



***Better Together:  
Relationship based programming  
for students who have visual  
impairment and social  
communication deficits***



Presented by  
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New Mexico School for the Blind and  
Visually Impaired



## Guiding Principles for Relationship Based Teaching

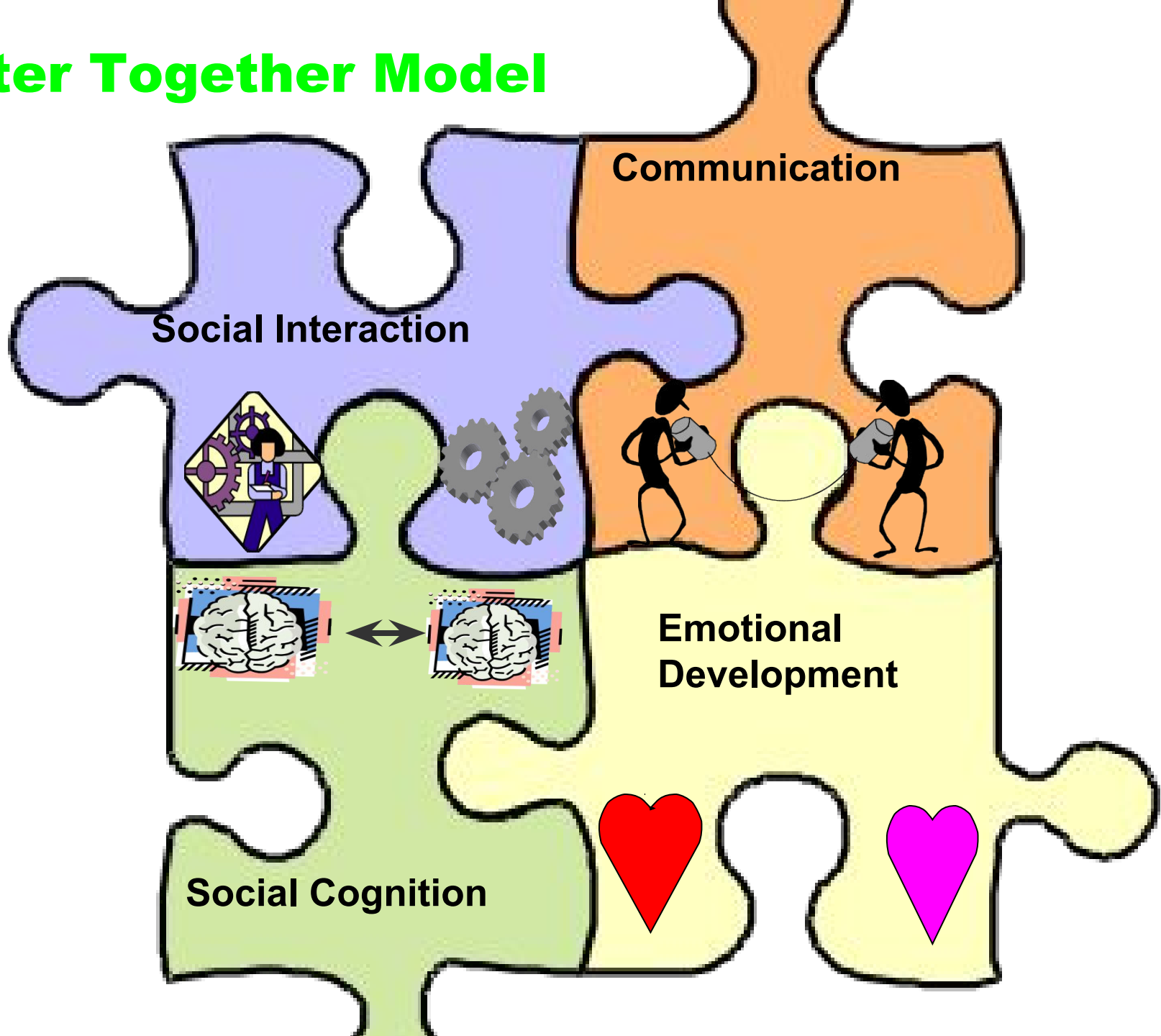
- **Relationships** are the foundation for all other learning.
- **Normal developmental** sequences and processes should be our guide.
- **The impact of the visual and neurological challenges on social learning** should be understood by all who interact with students.
- **Interdependence** (not independence, not codependence)
- Work for **Balance and Equity**
  - turns
  - questions/ corrections: comments/ positive feedback
  - student interest : adult interest.
- **Learning should be FUN** for grownups too (monitor your own emotional barometer)

# Autism Spectrum Disorder:

## Diagnostic Criteria and Associated Features

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities as manifested by at least two associated behaviors.
- Symptoms must be present in early developmental period
- Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning
- Disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay.

# Better Together Model



# Social Interaction...

## it's part of the ECC



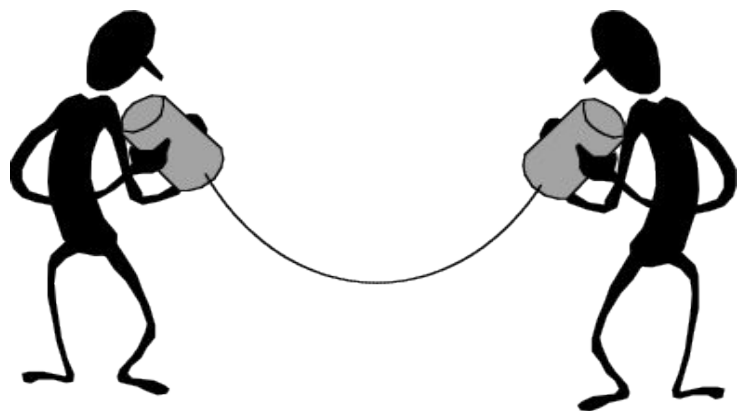
- **Skills used to initiate, maintain, and end interactions (both verbal and nonverbal).**
- **Ability to interact in varied contexts with varied partners.**
- **Includes participation, body language, imitation, repair strategies, social conventions.**

# Examples of social interaction objectives

- Level 1: Maintains proximity to partner for brief periods.
- Level 2: Imitates familiar actions, words, or sounds.
- Level 3: Fluidly transitions from one social routine to another to extend engagement
- Level 4: Repairs interactive breakdowns with support.
- Level 5: Uses conventional social behaviors (please, thank you, compliments, apologies)

# Communication...

## it's not just for SLP's



- Purposeful behavior used to convey a message to others.  
Components :
  - **Form:** the vehicle for conveying meaning (words, pictures, signs)
  - **Content:** the meaning or message in a communicative exchange (vocabulary/ topics)
  - **Functions:** purposes for communication (requesting, labeling, describing)

# Examples of communication objectives

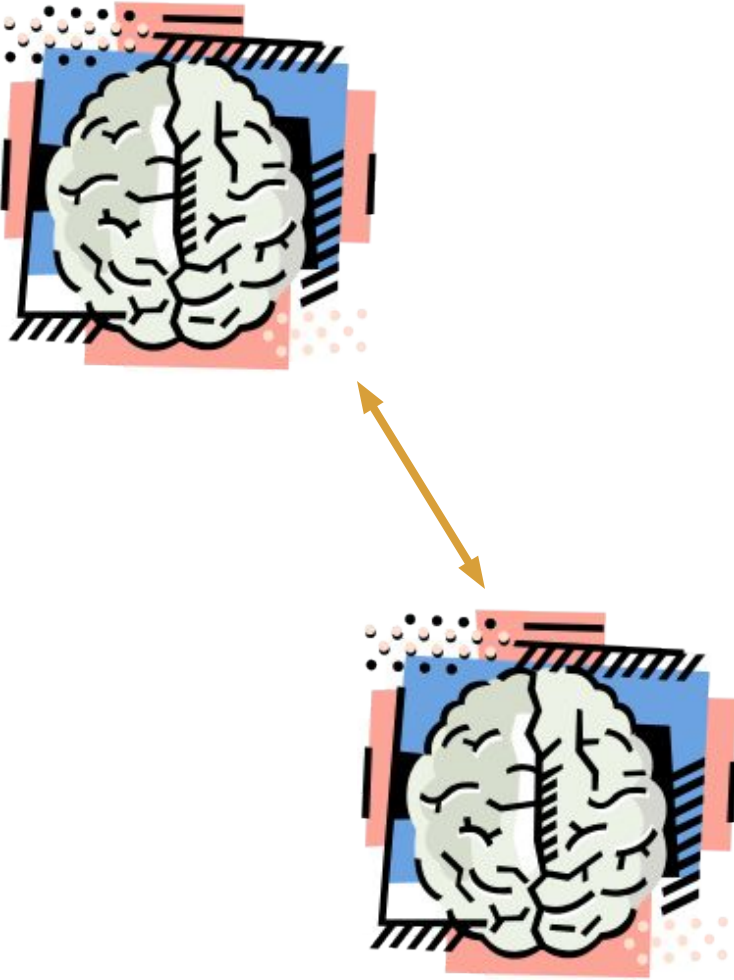
- Level 1: Intentionally requests/ protests.
- Level 2: Comments, labels
- Level 3: Communicates about non-present events.
- Level 4: Uses written form to communicate
- Level 5: Infers meaning; uses abstract vocabulary



# Social Cognition...

## more ECC

- The ability to understand social situations .
- Use of cognition to problem-solve and make sense of emotions, interactions, and communication.
- Naming emotions, use of play to represent social situations, use of reading and writing to clarify social rules and relationships, perspective-taking

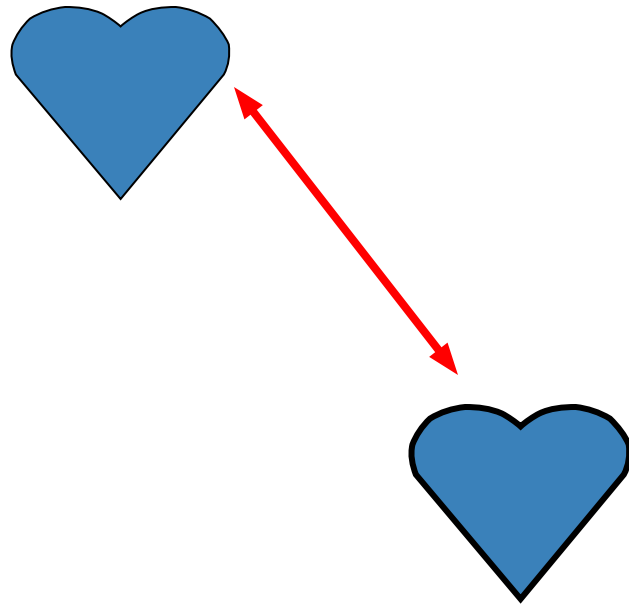


# Examples of social cognition objectives

- Level 1: Visually or tactually explores face/ body of partner; recognizes and differentially responds to familiar people
- Level 2: Demonstrates joint attention; parallel play; functional play with objects
- Level 3: Recognizes/ labels basic emotions in self and others; cooperative play, symbolic play.
- Level 4: Predicts emotions in self/ others; dramatic play, games with rules.
- Level 5: Negotiates compromises; compares own strengths, interests, challenges to another person's

# Emotional Development...

## the impact of ONH

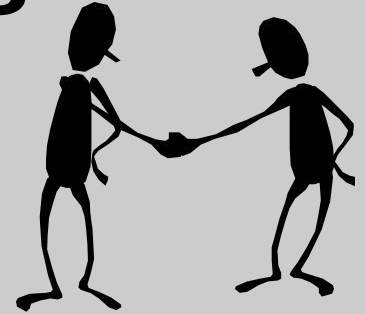


- Development of concept of self in relationship to others. Necessary for establishing relationships and for monitoring/modifying own behavior.
- Understanding of feelings, reciprocity, experience sharing, social referencing, understanding and use of calming techniques and coping strategies.

# Examples of Emotional Development Objectives

- Level 1: Socially references partners during fun activities.
- Level 2: Practices calming activities during low-stress times.
- Level 3: Synchronizes and coordinates movements/sound play.
- Level 4: Seeks adult help in moderating emotions.
- Level 5: Develops true, mutually-valued friendships.

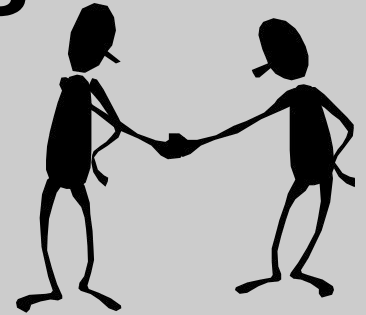
# Strategies for Building Relationships



## 1. Be predictable.

- Use structure to support activities (e.g., routines with consistent beginning, ending and sequence of steps, pictures, objects or tactile symbols to cue responding, organize materials in predictable way, calendar or anticipation systems to help teach time concepts).
- Control the sensory aspects of the environment (visual clutter, sound, touch).
- Use consistent introductions, associated activities, scheduling, touch (hand-under-hand to explore) and language.

# Strategies for Building Relationships



## 2. Use modeling strategies

- Teach, don't test (describe and comment, reduce questioning)
- Models are not always prompts to imitate.
- Think out loud
- Affective involvement
- Creativity and humor
- Connecting language

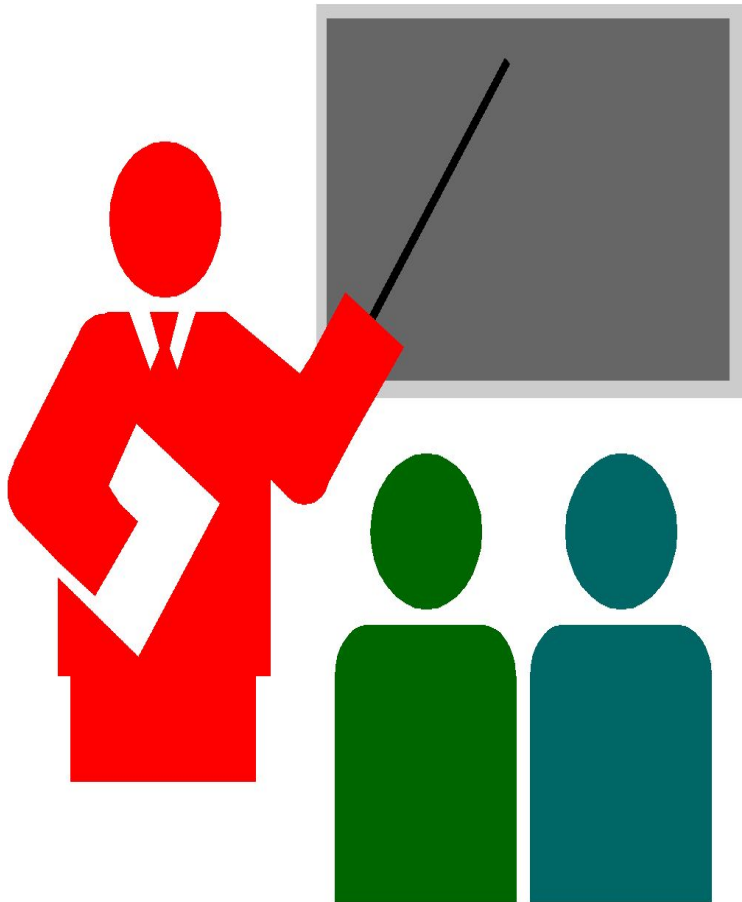
# Strategies for Building Relationships



## 3. Work to achieve balance and equity

- Balance number of adult-student turns.
- Comments and positive feedback: questions and directions (at least 1:1, 2:1 when establishing a relationship).
- Balance adult and student preferred activities/ topics for interaction
- Get something back and tell her how she makes you feel.
- Monitor your own emotional barometer.
- Work toward balanced control--if student was leading most activities initially, gradually increase adult control. If adult made all decisions at the beginning, gradually increase student input.
- Use sincere and specific compliments and encouragement.
- Scaffold to maintain a high level of participation and engagement, flexibly moving between levels of demand and support.
- See each other as sources of reward, not demand.

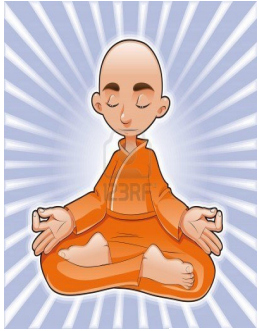
# Approaches to teaching others: Social Skills Classes



- Direct instruction in specific social skills.
- Help to highlight or clarify skills taught using imbedded instruction.
- Best for students with basic language skills
- Methods may include role play, student-specific problem solving



# Approaches to Teaching: Imbedded Instruction



- Activity-based instruction, in which skills are imbedded into interactive routines, e.g.
  - Yoga
  - Cooking
  - I love you rituals
  - Collaborative writing/ Drama
- May be combined with direct teaching in social skills classes.
- Good for students with varied cognitive and language abilities.



# Why I LOVE “I Love You Rituals”

- Predictable and structured
- Can be expanded and modified in many ways.
- They are simple and don't require a lot of planning and materials.
- Can be shared easily with parents, teachers, siblings.
- Provide foundation for building calming activities to assist in self-regulation
- **KIDS LOVE THEM!!**

Bailey, B. (2000) *I Love You Rituals*. New York: Harper Collins



## Important Principals of “I Love You Rituals”

- The adult is in control.
- The routine should convey the message of safety and security.
- Have fun, even if you do it alone at first.



## Why are “I Love You Rituals” so helpful for children with combined social and visual challenges?

- Use of movement and affective attunement as primary modes of communication and engagement.
- Meaningful/ functional context for use of residual vision and hearing.
- Help in establishing bond with adult as foundation for social/cognitive learning.
- Limited use of objects, which may distract from human Interaction.
- Reinforce concept of safety in human relationships.

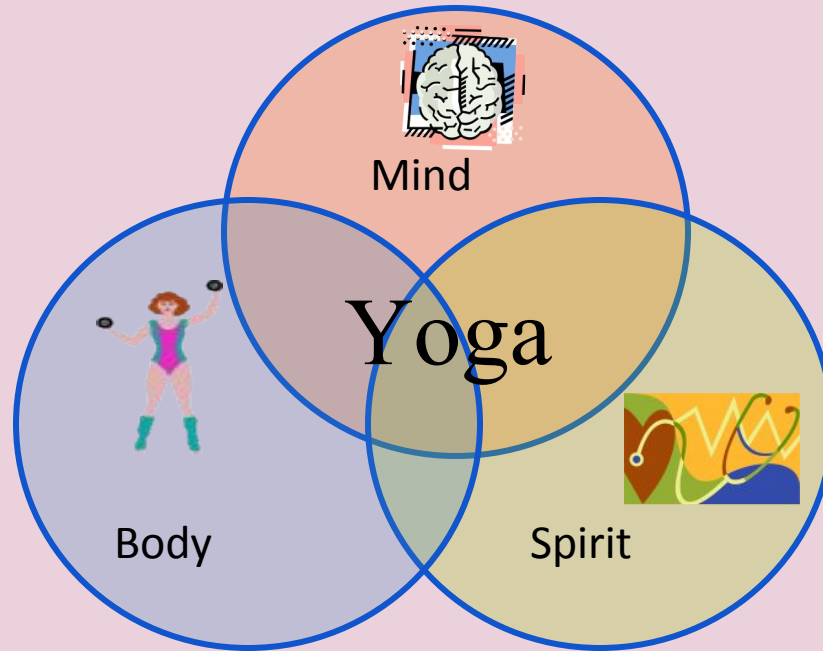
# Using Yoga to Build Relationships Through Movement and Sound



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# Goal of Yoga: Integration of Mind, Body, and Spirit



# Typical yoga activities

- Mantra (yoga sounds)
- Pranayama (breath awareness)
- Asana (Postures and exercises)
- Savasana (deep relaxation)
- Meditation (quiet/alert time)

# Areas of Focus for Children with Visual Impairment and additional Challenges

- Emotional Regulation
- Connections to others
- Creativity/ Symbolic thinking



# Teaching emotional regulation

- Use the emotion meter
- Sa Ta Na Ma (loud-quiet distinction)
- Snake (active-passive distinction)
- Butterfly (nervous-calm-sleep)



# The Emotion Meter

The following slide shows a graphic representation of the emotion meter, which I have used to help children quantify their levels of emotional arousal. Another sample of the meter is shown in the *Better Together* book on page 298. In the graphic representation, levels of arousal are graphed and described numerically from low (0-10) to high (80-100). Each level corresponds to a character or an event which may occur on the pretend row boat ride enacted by the adult and child together. As the adult guides the child through this imaginary/ sensory experience, s/he models the experience of getting excited/ upset, then calming down, repeating the experience with each new encounter along the way. The routine provides a context for practicing calming strategies.

The emotion meters have been adjusted, based on various characters which have been developed over the years, so the samples you see in the following slides may include new and different characters than those depicted on the following emotion Meter slide (e.g. the flying monkey instead of the alligator).

**SA TA NA MA (#80)**

**SA TA NA MA (#50)**

**SA TA NA MA (#30)**

**SA TA NA MA (#10- WHISPER)**

**----- (0-SILENT)**

**SA TA NA MA (#10 WHISPER)**

**SA TA NA MA (#30)**

**SA TA NA MA (#50)**

**SA TA NA MA (#80)**

# Other Emotion Meter Yoga Activities: the Sa Ta Na Ma chant (pg. 299)

This powerful mantra provides a way to practice regulating loudness of the voice, as we chant together, using the finger movements shown on Page 299, beginning loud (#80), moving to moderate intensity (#50), then to quiet voice or whisper (#10) and finally to a silent (“meditative”) finger-only (#0). We may go up and down this scale several times, with a specified number of repetitions per intensity level. There are many theories on the value of this particular mantra, and I must say that (for whatever reason) I have found it calming for both adults and students, and have seen students initiate the finger movements for self-calming when in stressful situations.

For those who are interested, one translation of the chant is:

SA is the beginning, infinity, the totality of everything that ever was, is or will be.

TA is life, existence and creativity that manifests from infinity.

NA is death, change and the transformation of consciousness.

MA is rebirth, regeneration and resurrection which allows us to consciously experience the joy of the infinite.

The graphic in the following slide has been helpful with my students, and has been used in Braille format as well.

# Building Connections

- Multilevel groups
- Atmosphere of support
- Humor
- Vary locus of control
- Activities
  - Passing energy
  - Sunflower
  - Dinosaur Walk
  - Forest



# Developing Creativity

- Using body representationally.
- Using sounds in pretend play.
- The Yoga Story





# Shakta Khalsa's Radiant Child Yoga program

[www.childrensyoga.com](http://www.childrensyoga.com)

- Developmentally appropriate.
- Chants and music appeal to children with visual impairment.
- Teaches important social/ psychological concepts: self-respect, caring for others and the environment, awareness and responsibility for body, mind and spirit.
- Flexible, with emphasis on cooperation, development of self-regulation, and having fun.

# Other children's yoga resources:

- Solis, Sydney. *Storytime yoga: Teaching yoga to children through story.* [www.storytimeyoga.com](http://www.storytimeyoga.com).
- Sumar, Sonia. *Yoga for the Special Child: A Therapeutic approach for infants and children with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Learning Disabilities.* [www.yogamovement.com](http://www.yogamovement.com), [www.specialyoga.com](http://www.specialyoga.com)
- Wenig, Marsha. *YogaKids.* [www.yogajournal.com/pracice/210\\_1](http://www.yogajournal.com/pracice/210_1)





## Writing CAN be Child's Play: A Collaborative Writing Program

This is a program I originally developed for students with autism, and later applied to my work with students who also have visual impairments. The program uses writing as a context for teaching play and interaction. Although the primary goals are actually to improve social interactions and play, many students do learn important writing skills as well. I have found that the strategies and methods used are helpful for para-educators who work with students in inclusive settings, and that this approach to writing helps kids learn to enjoy, rather than avoid, writing. The goals for the program can be divided into Process and Product goals, as shown in the following slide.

# Writing Together

Process

Product

Shared  
reference

Play

Language  
Functions

Language  
Content

Writing  
mechanics

Narrative  
structure

Story  
grammar

Language  
form

# Writing Together: Process

## “Writing As Child’s Play”

Writing is play, and its toys are pencils, markers, brailleurs, and keyboard. Like play, writing can be:

- Independent , parallel, or cooperative activity
- Sensorimotor, symbolic or pretend, or rule-based activity.
- A way to help children learn to manage and regulate feelings and emotions.

# Writing Together Products:

## “Can you read the picture in my brains?”

Writing has many visual elements which appeal to the child with autism spectrum disorders.

### **Guiding Principals for the product component:**

- Create work you can be proud of
- Use the written product to help others understand you better-- your relationships, conflicts, joys, hopes.
- Use partial participation strategies.
- Share your work with others.

## Parallels: Social play levels & writing abilities

Social Play Level	Writing Example
<p><b>Isolated:</b> Solitary play without reference to others; with or without objects or toys.</p>	<p>Scribbling with braille or marker; no concern about communicating or sharing ideas with other.</p>
<p><b>Parallel:</b> Playing in a side by side manner, using similar or matching materials, some simultaneous imitation.</p>	<p>Copying/ imitating writing activities of partner. Taking turns scribbling with braille or marker. Adding ideas to partner story.</p>
<p><b>Cooperative:</b> Early playing together, with sharing, turntaking, usually unplanned &amp; loosely structured.</p>	<p>Developing story together to include everyone's ideas, with adult support. Writing has additive quality.</p>
<p><b>Collaborative:</b> planned, coordinated play with well-established roles, often with defined goals.</p>	<p>Writing project planned as group, considering individual strengths/ interests, clearly stated roles &amp; outcomes</p>

## Parallels: Cognitive Play Levels & Writing Abilities

Cognitive Play Level	Writing Example
<p><b>Sensori-motor</b> : focus on actions, sounds, visual &amp; tactile experiences.</p>	<p>Scribbling with focus on movement/ sound effects of marker or braille, rhythm, chants &amp; verses.</p>
<p><b>Early pretend (preoperational)</b>: brief episodes of unconnected representational play (stick as fishing pole, drinking from empty cup)</p>	<p>Ideas disconnected, but suggest emerging concept of story/ pretend Labeling/ naming pictures or braille words.</p> <p>Most writing is about real life activities (experience stories), highlighting fun/ sensory aspects of story.</p>
<p><b>Later pretend (preoperational)</b>: play involves “acting out” connected events with loosely defined/ shifting roles.</p>	<p>Ideas more connected, emerging “parallel stories”</p> <p>Distinguishes between experience stories/ pretend writing.</p>

## Parallels: Cognitive Play Levels & Writing Abilities (continued)

Cognitive Play Level	Writing Example
<p><b>Rule based (early concrete operations)</b> :Play with clear rules/ role definitions (card games, playground games, highly structured dramatic play)</p>	<p>Writing involves original, but standardized plot lines, routinized sequencing, stereotyped/ scripted beginnings, endings, universal themes.</p>
<p><b>Strategy-based (later concrete operations-to-formal operations):</b> Play may be competitive or collaborative, involves foresight and planning (chess, some sports, dramatic magic or comedy shows)</p>	<p>Writing may involve humor, multiple plot lines, surprise endings, and mystery. Use of graphic organizers, outlines and color-coding helps to plan the writing.</p>

# Experience Stories

- Based on student's own activities
- Highlight part that was memorable to STUDENT. (Look for part in which student was engaged or interactive)
- Model language related to student's symbolic or interactive play level (e.g. "together", sound effects)
- Initially, introduce writing as natural ending to activity
- Share story with someone who wasn't there for the experience.
- Little or no sequencing to begin with--later build in beginning, middle and end..



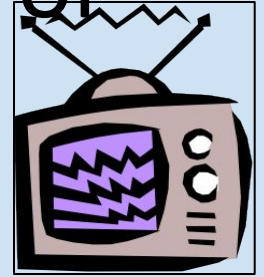
# Pretend play stories

- ❖ Built on pretend play activities which student may have enacted with puppets/ action figures/ dolls./ dress-up materials.
- ❖ For early writers--write in small segments (Do-Write-Do)
- ❖ For more advanced writers--write when pretend play is complete.
- ❖ Story will often be modified or expanded in written form.
- ❖ Look for child's emotional theme and expand during writing (fear, hunger, connection, friendship, conflict, etc.)

# Grownups get to play too!



# Stories Built Around Books, TV, or Video Games



- Choose short, simple books with emotional themes (The Missing Piece, It's not easy being a Bunny, Little Red Hen, 3 Billy Goats Gruff, Where the Wild Things Are, Alexander and the Bad Day)
- For older kids, use video games, longer books (Holes, Wizard of Oz, Twilight, Harry Potter), movies.
- Use book to support writing activity.
- Scaffold between enacting and writing.

# Socially motivated stories--built around student's social issues



- Built around student's social problems, confusions, or conflicts.
- An alternative to Social Stories--not so "in your face"

# Yoga Stories



- Teach characters first using yoga animals.
- Good for kids who like to talk but not “do”--a good way to draw them into yoga group.

# Things to remember



- **INTERDEPENDENCE**-building a concept of **TOGETHER**.
- Use writing to highlight **feelings, relationships**.
- The 2 most important words: **“YES, AND...”**
- **Scaffold** from sensorimotor to pretend play and back again.
- Let your **imagination** fly!





# Problem behavior vs. Coping Mechanisms

The “common problems” discussed in this chapter might be better described as “coping mechanisms.” The behaviors described here fall into 4 categories:

1. Echolalia
2. Rigidity/ Intolerance of change
3. Isolation
4. Mannerisms and self stimulation

People with combined diagnoses of visual impairment and autism are likely to demonstrate these behaviors. If we think of the behaviors as “problems” which must be eliminated, we are likely to be unsuccessful. All behaviors serve a purpose, and if we try to “extinguish” a behavior without thinking about its function and teaching an appropriate replacement, the function may be achieved in another (even less acceptable) way. We must think of ways to

1. Prevent the behavior from occurring so it won't be practiced and become a habit.
2. Teach alternate/ more acceptable and effective ways to achieve the functions of the behavior.

# Problem / Coping Area 1: Echoed Speech



- Possible functions/ purposes:
  - Filling turns in back-and forth conversations (maintaining interactions) when comprehension or language production are limited.
  - Learning/ practicing language
  - Recalling / labeling/ imprinting events
  - Calming/ self-regulating
- Preventive strategies
  - Reduce questioning and expectations for language-based response (even with individuals who appear to have adequate language skills)
  - Respond to/ interpret lengthy echoed responses by “breaking down” rather than building up
  - Teach other strategies for self-regulating
  - Model language to describe emotional level





# Problem area 2: Rigidity/ Intolerance to Change

## **Possible reasons/ functions for rigidity and change intolerance:**

- Confusion about the environment or expectations in the novel situations.
- Over-reliance on strengths of memory to make sense of the world.
- Lack of experience with new people and places.
- Too much or too little structure in daily routines.
- Past experiences which made change unpleasant or fear-inducing.
- Protesting shift from low-demand to high demand activity

## **Preventive strategies**

- Structure activities with a clear beginning and end point so he can anticipate when they will end.
- Use a calendar system to provide scheduling and sequencing information, and to give him information about upcoming changes.
- Build variation into activities from the beginning, keeping beginning and end points the same and changing middle steps.
- Teach change tolerance on a daily basis, systematically building in changes.
- Carefully sequence high and low demand activities, so that he doesn't go from his favorite to least favorite activity suddenly .

# Rigidity/ Intolerance to change, cont'd



- Responses to rigidity

- Be patient and plan transition time into your schedule ( remember, this is a big part of what this student needs to learn—as important as math or PE class).
- Vary the person and words used to cue the student to make the transition, so that refusal to transition (and all the interactions that accompany it) does not become a routine in itself.
- Use concrete materials (objects, pictures, symbols) to cue student to next activity.
- If the student has shut down or begun to tantrum, reinstatement of participation and interaction with adults or peers becomes the goal—use familiar hand games, verbal routines, tickle games to re-establish a connection and shape the transition.
- If you can't get the student to fully participate in the transition, bring materials to him/her and support partial participation in refused activity.
- After the incident is over, re-think as a team and try to generate preventive strategies for next time



# Problem/Coping Area 3: Isolation

## Reasons or Functions for Isolation

- Poorly developed skills for engaging and interacting.
- Lack of clear input in social situations, due to visual problems and/ or neuropsychological issues.
- Poor processing of sensory information—sounds may seem too loud, touch may seem too rough, smells may be too strong, and visual input may fluctuate with changes in lighting and sensory arousal level.
- Inconsistent responses of others in the environment to previous efforts to engage and explore the social world.
- Emotional regulation (she may enjoy time with others, but need more time than we realize to calm down, relax, process, and plan interactions).

## Preventive strategies:

- Use the games, rituals and strategies you've learned in this course (chapters 4-6 of this course) to TEACH the social interactive skills we often learn intuitively.
- Shape and gradually increase amount of time he spends in short pleasurable interactive rituals, first with familiar adults/peers/siblings.
- Use familiar interactive rituals and routines as “warmups” or buffers to use between alone time and together time activities.
- Teach concepts of “watching” and “practicing”
- Prepare him for his role in social situations through verbal and nonverbal practice.
- Try “backward chaining”, bringing him into group activities toward the end, and gradually increasing time spent with group.
- Provide opportunities for facilitated peer interaction as early as possible, so that s/he and the peers who are part of the community feel confident and comfortable with the interactions.



# Isolation, continued

- Responses to isolating behaviors.

Don't give up. Even if he resists social interaction now, he may change his mind later. As I've worked with individuals with autism and visual impairment over the years, I have seen individuals change dramatically during and after two major periods of neurological/ chemical maturation: after the preschool years, and again during late adolescence/ early adulthood. Actually, this is not so very different from the pattern most of us exhibit. We usually end up with many of the values and skills which our parents wanted us to have—we just didn't exhibit those skills until we were young adults ourselves (certainly not when we were in the emotional turmoil of puberty!). The lessons you teach now will be easier to re-teach if you and your student have practiced them in the past

(remember, one of the hallmarks of autism is remembering the past).

# Problem/ Coping Area 4: “Mannerisms” and Self-Stimulation

- **Reasons or purposes for using mannerisms/ self-stimulation:**  
Initially,
  - Emotional regulation
  - Seeking or controlling sensory input
- **Later, the behavior may also be a way to**
  - Initiate predictable interactions with others
  - Avoid or redirect adult-directed interactions (“change the topic”)

# Mannerisms/ self-stimulation

## **Proactive/ preventive strategies:**

Think about what sensory or social needs the specific mannerism might be serving and teach an alternate behavior.

- If it is serving a sensory or emotional regulation function, find other activities which serve to calm/ arouse/ provide visual, tactual or auditory input so that the single mannerism doesn't just become a "habit" that doesn't serve its initial purpose. Provide time between other more demanding interactive or academic activities for sensory breaks to practice the activity.
- If it is serving a social function (to initiate or avoid an interaction), teach a communication act to add to it, which will eventually be substituted for the idiosyncratic purpose.

## **Reactive strategies:**

If the behavior interferes with the ongoing activity, support the student with object prompts or physical redirection to continue the activity, or shorten the activity to make it easier for the student to complete. Don't build in a "nag ritual" ("No stimming—time to work") as this can easily be incorporated into the mannerism to make it a dysfunctional social interaction that gets both of you off-track—making the mannerism/ behavior the focus rather than the completion and participation of the work.

# Readings on Challenging Behavior

Hagood, Linda, 2008. *Better Together, Building Relationships with People Who Have Visual Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder (or Atypical Social Development)*, Chapter 8.

Prizant, Barry. Behavior is not the issue: an emotional regulation perspective on behavior

[http://www.barryprizant.com/files/asq14\\_problem\\_behavior\\_part\\_2\\_summer\\_2011.pdf](http://www.barryprizant.com/files/asq14_problem_behavior_part_2_summer_2011.pdf)

Prizant, Barry. Thinking developmentally.

[http://www.barryprizant.com/files/asq19\\_thinking\\_developmentally\\_part\\_2\\_fall\\_2012.pdf](http://www.barryprizant.com/files/asq19_thinking_developmentally_part_2_fall_2012.pdf)