LIFE ISN’T FAIR:
HELPING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM COPE WITH AN IMPERFECT WORLD
HTTPS://AUTISMPARTNERSHIP.COM/CONFERENCES
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CONVENTIONAL WISDOM
• Make Life Easy
• Adjust your expectations
• Protect them from stress
• Make Accommodations

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM
• Consistent Routines
• Reduced Demands
• Silencing The Bells
• Eat what you want

TO ACCOMMODATE OR NOT TO ACCOMMODATE?
• Is it possible that accommodation can actually become the handicap?
TO ACCOMMODATE OR NOT TO ACCOMMODATE?

- It is **NOT** helpful to strive to eliminate distress for children with autism.
  - Discomfort is a natural part of life.
- Protecting children from discomfort results in being ill-prepared for life in the real world.

TO ACCOMMODATE OR NOT TO ACCOMMODATE?

- Life is full of disappointment.
  - Swimming pool is closed for repairs?
  - It’s raining and we can’t go outside to play.
  - The internet isn’t working and I can’t watch my favorite YouTube clips.
- Being able to tolerate adversity is an essential life lesson.
- Tolerance is a skill you get better at with practice.

DEVELOPING TOLERANCE

- Tolerance is developed by exposure in the absence of traumatic event.
  - We are "deconditioning" a learned emotional response (respondent extinction).
- Start with minimally stressful dose.
  - Brief duration.
  - Mild intensity.
- Simultaneously teaching "coping" response (operant skill).
  - Reinforcer is child gets to have it their way.
  - Initially contingent only on the passage of time.
  - This prevents despair.
- We can gradually shape alternative behavior ("putting on the brakes").

TOLERATING HAIRCUT

- Sitting still in barbers chair.
- Wear apron.
- Head and face being touched.
- Water mist.
- Combing.
- Sounds Snipping, Buzzing, Blow dryer.
- Vibration.
TOLERATING HAIRCUT

TOLERANCE CHALLENGES ARE EVERYWHERE
- Vacuum cleaner
- Blender
- Coffee grinder
- Wearing a helmet or hat
- Shop is closed
- Giving up preferred item

TOLERANCE: GIVING UP PREFERRED ITEM
- Attachments and preoccupations can interfere with availability for learning
- Child believes they need item in order to achieve comfort and security
- In fact they can learn to soothe themselves and find comfort and enjoyment in a wide variety of things

NEED vs. PREFERENCE
- How Do We Distinguish?
- Detrimental Not To Have It = NEED
- Really Like It = PREFERENCE
- General Need Vs. Specific Preference
  - Need food to stay alive
  - Prefer to eat chocolate cake
**TOLERANCE FOR GIVING UP PACIFIER**

- VIDEO: Julie (5) matching w Mom

**PICKY EATING**

- **Antecedent(s)** 
- **Behavior** 
- **Consequence(s)**
  - (positive and negative)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent(s)</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-preferred food is offered</td>
<td>Rejection of item</td>
<td>Something better is offered</td>
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**PICKY EATING**

- Desensitize (expose at distance in non-threatening manner)
- Shape approximations (touch, smell, etc.)
- Use Nonverbal imitation
- Modeling may help (e.g., peers at school)

**PICKY EATING**

- Consider Targeting related behaviors first
  - using utensils
  - remaining at table
- Determine hierarchy on 1-10 scale
  - (most preferred = ‘10’)
- Start with 8’s and 9’s to get a ‘10’
- May be helpful to tackle flexibility
  - Alterations in highly preferred items
PICKY EATING

WAITING PATIENTLY

- Start in situation where there is an obvious reason why you are waiting
- Let movement toward the desired item be the reinforcer for staying calm
- Use shaping: behavior doesn’t have to be perfect in the beginning stages
- Use a “WAIT” card to represent that the thing you want is coming
- WAIT card becomes conditioned reinforcer

WAITING PATIENTLY

- This app is called “Childrens countdown timer” (free download in app store)
- Recommend turning off ticking sound in settings.
- Can start with duration as short as 10 sec.

WAITING PATIENTLY

1) Child makes request
2) We ask him to wait “a minute” and hand him card that says wait
3) Optional: start timer and allow child to see movement of timer dial. When timer ends, prompt child to hand over wait card.
4) Otherwise child sees you traveling short distance to get item that was requested.
5) Nonstop praise for “waiting nicely”
6) Gradually increase duration.
WAITING PATIENTLY
Trial 1: 20 secs. (cookie)

WAITING PATIENTLY
Trial 6: 70 secs. (coloring)