



# INCREASING INDEPENDENT THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOR IN INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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# WHAT TRAITS ARE NECESSARY FOR SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENCE?

- LEARN - from your past
  - PREPARE – for the future
  - LIVE – in the present
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# TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY ONE MUST THINK INDEPENDENTLY

- To initiate actions and adjust our behavior as needed without outside prompting, the direction must come from within the person.
- What neuro-cognitive and executive function processes are needed for independent information processing?

# TO LEARN FROM YOUR PAST

- Rote Memory – Remember the event
- Analytical Skills – Understanding what went right or wrong and why it did so
- Working Memory – To remember and think at the same time

# LEARNING FROM YOUR PAST AND ASD

- Rote Memory – Usually well developed unless person was not paying full attention at the time.
- Analytical Skills – Often strong for areas of interest but much less consistent for social, emotional, and navigational areas.
- Working Memory – Typically poor unless high familiarity with what person has to think about.

# TO IMPROVE LEARNING FROM YOUR PAST

- Rote Memory – Repeatedly talk about information out loud or write it down to force attention and transfer to rote memory.
- Analytical Skills – Place events, actions, and consequences on a chart or drawing for person to see the connections and relations.
- Working Memory – If event is part of rote memory or displayed visually then working memory is not needed for analysis. Typically difficult to develop.

# USING VISUAL SUPPORTS TO ENHANCE DECISION MAKING

- Example: Visual Support Guide for making a decision about what coat to wear for the weather.

# TO PREPARE FOR YOUR FUTURE

- Planning – Identify what is wanted and what is needed to achieve it.
- Generate Alternatives – In case plans do not go as expected
- Be open emotionally to change and uncertainty



# PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE AND ASD

- Planning – Can sometimes identify goals but typically poor at breaking down goals into achievable steps.
- Generate Alternatives – Typically poor
- Be open emotionally to change and uncertainty – Typically very poor

# TO IMPROVE PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

- Planning – Use outlines and visual guides to structure long term goals and short term objectives. Repeatedly ask how are you going to do that?
- Generate Alternatives – Use memory and research to generate ideas. What else could you do?
- Be open emotionally to change and uncertainty – Rehearse coping statements and develop concrete strategies.

Lamp doesn't work

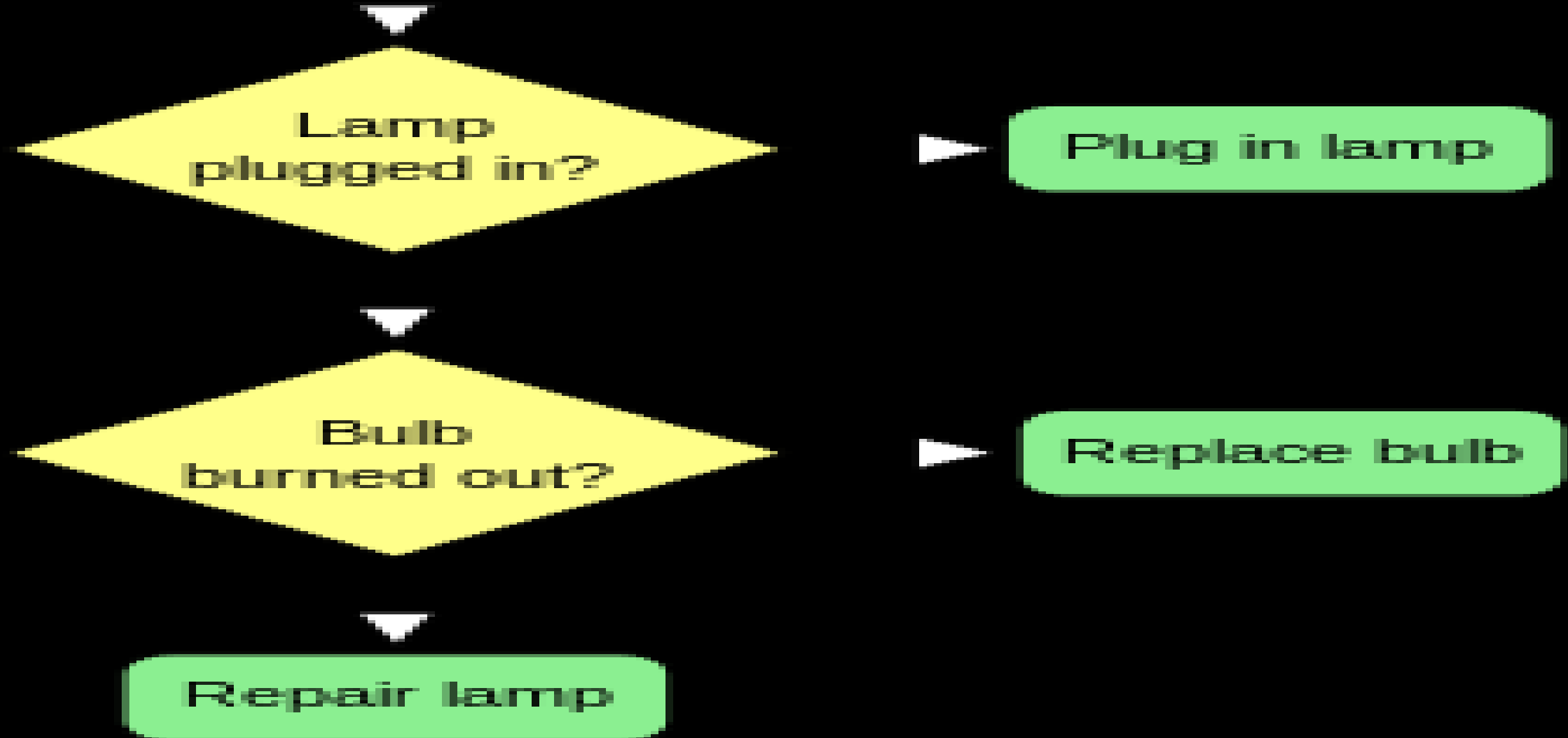
Lamp  
plugged in?

Plug in lamp

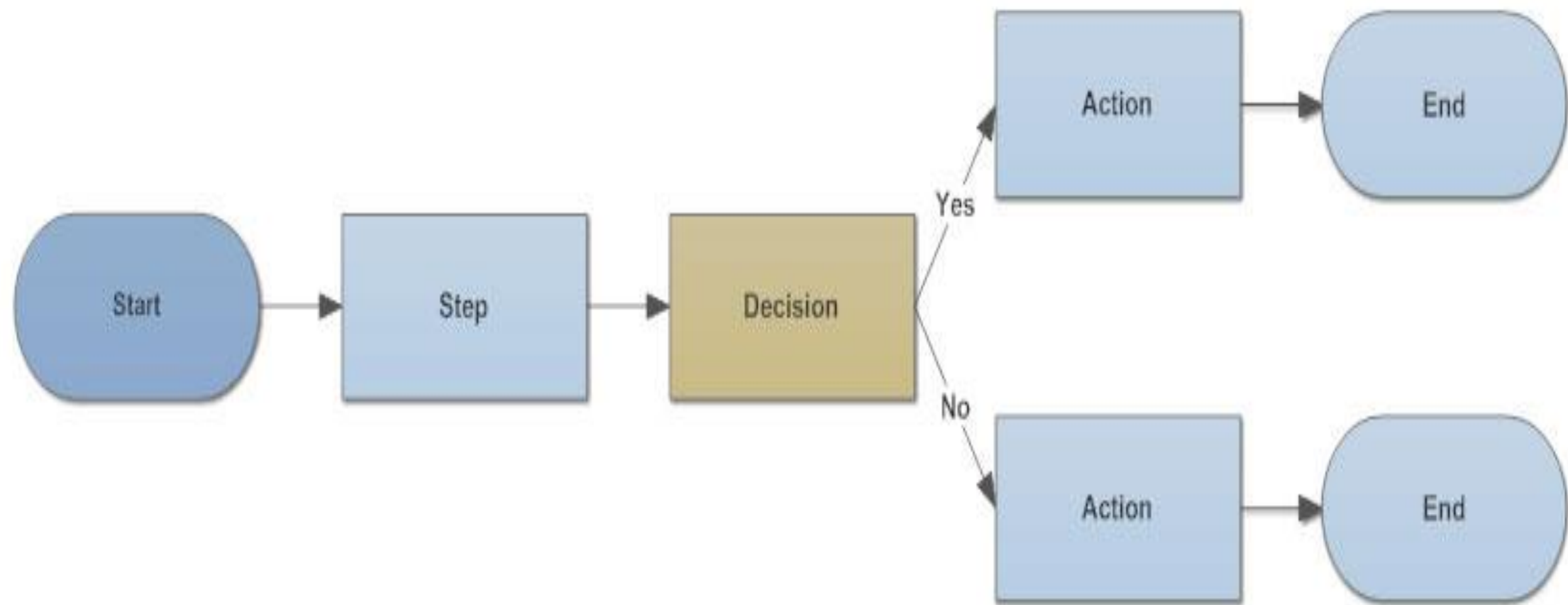
Bulb  
burned out?

Replace bulb

Repair lamp



## A Basic Flowchart



# Decision Grid II

Identify the Problem: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Choices	Benefits (short-term)	Benefits (long-term)	Costs (short-term)	Costs (long-term)

# Decision Making Grid

	<b>Alternatives</b>	
	<b>Sleep late</b>	<b>Wake up early to study</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Enjoy more sleep</li><li>•Have more energy during the day</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Better grade on the test</li><li>•Teacher and parent approval</li><li>•Personal satisfaction</li></ul>
<b>Decisions</b>	<b>Sleep late</b>	<b>Wake up early to study for test</b>
<b>Opportunity Cost</b>	<b>Extra study time</b>	<b>Extra sleep time</b>
<b>Benefits Forgone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Better grade on the test</li><li>•Teacher and parent approval</li><li>•Personal satisfaction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Enjoy more sleep</li><li>•Have more energy during the day</li></ul>



# Thinking at the Margin

- When you decide how much more or less to do, you are **thinking at the margin**.

Options	Benefit	Opportunity Cost
1st hour of extra study time	Grade of C on test	1 hour of sleep
2nd hour of extra study time	Grade of B on test	2 hours of sleep
3rd hour of extra study time	Grade of B+ on test	3 hours of sleep

# TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT

- Desire/Motivation – To be in the current situation
- Awareness – Focus on current situation and avoid distraction
- Emotion Regulation – To tolerate being in the situation



# LIVING ON THE PRESENT AND ASD

1

Desire – Typically there for interest areas but not for other situations.

2

Awareness – Often distracted by either own thoughts or outside influences

3

Emotion Regulation – Can become overwhelmed and frustrated easily leading to avoidance of situation.

# TO IMPROVE LIVING IN THE PRESENT

- Motivation – Explain benefits of awareness. Associate activity with person's interests or desired outcome. Positive Motivation typically better than negative motivation.
- Awareness – Limit physical distractions, increase energy, and provide concrete strategy to temporarily suspend recurring thought
- Emotion Regulation – Create concrete calming procedure and provide frequent breaks in between periods of awareness.

# VISUAL SUPPORT FOR COPING MODEL

- Feeling Thermometer

# THREE BIGGEST THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Over-rehearsal
- Visual Supports
- Google is my friend.

## Resources

### INDIANA RESOURCE CENTER FOR AUTISM

- [Skills for the Future](#)
- [Supported Living; It's a New Direction](#)
- [The Puzzle of Lifestyle Planning](#)
- [Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)
- [Work Study and Supported Employment: One School District's Approach](#)
- [Increasing Independence in Adults](#)
- [My Vote Counts](#)

- Articles
- Transition From School to Adulthood for Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorders Review and Recommendations. Dawn R. Hendricks, Paul Wehman
- Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, March 2009
- © 2009 Hammill Institute on Disabilities
- 10.1177/1088357608329827
- <http://focus.sagepub.com>
- <http://online.sagepub.com>
- Citation: Hume, K., Loftin, R., & Lantz, J. (2009). Increasing independence in autism spectrum disorders: A review of three focused interventions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 39, 1329-1338.