



The Efficacy of Supporting Joint Attention

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Joint attention is one of the skills humans develop to facilitate social communication and connectedness to others. Most young children develop effective social communication by learning joint attention skills along with other pivotal social skills like eye contact, vocalizations, and social referencing before mastering more complex cognitive and language skills. A recent CASEmaker bibliography (Hamby, 2023) available on the FIPP website (www.fipp.org) includes references providing an overview of joint attention, difficulties in developing joint attention, and strategies to develop and maintain joint attention. The references in the CASEmaker support increasing both practitioners' and caregivers' knowledge of how joint attention skills impact social engagement and how early intervention strategies improve joint attention skills of children with autism spectrum disorder. Joint attention is "social sharing of awareness, experience, affect, or interest" (Holth et al., 2009), and is often exemplified by following the eye gaze of another person or shifting eye gazes between persons to share interest in an object or event (Salley & Colombo, 2016; Van Hecke et al., 2016). Joint attention is a specific communication skill involving the understanding of others' intentions (Mundy et al., 2007).

Conceptualization

Joint attention is fundamental to a child's ability to learn, develop language, and understand social interactions. Joint attention promotes language acquisition, helps a child to indicate their interests to others, and enables a caregiver to understand early child communicative vocalizations. Also, joint attention is pivotal in providing a foundation for imitation and social engagement. An early interventionist with knowledge of joint attention, an understanding of its

importance to other higher skills, and strategies to facilitate joint attention can help a caregiver improve a child's joint attention and advance social communication skills.

Operationalization

Practitioners can help expand a caregiver's knowledge and capacity to help a child develop this pivotal social communication skill by supporting a caregivers' ability to learn and use multiple responsive strategies to increase a child's joint attention across everyday activities and routines. By helping caregivers understand why the joint attention strategies work and supporting generalization to other settings, practitioners help build the capacity of the family to promote the child's joint attention throughout the child's day.

Outcomes and Benefits

Research studies have shown using responsive strategies that focus on joint attention (e.g., no demands from caregiver, limit talking by caregiver, join in child's interest activity, let the child lead, stay in line of sight, pause for child's response) helps to increase a child's attention, initiation, and joint attention. Children with positive social behaviors are more successful in joining in family activities and routines, and this success makes activities and routines more pleasurable for the children and their family members. Children interacting more with their caregivers provides many opportunities to observe and learn from them.