Teaching "Wait for Instruction" and "Scan Before Responding": A Quick Guide for RBTs

This handout provides simple strategies for teaching learners to **wait for instructions before interacting with materials** and to **scan their environment/instruction before responding**. These skills are crucial for independence, following directions accurately, and reducing impulsive behaviors.

Why are these skills important?

- **Following Directions:** Ensures the learner understands the full instruction before starting a task, leading to more accurate completion.
- **Safety:** Prevents accidental misuse of materials or engagement in unsafe activities.
- **Independence:** Reduces reliance on constant prompting and encourages self-regulation.
- **Executive Functioning:** Builds foundational skills in inhibitory control and planning.
- **Reduced Errors:** Minimizes impulsive responses and the need for error correction.

Teaching "Wait for Instruction"

This skill teaches the learner to pause and listen before touching or manipulating materials.

Strategies:

1. **Set Clear Expectations:** Before presenting materials, explicitly state the rule: "Wait for my instruction before you touch anything," "Ready hands." Use clear and simple language the learner understands.
2. **Control Access to Materials:** Initially, keep materials out of the learner's immediate reach. Present them only when you are ready to give the instruction. Start with smaller arrays and work your way up.
3. **Provide a Visual Cue:** Use a visual signal (e.g., a raised hand, a specific picture card with "Wait") to remind the learner to pause. Pair this with the verbal instruction.
4. **Deliver the Instruction Clearly:** Once the learner is waiting (even briefly), provide a concise and understandable instruction.
5. **Reinforce Waiting:** Immediately and enthusiastically reinforce the learner for waiting, even if it's just for a few seconds. Use preferred items, activities, or verbal praise. Be specific: "Great waiting!" or "I like how you kept your hands still!"
6. **Gradually Increase Wait Time:** As the learner becomes more successful, gradually increase the amount of time you expect them to wait before providing the instruction.

7. **Practice in Different Contexts:** Generalize the skill by practicing waiting in various settings and with different materials and instructors.
8. **Use "First-Then" Statements:** If the learner struggles with waiting, use "First wait, then [activity]." This helps them understand the contingency.
9. **Visual Supports for Tasks:** For multi-step tasks, use visual schedules that clearly indicate when to interact with specific materials.

Example Scenario:

-   **Materials:** Puzzle pieces and a puzzle board.
-   **RBT:** (Holding the puzzle pieces out of reach) "Okay, we're going to do the puzzle. **Wait for my instruction before you touch any pieces.**" "show me ready hands" (Shows "Wait" visual).
-   **(Learner looks at the pieces but keeps hands still - reinforce immediately):** "Great waiting, [Learner's Name]! Now, **find the piece with the red color.**"

Teaching "Scan Before Responding"

This skill teaches the learner to take a moment to look at the relevant information (e.g., task materials, written instructions, the environment) before giving a response.

Strategies:

1. **Explicit Instruction:** Teach the concept of scanning: "Before you answer, look carefully at [the picture/the question/the materials]."
2. **Model Scanning:** Demonstrate how to scan effectively. For example, when presenting a choice of pictures, visually scan each picture and verbalize what you see.
3. **Use Visual Cues:** Employ visual prompts like "Look," "See," or an eye icon to remind the learner to scan. Place these cues near the task or instruction.
4. **Provide Clear Stimuli:** Ensure the materials or instructions are presented clearly and are not cluttered or overwhelming.
5. **Reinforce Scanning:** Immediately reinforce the learner for taking time to scan before responding, even if their initial response is incorrect. Acknowledge the effort: "I saw you looking carefully! Good scanning." Then, provide error correction.
6. **Practice with Different Stimuli:** Practice scanning with various types of materials (pictures, words, objects) and in different tasks (matching, identifying, following written instructions).
7. **Use "Look First" Prompts:** Before asking a question or giving a direction that requires a visual response, prompt "Look first."
8. **Fade Prompts Gradually:** As the learner becomes more independent, gradually fade the visual and verbal prompts to scan.

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9. **Incorporate into Error Correction:** If the learner responds impulsively and incorrectly, prompt them to "Look again" or "Scan carefully" before trying again.

Example Scenario:

- **Materials:** Three picture cards (apple, banana, orange).
- **RBT:** (Placing the cards in front of the learner) "**Look carefully at all the pictures.**" (Points to the cards). "Show me the banana."
- **(Learner looks at all three pictures before pointing to the banana - reinforce immediately):** "Great looking! You scanned all the pictures and found the banana!"

Troubleshooting:

- **Impulsivity:** If the learner is highly impulsive, start with very short wait times or scanning periods and provide frequent reinforcement for any attempt to pause.
- **Difficulty Understanding:** Ensure your language is clear and at the learner's level. Use visuals to support understanding.
- **Lack of Motivation:** Use highly preferred reinforcers to increase motivation for engaging in these skills.
- **Environmental Distractions:** Minimize distractions in the learning environment to help the learner focus on waiting and scanning.

Data Collection:

Track the learner's progress in independently waiting for instructions and scanning before responding. This data will help you determine the effectiveness of your teaching strategies and make necessary adjustments.

By consistently implementing these strategies, RBTs can effectively teach learners the valuable skills of waiting for instructions and scanning before responding, promoting greater independence and accuracy in their learning. Remember to always use positive reinforcement and tailor your approach to the individual needs of the learner.

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