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Enhancing Social Communication Outcomes in Children with Autism: Evidence for the Script Fading Procedure and Translational Extensions

The development of social communication is a primary target of pediatric intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as early social engagement is closely linked to developmental and functional outcomes. The Script Fading Procedure (SFP) is a systematic prompting and fading intervention with a substantial evidence base demonstrating effectiveness in increasing spontaneous verbal initiations and reciprocal social interactions.

This invited presentation will synthesize over three decades of empirical research on SFP with a focus on pediatric populations, including preschool- and school-aged children with ASD, including foundational and recent investigations conducted by the presenter and colleagues. Studies will be reviewed to illustrate the use of textual and auditory scripts embedded within naturalistic contexts to promote social initiations, joint attention, empathic responding, and conversational reciprocity. Particular attention will be given to methodological features associated with successful outcomes, including systematic fading procedures, incorporation of common stimuli, and strategies that support generalization and maintenance of skills.

Clinical implications relevant to pediatric and early intervention settings will be discussed, including applications within play routines, classroom environments, and daily activity schedules to support functional communication development. Considerations for implementation fidelity and intervention planning will also be addressed.

The presentation will conclude with a brief overview of recent translational work extending SFP beyond pediatric populations. Preliminary findings from a novel application demonstrate the successful use of script fading to teach an adult with autism to memorize and perform dramatic scripts, highlighting the potential for lifespan application of this intervention. Implications for future research and clinical practice will be discussed.

Biography

Randi A. Sarokoff, Ph.D., has been a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst since the inaugural certification exam in June 2000. She now holds the BCBA-D (Board Certified Behavior Analyst-Doctoral) title, which was introduced in 2009. Dr. Sarokoff earned her doctorate in Psychology: Learning Processes and Behavior Analysis from The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York. Currently, she is an Associate Professor and the Program Coordinator for the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Graduate Programs within Kean University's Department of Special Education and Literacy. Previously, she served as the Executive Director of the School of Special Education and Literacy at Kean University for five years.