

Child Directed Play Skills for Young Children on the Autism Spectrum

John Paul Abner, Ph.D.

Milligan College

PCIT International Certified Master Trainer

Many interventions use Child Directed Play

- Floor Time
- Incredible Years
- Parent Child Interaction Therapy
 - Promising treatment for children on the autism spectrum with disruptive behavior issues.

What's so different about PCIT?

- It is a “doing” therapy.
- Hand's on treatment approach
- Parents/caregivers are trained in skills during therapy that are easy to take home.
- It is not a parenting class
 - Specific set of skills to work with specific set of problems.
- Therapists are in the role of coach and educator.
- It works!

PCIT is comprised of two very distinct components

Child Directed Interaction (CDI)

- Developmental Play Skills
- Parent as play therapist.
- Five minutes a day
- Child leads the play.



Child directed interaction helps parents of children with autism spectrum disorder to get into their child's world



Child Directed Interaction

- Improves parent's plays skills.
- Improves child's self-esteem.
- Promotes warmth in the parent-child relationship.
- Promotes language skills.
- Promotes concept formation.
- Helps the parent appreciate the child more.
- Increases the parent's self-esteem
- Gives child an appropriate place to lead

Parent Directed Interaction

- Structured discipline techniques.
- Teaches the child to obey parents.
- Modifies problematic behaviors



If PCIT is so great, then why haven't I heard about it before?

Child Directed Interaction Skills

Avoid Skills

Avoid criticism

- Doesn't work to decrease bad behaviors
- Often increases the criticized behaviors
- May lower the child's self-esteem
- Creates an unpleasant interaction



Avoid commands.

- Commands lead the play.
- Commands can lead to unpleasant interactions if child disobeys.
- Two types of commands.
 - Direct: “Sit down” “Put that away”
 - Indirect:
 - “Why don’t you sit here?”
 - “Let’s clean up the room.”

Avoid questions.

- Leads the play instead of following it
- Questions are often hidden commands or suggestions.
- May seem like you aren't listening or disagree with the child
- May suggest disapproval



CDI Skills

Pride Skills

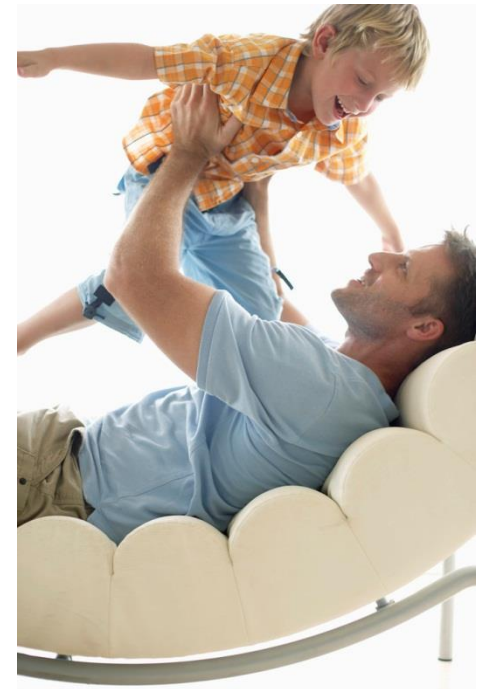
Pride skills

- Praise
- Reflect
- Imitate
- Describe
- Enjoy



Give Labeled Praise to appropriate behavior.

- “That’s terrific counting”
- “I like the way you are playing so quietly.”
- “You did a nice job on that building.”
- “Your design is pretty.”
- “Thank you for showing the colors to me.”



Why praise?

- Causes the behavior to increase
- Lets the child know what you like
- Increases the child's self-esteem
- Adds to warmth of the relationship
- Makes both parent and child feel good

Reflect appropriate talk.

Child: "I made a star."

Parent: "Yes, you made a star."

Child: "I like to play with this castle."

Parent: "This is a fun castle to play with."



Why Reflect?

- Shows the child you are really listening
- Demonstrates acceptance and understanding of the child
- Improves child's speech
- Increases verbal communication

Imitate appropriate play

Child: “I’m putting baby to bed.”

Parent: “I’ll put sister to bed, too.”

Child: (Uses a dump truck.)

Parent: (Uses a dump truck)



Why Imitate?

- Lets child lead
- Approves child's choice of play
- Shows child that you are involved
- Teaches child how to play with others (e.g. basis of taking turns)
- Tends to increase the child's imitation of what you do

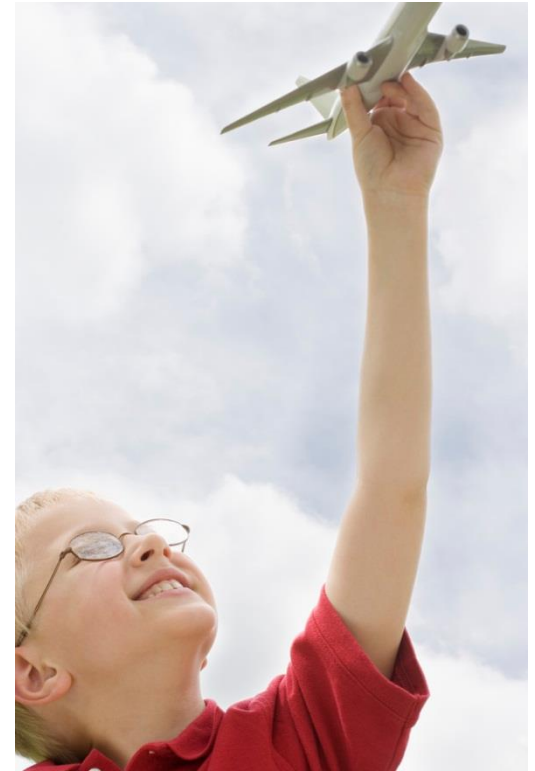
Describe appropriate behavior.

- “You picked up the red block.”
- “You’re making a tower.”



Why Describe?

- allows child to lead
- shows child that you are interested
- teaches concepts
- models speech
- holds child's attention
- organizes child's thoughts about play



Enjoy

- Let's child know that you enjoy spending time with the parent
- Increases the warmth of play.



Ignore negative behavior

(Unless it is dangerous or destructive)

Child: (Whining) I want the toy you have.

Parent: (Continues to play with toy)

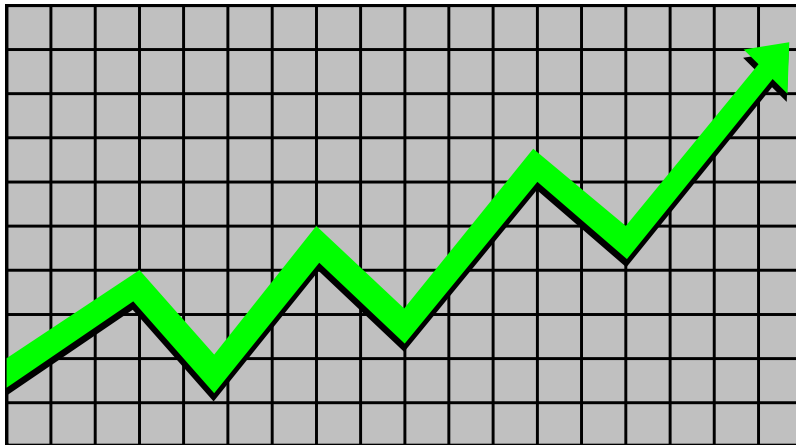
Child: (hits parent)

Parent: (Stops play and administers appropriate discipline)

Why Ignore?

- Although behavior may increase at first, consistent ignoring decreases many behaviors
- Helps the child to notice the difference between your responses to good and bad behavior

What will happen when you ignore behavior?



- Extinction burst
- Must coach parents about how to cope with extinction burst.

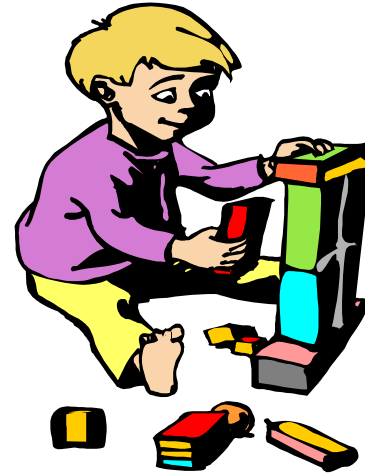
If play behavior is dangerous or destructive then end “special play time” and engage in normal discipline

CDI is an extremely verbal interaction

- 10 descriptions
- 10 reflections
- 10 labeled praises

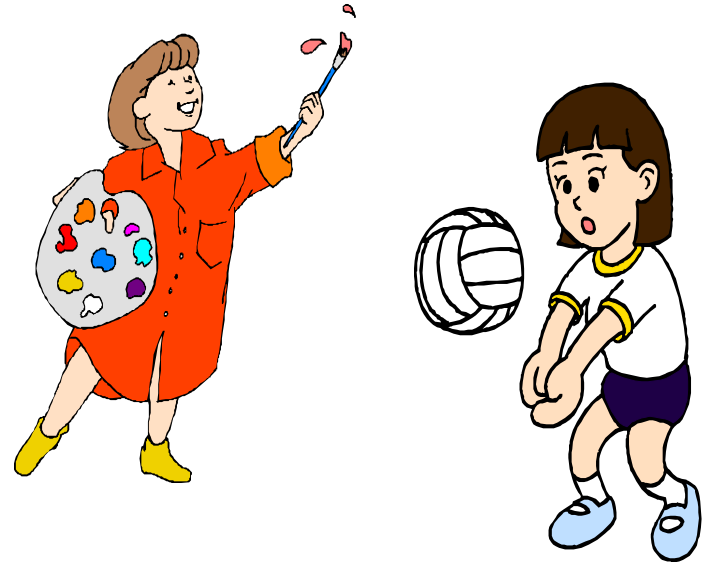
Toys that work well with CDI

- Construction toys
- Creative toys
- Non messy art activities
(crayons, etc.)
- Playskool barns, house, etc.



Toys to avoid during CDI

- Board games
- Pretend talk toys
- Toys that encourage rough play.
- Toys that encourage aggressive play.
- Toys that encourage messy play.



Time to Play

- Parent
- Child
- Pick a toy
- Role play for 5 minutes each in each role.
- Child misbehaves in final minute.