

Dear Wonderful Son-Rise Parents and Volunteers,

Everyone I know who has had experience with the Son-Rise Program<sup>®</sup>, either as a parent, a volunteer or as part of our professional staff say that they have learned more than they ever expected about themselves from using this program.

One thing that I have learned about myself from working in The Son-Rise Program<sup>®</sup> (and there are many others) is that I am a creative person. Eight years ago, when I first started using The Son-Rise Program I used to tell myself “I am not a creative person” and subsequently when I went in the playroom I tended to always introduce the same games over and over to the child with whom I worked.

This child’s mother pointed my rigidity out to me one day in a feedback session. By doing this she gave me an opportunity to uncover the belief “I am not a creative person” and realize how this was holding me back from helping this child grow. I was scared to try new games in case the child didn’t respond to them which I would then take as more evidence that I was not creative and end up judging myself and feeling bad about the whole situation. Safer to stick with games that already worked! So I judged my creativity, to stop me being creative, and keep me stuck in the “safe zone.” I thought that this made me a more effective facilitator because the child wanted to play most of the games I would offer.

When his mother explained to me that one of the things we wanted to help this child with was his flexibility and openness to new experiences I realized that this belief I had created about myself was limiting me and holding this little boy back from learning more.

I wanted to be as helpful as I could to him so I decided to change this belief about myself. I decided instead to believe that I was indeed creative but just had not yet developed that part of me because I had never asked myself to be very creative. So I started going in the playroom with all sorts of ideas of games I wanted to play and each time he ignored me or showed no interest in my game I told myself “that’s because he’s autistic, not because I am not creative”. This enabled me to feel comfortable with my games, no matter how they were received by the child, and therefore allowed me to be *persistent* – I just kept trying until I found a new game he wanted to play with me. From that point on there was no limit to the wacky, fun games I would bring into the playroom.

We wanted to help stimulate some ideas for anyone out there who may be finding themselves playing the same game over and over or might be telling themselves “I’m not creative.” So, attached are some game ideas that can be adapted to work with a variety of children with different motivations and different functioning levels.

I, and the rest of the staff at The Autism Treatment Center of America<sup>™</sup>, hope that these ideas will help stimulate more and more ideas and that you enjoy the process of playful persistence in your playrooms.

We are always here cheering for you

Kat Houghton and The Son-Rise Program<sup>®</sup> Staff

# Five Fun Games to Initiate

## 1. Puzzle Hunt.

Goal: To inspire an increased interactive attention span.

Motivations: Pictures or puzzles and going on rides.

Preparation: Print out a large picture of one of your child's favorite characters (Thomas the Tank, Barney, Micky etc). Laminate the picture (to make a sturdy re-usable game) and cut into pieces to make a puzzle. When you enter the room put the pieces up on the shelf.

Initiating the Game: When your child gives you a Green Light<sup>1</sup> introduce the game by getting one or two pieces of the puzzle down from the shelf. Explain excitedly to your child what the picture will be when it is complete. Also tell your child that the way to get more pieces is for him/her to get on your back so you can ride around the room to find the next piece. Keep initiating this game each time your child gives you a Green Light until s/he gets on your back.

Building the Motivation Level: Ride around the room with your child on your back (or in your arms, etc.) in a variety of fun ways and pick up one puzzle piece at a time. Each time you pick up a piece take it back to the table and add it into the puzzle. Show your child how exciting it is to watch the picture grow and grow and see the character start to emerge.

Requesting: The goal here is to increase the duration of your child's interactive attention span, so the only thing to request is that your child climb back up and you go get another puzzle piece. If your child goes to sleep before completing the puzzle, join him/her until you get another Green Light then re-introduce the puzzle game. Keep re-introducing the puzzle game until either the puzzle is completed or the session is over.

## 2. Surprise Chase

Goal: To invite more eye contact.

Motivations: Chases or tickles; costumes or hats.

Preparation: Collect a bag full of costumes, hats, and wigs. Create a screen that you can hide behind while you change costume, for example, a large piece of cardboard or a sheet suspended from the ceiling. Cut out a hole in the screen at your child's eye level.

Introducing the Game: When your child gives you a Green Light introduce the game with the motivation by starting to chase your child in a fun way. Adapt the motivation to best suit your child, for example, if he likes tickles then chase him and tickle him at the end.

Building the Motivation: If your child indicates that s/he wants more chasing and tickling then quickly duck behind the screen and put on a hat or wig. Come back out and chase your child wearing the new costume. Do this a few times with a variety of different costumes. You could try pretending that each costume turns you into a different character. Each character looks, talks, chases and tickles differently from the other characters. This will add variety and anticipation to the games making it even more motivating for your child.

Requesting: Once you have done this a few times and your child is motivated for more of the game, you can start to request. Go behind the screen to change costumes and before you come out to reveal your costume put your eyes up to the hole in the screen and ask your child to look at you through the hole. As soon as s/he looks at you spring into action.

---

<sup>1</sup> Green Light: After child has been exclusive s/he will signal availability to social interaction through a "Green Light". There are three types of Green Light: Eye contact; Language; Physical contact.

Jump out from behind the screen and starting chasing. Each time you go back to change your costume request that your child look at your eyes before you come out from behind the screen.

### **3. Sentence Fishing**

Goal: To encourage use of longer sentences.

Motivation: Physical games (e.g. rides, bounces, swinging, etc.)

Preparation: In large print, type out sentences describing the activities you think your child will be motivated for. For example, “I want a fast ride”, “I want a bumpy bounce”, “Give me a slow swing”, “I want an elephant ride”, “I want a sneezing ride”! Be creative with the types of rides, bounces and swings you can offer to your child. Type out as many as you can think of. Next laminate the sentences strips so you can reuse them. Then cut up the sentence strips into three sections to create three “pools” of words / phrases. The first pool will contain the beginnings of the sentences (e.g. “I want”, “give me”), the second pool will contain descriptor words (e.g. “fast”, “bumpy”, “helicopter” etc.) and the third pool will contain the verbs (e.g. “ride”, “swing”, “bounce” etc.) To each word attach a paper clip. Finally make a fishing pole with a small magnet on the end of the string. Put the three categories of words in three separate “pools” (basins, boxes, etc.) in the playroom.

Introducing the Game: When your child gives you a Green Light run over to the third pool (verbs) and catch yourself a word. Read this to your child and offer them whatever action is written on the card.

Building the Motivation: Next time round try caching a word from the third pool and then one from the second pool then read the phrase to your child (e.g. “elephant bounce”). Offer this action to your child. Do this until your child is motivated enough to come help you fish for a word from each pool.

Requesting: Once you child is motivated enough for a request you can ask him/her to either read the whole sentence or repeat it after you. Then give him/her the physical action. Eventually you can move towards your child not needing the written prompt to produce a full sentence.

### **4. Intrepid Reporter**

Goal: To inspire a deeper interest in other people.

Motivation: Imaginary play, trophies / awards / medals.

Preparation: Take in any props you have in a safari / exploration theme (e.g. binoculars, old phone, hats, ropes, backpacks, pictures of animals, etc) and make a map of the territory you will be exploring. Make a “Reporters Notebook” with questions you have written as prompts for your child. These will be questions s/he will ask you as you pretend to be the different characters (e.g. “What’s it like to live in a swamp?”)

Introducing the Game: Excitedly show your child the map and explain that a local newspaper wants you to report back to them on the exotic animals / dinosaurs / aliens / people (whichever you think will be most motivating for your child), who live there. Start the game by giving your child a simple, physical way to participate, for example, hold the map, drive the jeep, look through the binoculars for giraffes, etc. Let your child know that when s/he returns to report to the newspaper s/he will receive an “Intrepid Reported” medal or trophy.

Building the Motivation: As you travel through the terrain you have created use your Three E's<sup>2</sup> to grow your child's level of excitement for the game. Pretend to be one of the animals (or aliens, etc.) and introduce yourself to your child. In character tell your child excitedly about yourself, answering the questions written in the "Reporter's Notebook" without your child having to ask you these questions.

Requesting: Once your child is invested in the game with you, begin to ask him/her to take over the role of the reporter more fully. Encourage him/her to ask you the questions written in the book while you act out the different characters you meet along your journey. If you do this with a few of the characters with little help from up then up the challenge by introducing the idea that the reporter most likely to win the "Intrepid Reporter" award is the reporter who thinks up new questions to ask. Encourage your child to ask the characters something that is not already written in the "Reporters Notebook".

## 5. Roll-A-Conversation

Goal: Conversation with social content

Motivation: Whatever your child likes to talk about (e.g. cars)

Preparation: Make two large dice (square boxes wrapped in paper). One die will be the situations die, each face will be labeled with a different situation related to your child's area of interest (e.g. Car breaks down, Shopping for a new car, etc.). Label the faces on the other die with names of people your child knows (for example, the volunteers in your program, close family members, also include you and your child).

Introducing the Game: Simply explain to your child how to play the game. To play the game you take turns in rolling both dice together. The combination of situation and name that you roll forms the topic of conversation. The idea is to talk about how that particular person would act in the given situation to encourage conversations that are focused on personal information rather than factual information. If you roll the same combination for a second time, roll the name die again until you have a different name.

Building the Motivation: You take your turn first, roll both dice and then describe how you think that person would act in the situation. Make your description fun and animated and detailed, as if painting a picture of the scene. Try to add into your description as many of your child's other motivations as possible. For example, if you know your child likes slapstick humor, then include people falling over or dropping things, etc., or add in other topics you know s/he tends to be motivated by. Ask your child to take the next turn. Help him/her with the description as much as you feel is necessary and celebrate any ideas s/he delivers. You take another turn.

Requesting: When s/he has got the general idea of how to play the game and is motivated to do so start to challenge your child more. Give less help, pause and allow your child to come up with ideas spontaneously. If s/he gives you a factual account of what might happen or a general description, not related to the specific named person, celebrate him/her and ask for more specificity on how that specific person would act. Give pointers if necessary ("Remember how Bob likes to talk a lot, what do you think *he* would do if his car broke down?")

---

<sup>2</sup> Three Es: A fundamental technique of The Son-Rise Program. The three E's are Energy, Excitement and Enthusiasm.