

Getting Started with The Son-Rise Program[®]

These principles can be applied immediately to begin making a difference in the life of your special child. (Note: We suggest you pick 1 technique that applies to your child and consistently use it at every opportunity for 2–4 days.)

Area of Challenge:

Child has limited speech or is nonverbal.

Guiding Principles:

- If you teach that language is for communication (and not just sounds to be memorized and repeated) then you show the child that there is a *reason* for speaking.
- If language is seen as both *useful* and *fun*, children will be motivated to use it.

Applying the Principles:

- Respond quickly to sounds that your child *does* make. When your child makes a sound (even if you are not sure they are trying to speak), move quickly and offer something even if you don't know what they are requesting. Demonstrate that verbal communications get people to move. Show them that speech will give them power.
- Show that every word spoken results in an *action*. Teach action words and nouns associated with actions first. These words are the easiest to respond to and show the power of language. (E.g., if you teach the word *up*, you can pick your child up when they use the word. In contrast, if you teach the word *table*, there is no specific action to take as a result of using this word. Effective nouns might be *ball* or *cup*.)
- Celebrate every attempt at communication. If your child tries to say a word, cheer and celebrate wildly! We want children to be excited to try and try and try again. We encourage this by celebrating not just success but all effort along the way.

Area of Challenge:

Child exhibits repetitious and ritualistic self-stimulating behaviors (“stims”).

Guiding Principles:

- Children and adults use these behaviors to organize their understanding of their environment and gain a sense of internal control.
- These behaviors may be curative in nature.
- These rituals are a doorway to human interaction and social relationships.
- These behaviors are comforting to children and have a purpose *even if we don't understand it*.

Applying the Principles:

- Rather than try to forcibly stop a behavior, “join” the behavior to help solitary play become tandem play. Sincerely take part in their “games” before asking them to take part in yours.
- “Join” in your child’s activity by imitating exactly what they are doing. (E.g., if your child is flapping their hands, flap your hands with them.) Position yourself so your child can see what you are doing.

Area of Challenge:

Child possesses a large vocabulary or speaks in sentences, but lacks the ability to use language successfully in social situations.

Guiding Principles:

- If we help a child build confidence in social communication they will try harder.
- Children are motivated to use their verbal skills with others when they are shown the benefits of doing so.

Applying the Principles:

- Recreate social situations in a distraction-free environment in order to role-play familiar community/social situations.
- Offer specific phrases/sentences you want them to learn within the context of an exciting activity or game. (E.g., rather than correct them or “feed” them sentences to repeat, create a game called “grocery store” and show them how to interact with you as you play the cashier.)
- Be willing to discuss your child’s topic of interest (Thomas the Tank Engine, shopping malls, repetitive questions such as, “What time is dinner?”) with enthusiasm. Be a model. If we want them to discuss our areas of interest we want to first be willing to discuss theirs. *After* we have followed their area of interest we can then begin to gently guide the conversation in different directions.
- Rather than continually correct them or show them how what they are saying is off point or has been said before, celebrate the fact that they are communicating with you. Let them know how much you enjoy hearing them speak and share.

Area of Challenge:

Screaming, crying, hitting, throwing, etc.

Guiding Principles:

- Children use these behaviors because they work. If a child is screaming, it’s because they learned that this is the way to get what they want. If this behavior is no longer useful they will no longer use it.
- Every child and adult is doing the best they can. For whatever the reasons, in this moment they are not able to find another way to do it. If they could, they would.
- Our reactions play a vital role in encouraging or diminishing each behavior.

Applying the Principles:

- Give no reaction. Keep your facial expression and voice tone unresponsive (e.g., don’t frown, yell, grimace, etc.). Always move slowly and quietly during this time, so you are minimizing your reactions, and therefore no longer being a possible support for these behaviors.
- Rather than attempt to ignore these behaviors, explain in a calm and caring voice that you don’t understand them when they communicate with you this way. Even if your child is not verbal your explanation is useful both in content and tone.
- Avoid giving the “payoff” they want. If you give them what they want when they scream, you teach them that this is an effective way to communicate.
- Take care of yourself. Minimizing reactions does not mean you have to allow your child to hit or pinch you. Try putting a pillow in front of you and slowly move to another location.
- Offer an alternative. If your child is pulling your hair, offer them a string to pull instead. If they are throwing blocks, offer them a pillow or stuffed toy to throw.
- Give substantial reactions of celebration every time your child is gentle and makes requests in a way you prefer.
- *Move quickly* when they request in a sweet or clear way so that you show them the contrast between these types of communication.

Area of Challenge:

Unable or unwilling to participate in activities of daily living (e.g., brushing teeth, using the toilet, personal hygiene, preparing own meals, dressing self, etc.).

Guiding Principles:

- All people (children and young adults) move towards that which is enjoyable. If these activities are seen as pleasant our children will move towards instead of away from them.
- People require time to learn – it is worth *investing* time to help your child acquire new skills.

Applying the Principles:

- Take these activities “out of the closet.” Do/teach these activities ongoingly throughout the day. Rather than only doing them during very busy times of the day (e.g., when trying to get your child out the door so they don’t miss the bus), take other opportunities to slowly teach these skills.
- Give attention to and celebrate all family members who successfully participate in these activities (e.g., “Yay daddy! You put on your own jacket!”).
- Give big, exciting reactions to any signs of interest or willingness in this area (e.g., if they look at the toothbrush, if they put their shirt on backwards, etc.).
- Make it fun! (What? Brushing teeth fun? Yes! Brushing teeth can be fun!)
- Be flexible regarding timing. If your child moves away from brushing their hair, rather than force or push it, wait 10 minutes and try again.

To contact the Autism Treatment Center of America™: call (800) 714-2779 or (413) 229-2100 or visit www.autismtreatment.org