated steps within the time allotted (Schetter, 2008)
- The 5 W's:
  - Who, what, when, where, and how



# Planning and Organization Strategies

- Planning/organizing strategies are those behaviors and skills that are taught to help a person overcome or compensate for his/her deficits (Schetter, 2008).
- Planning/Organizing requires breaking down tasks into manageable “sub-tasks” (Schetter, 2008)

# Cluster Organizer: Breaking Down Instructions

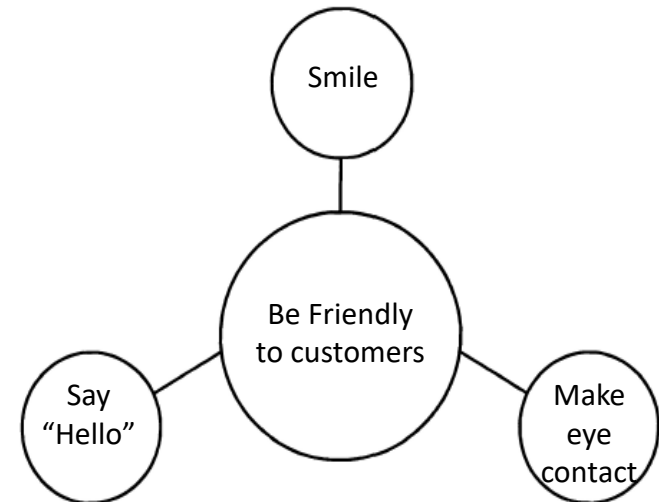
- Cluster organizers can be used to breakdown job related social behaviors.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Support provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

## Cluster Organizer

Identify the topic in the center bubble. Fill in items that are recalled or subcomponents in the additional bubbles.



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(Schetter, 2008)

# Cluster Organizer: Breaking Down Tasks

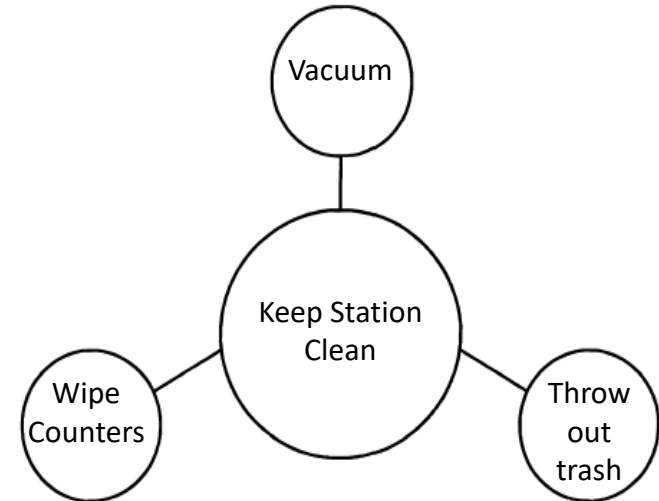
- Cluster organizers can be used to breakdown job related tasks

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Support provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

## Cluster Organizer

Identify the topic in the center bubble. Fill in items that are recalled or subcomponents in the additional bubbles.



Learning the R.O.P.E.S. for Improved Executive Function

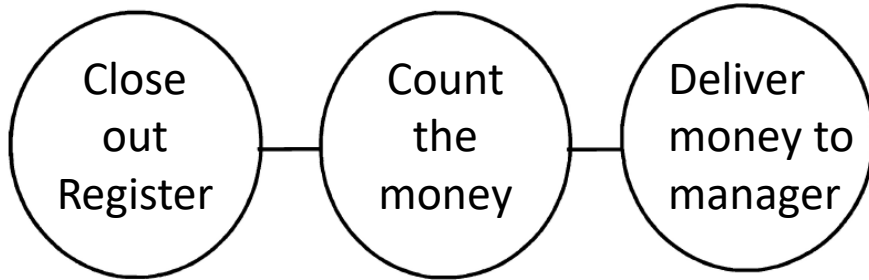
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(Schetter, 2008)

# Sequencing steps of a task

## Sequential Organizer

Use this worksheet to put items in order.



- Complex tasks may need to follow a specific sequence. Use a graphic organizer to visually represent the steps of a task.

# Time Management: Estimation

- Time estimation plays a critical role in overall time management.
- Start time estimation by working with the learner on known tasks/activities (Schetter, 2008)
- Time journals: Begin by identifying time estimates for familiar tasks

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Support provided by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Time Journal**

Activity	Estimation	Start Time	End Time	Total Time	Difference
Shower	30 min	9am	9:15am	15 min	15 min
Get Dressed	10 min	9:15a	9:20a	5 min	5 min

Learning the R.O.P.E.S. for Improved Executive Function

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# Tips for Teaching Social Skills

- Spend time building **rapport** with your learner
  - Non-contingent Reinforcement (Positive “fun time”)
- Reinforce ***immediately***
- Break down broad categories into smaller individual goals
- ***Collaborate*** with your learner and bring them into the process



# Questions



# Resources

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# Video Model Resources

- Peers Program Role Play videos:
  - <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/resources/role-play-videos>
  - *Department of Labor*  
[www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/topics/youth/transition/soft-skills/videos](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/topics/youth/transition/soft-skills/videos).