BOUNDLESS ABA

Functional Communication Training

Family Resource

FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Parent Guide

What is Functional Communication Training?

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is a way to help children learn to communicate their wants and needs using appropriate words, signs, pictures, or gestures—instead of crying, yelling, or acting out.

We teach them what to say or do to get something they want. The goal is to replace challenging behaviors with meaningful communication.

How Can Parents Support This At Home?

You can help your child by following their motivation or creating opportunities where they are motivated to communicate—but don't immediately give them the item. Instead, use the moment to teach and prompt a more functional way to ask.

Be A Good Communicator

Model clear and correct speech and language behaviors. Use appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures when communicating with your child.

Consistency

Ensure everyone consistently prompts and responds to any communication attempt, reinforcing its effectiveness. Celebrate every successful communication interaction to build confidence.

Provide Social Interactions

Social interactions are important for a child's development. Encourage your child to engage in playdates and group activities to practice their communication skills in different social settings.

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SETTING UP OPPORTUNITIES
For FCT

Create a calm space with easy access to communication tools like picture cards or a communication board, if applicable. Keep preferred items nearby, but slightly out of reach, to encourage requests. Minimize distractions like loud noises or excessive toys.

Contrive Opportunities

Here's how you can set up situations to encourage communication:

1. Put preferred items out of reach (e.g., on a high shelf, in a clear container, or have an adult hold or control the item).
2. Hold onto a favorite toy instead of handing it over right away.
3. Model playing with the toy in a fun way—make it exciting and engaging so your child is naturally interested.
4. When they show interest, model the word or gesture (e.g., "blocks!").
5. Prompt communication using this approach:
   - Give up to 3 prompts, with a 3–5 second pause between each.
   - If your child doesn't respond after the 3rd prompt, lower the difficulty—allow them to just point, look at the toy, or reach toward it to earn it.
   - Reinforce any attempt to communicate appropriately by giving the item right away with praise!

Praise Efforts

Celebrate your child's progress. Praise their attempts, even if they make mistakes. Positive reinforcement can boost their confidence and motivation.

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REAL LIFE EXAMPLES
of FCT

Contriving Opportunities Example:

You're holding a toy train your child loves.

1. Show excitement and play: "Choo-choo! Look at the train!"
2. Child shows interest by reaching or smiling.
3. You model: "Train."
4. Wait 3–5 seconds.
5. If no response, repeat up to 2 more times: "Train"
6. If they don't say it, allow them to point, look at the train, or reach for it.
7. Reward their effort—give them the train and say, "Great asking for the train!"

Following motivation Example:

You are sitting on the couch, and your child gets up and walks to the pantry for a snack. You get up and follow them.

1. Child pulls you towards the shelf and points upwards.
2. You say, "You want crackers?" "Crackers" and point to the shelf.
3. Wait 3–5 seconds.
4. If no response, repeat up to 3 times: "Crackers"
5. If they don't say it, allow them to point or guide your hand towards the crackers.
6. Reward their effort—give them the crackers and say, "Thats asking for the crackers!"

Practice Assignment: Teaching Communication

This week focus on setting up 2-3 opportunities for your child to communicate

What you need:
- 2-3 favorite toys (e.g., ball, car, bubbles)
- A small shelf or clear bin to keep toys slightly out of reach

Short-Term Goal: Parents will consistently prompt and reinforce their child's functional communication attempts during daily routines.

Long-Term Goal: The child will independently use functional communication to request desired items and activities, resulting in a reduction of challenging behaviors.

Here's what to do:

1. **Choose one toy and place it just out**

2. **When your child shows interest:**
   - Model the word: e.g., "Ball!"
   - Wait 3-5 seconds.
   - Repeat up to 3 times if needed.

3. **If they don't respond:**
   - Accept any simple communication— pointing, looking at the toy, reaching.

4. **Give the toy with big praise:** "Yay! You asked for the ball!"

We'll discuss your observations next time! What was easy/hard/ surprising?

Quick Tip

If your child is pointing at a toy or trying to grab something, that's their way of saying, "I want that!" Using those moments to teach them how to ask makes learning easier because they're already motivated to get what they want.

SHORT TERM PARENT GOALS

01 **Prompting:** "Given a contrived opportunity, the parent will provide the verbal prompt (e.g., 'Train') with 80% accuracy across 3 consecutive sessions."

02 R**einforcement:** "The parent will provide reinforcement (access to item/activity and praise) within 5 seconds of the child's communication attempt (verbalization, pointing, reaching) in 90% of opportunities across 3 consecutive sessions."

03 **Consistency:** "Across two training sessions, the parent will correctly implement all steps of FCT (prompting, waiting, reinforcing) in 75% of contrived opportunities."

LONG TERM PARENT GOALS

01

Opportunity Creation: "The parent will independently create and implement 2-3 FCT opportunities per day for 5 days a week, with 100% data collection on child's responses for 4 consecutive weeks."

02

Generalization: "In natural settings (e.g., home, park, store), the parent will respond to 80% of the child's spontaneous communication attempts with appropriate FCT procedures across 4 weeks."

03

Problem-Solving: "Given a novel challenging behavior, the parent will identify a communicative replacement and implement FCT strategies with 70% fidelity across 3 sessions."