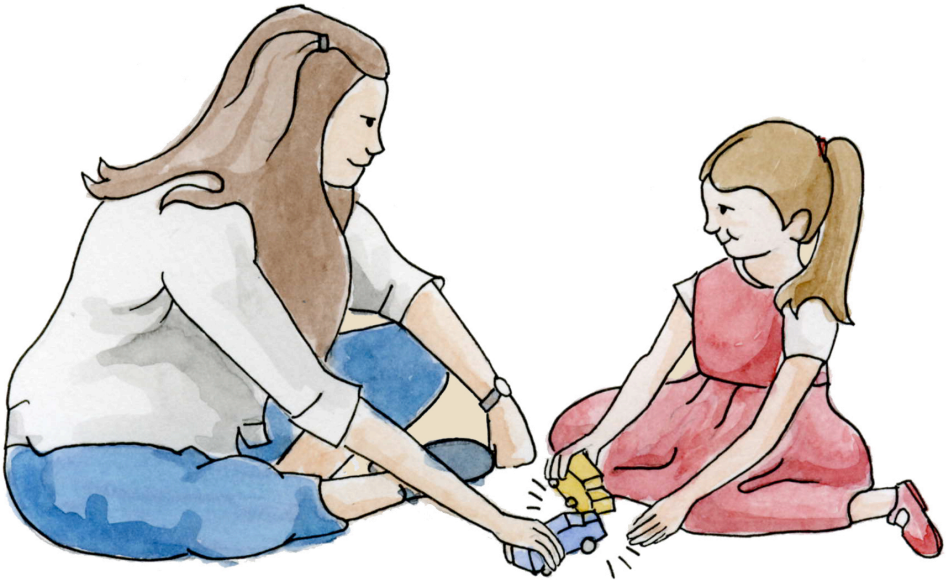
FOCUSED PLAYTIME INTERVENTION



TREATMENT MANUAL

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Outline of Intervention Sessions:

1st Session	**Topic 1:** When and how does my child communicate?
2nd Session	**Topic 2:** What do I hope to accomplish during play?
3rd Session	**Topic 3:** How do I develop a special play time routine?
4th Session	**Topic 4:** How to tackle play one step at a time?
5th Session	**Topic 5:** Who gets to pick the toys?
6th Session	**Coaching Session 1***
7th Session	**Topic 6:** Who decides the 'correct' way of using the toys?
8th Session	**Coaching Session 2***
9th Session	**Topic 7:** How do I speak to my child during play?
10th Session	**Topic 8:** How do I make play more balanced between me and my child?
11th Session	**Coaching Session 3***
12th Session	**Wrap-up Session**

*the interventionist may change the timing of the Coaching Sessions.

Topic 1: Defining the working relationship & When and how does my child communicate?

1. BACKGROUND

The first intervention session has two major goals: (1) to establish a working relationship with the parent; (2) to help the parent develop a thorough understanding of their child's communication skills. The first few intervention sessions lay the foundation for how parent and Primary Interventionist (PI) will work together for the rest of the intervention. Even though this working relationship continues to evolve during the later sessions, it will be increasingly difficult to change the parent's expectations, attitudes, and commitment level. This is why it is very important to be mindful about how you introduce this intervention (its topics, procedures, formats, etc) during the first session. Even more important than verbally describing the nature of this intervention is the style with which you approach the child and his parent.

Develop a relationship with the child. The common bond between parent, Primary Interventionist (PI), and Secondary Interventionist (SI) is the shared excitement about the child. Thus, from the moment you enter the family's home, make use of opportunities to develop a relationship with the child. For example, take time to greet the child, show him the suitcase, involve him in taking the toys out, take the time to be responsive to the child, encourage the SI to engage the child while you are talking to mom. In addition, let the parent know that you are excited about working with her child. Know that most parents of young children with autism don't hear that very often!

Encourage the parent's active participation. This intervention is best understood as a toolbox. What we have to offer are questions, suggestions, and observations. For this reason, the success of the intervention depends largely on the parent's ability to generate answers to these questions, to figure out which suggestions are helpful and which are not, and to validate your observations. This intervention benefits from a parent who is willing to share his thoughts, asks questions, and is open to suggestions. To encourage the parent's active participation during the first session: (a) try to engage rather than lecture the parent; (b) be curious, respectful, and reinforcing about the parent's point of view; (c) raise questions and generate ideas rather than providing answers; and (d) remind the parent that she is the expert and that the intervention is a collaboration.

Introduce the parent to the topics, procedures, and formats of this intervention. When parents sign up to participate in this intervention, they usually have expectations about what parent training entails. An important goal of the first session is to shape these expectations in a way that fits the intervention that we have to offer. On an implicit level, the interventionist can shape the parent's expectations by modeling a responsive interactive style with the child and a collaborative attitude with the parent. In addition, it is helpful to explicitly talk about important features of this intervention (e.g., what is the focus of this intervention, how will the intervention session look like, the collaborative nature of this intervention, etc.).

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Briefly introduce yourself and the format of today's session.
2.2. Videotape an episode of mother - child interaction (MCX).
2.3. Discuss the nature of this intervention (SOMETIMES IT IS MORE SUITABLE TO HAVE THIS DISCUSSION AT THE END OF THE SESSION).
2.4. Work with the parent to develop a profile of the child's communication skills.

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring the Parent Workbook Binder including Topic 1.
3.2. Prepare clips from the Early Social Communication Scale (ESCS). In preparing these clips, review the child's intake ESCS tapes and select 7-10 clips that seem representative of the child's communication profile.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. Briefly introduce yourself and the format of today's session.

Once you enter the home, take a moment to socialize with the parent; also take a moment to greet the child. Briefly introduce the parent to the format of today's session. That is, we will start by videotaping a 10 minute episode of MCX; afterwards, PI and parent will sit down and talk while SI will be available to keep the child (and if necessary his siblings) engaged. Try to keep this initial conversation short (a few minutes); it is not necessary to sit down at this point. One aim of this conversation should be to find a location for today's MCX. Usually, the decision is between the family living room and the child's bedroom. The following factors should contribute to the decision: a) where does the child usually play; b) does the child need an enclosed space (i.e., a room with a door); c) which objects (e.g., TV) are likely to distract the child's attention.

4.2. Videotape an episode of mother - child interaction (MCX).

The episode of MCX videotaped during the first session serves as an important baseline assessment. For this reason, it is important that the videotaping occurs before you introduce any intervention content. The videotaping of MCX is certainly intended to collect data, both for the conversation with the parent and to document intervention progress. However, the videotaping of the MCX has an additional side to it in that it establishes a play ritual. We will talk about play rituals in detail during the third session, however the PI should start to work on developing this ritual in session one. To develop such a ritual it is important that you (a) take time to greet the child; (b) try to make the child curious about the suitcase and its content; and (c) involve the child in taking the toys out. For all of this, the child should be happy, attentive, and curious – so, take your time. Finally, starting in the second intervention session, the videotaping of MCX will be followed by the videotaping of 10 minutes of Therapist-Child Interaction (TCX). In turn, during the first session you should use every opportunity to get to know and establish a relationship with the child.

Give the parent an opportunity to observe you interact with the child. Despite the verbal instructions, the parent might have a variety of implicit assumptions about what you

expect her to do (e.g., she may think that you want her to showcase her child, present his best behavior; she may think you want her to teach her child something new; she may think you want to see how the child engages his parent rather than the other way around). To deal with these implicit assumptions, it might be a good idea to give the parent an opportunity to observe you interact with the child before the videotaping of the MCX. I usually try to involve the child when taking the toys out of the suitcase. Be engaging, friendly, and responsive but don't try to teach the child.

Provide the parent with the following verbal instructions: *"We would now like to see how you typically play with your child. We brought some toys for you to play with. If [child's name] pulls out one of his/ her own toys, that's fine. We will videotape your interaction for 10 minutes. We know that how [child's name] plays during these 10 minutes is not how she always plays. So, afterwards I would be interested to hear how today's interaction might have been different from more typical interactions. There is nothing particular that we would like you to do. Just play as you normally would."*

After the MCX is completed, PI and parent will spend the remainder of the session talking. We recommend that this conversation takes place at a table. Sitting at the dinner table (rather than sitting on the floor in the child's bedroom) helps the parent to focus on the conversation, signals to the child that play (at least with the parent) is finished, and allows the PI to easily introduce the workbook and videos. For Topic 1, the discussion will focus on developing a shared understanding of the child's communication skills. In addition, at the end of this session the parent should have a rough understanding of what this intervention is about. You may discuss the nature of the intervention immediately after the MCX has been videotaped, or you may choose to bring it up at the end of the first session.

4.3. Discuss the nature of this intervention.

Even though it is important that you provide the parent with a rough understanding of what this intervention is about, there is no need to get into too much detail at this point in time.

(1) At the very least, you want the parent to be able to answer a simple question from her spouse (e.g., Spouse: *"How was the intervention session today? What is it about?"*).
(2) Make sure to ask the parent whether she has any questions about the nature of this intervention. Some parents (particularly parents who are fairly educated or have done parent training in the past) may want to know a lot of information upfront. Other parents may require much less information to start with.
(3) If you get the sense that a parent has expectations that this intervention is unlikely to satisfy, gently clarify what this intervention does and does not have to offer.
(4) Make sure to mention how the intervention will practically work (e.g., videotaping of MCX & TCX, video feedback, coaching, workbook, homework assignments).

If you decide to discuss the nature of the intervention immediately after the MCX you may start with an open-ended question: (1) *"Have you ever participated in parent training before? Was it helpful?"* Most parents have some experience with professional support, even if it is just parenting books, conferences, or support groups. It encourages the parent's active participation (by asking about her experiences) and it helps you to evaluate the parents' expectations about parent training. A unique feature of our intervention is that it is individualized (aiming to identify strategies that work for the individual child). (2) *"What kinds of toys does [child]*

play with? What happens if you try to join him with these toys?" This question prepares the parent for the fact that our intervention is exclusively focused on toys (sometimes I ask this question immediately after the MCX while we are still sitting on the floor; I may even ask the parent to show me some of the child's favorite toys). You may say: *"From your description, it sounds like it is pretty difficult to play with [child], particularly when toys are involved. We designed this intervention to figure out what we can do to make play interactions between you and your child more successful."*

If you get the sense that the parent is looking for an "easy fix" for her child. This intervention provides parents with a systematic framework for covering various challenges that adults typically face when playing with a young child with autism. Further, this intervention offers parents a selection of tools that may be helpful in tackling these challenges. However, it is important to recognize that the specific tools we have to offer might work with some children but not with others. For example, allowing children to choose the toys might further social engagement in some children – however, in other children the same strategy might increase the time spent in non-productive activities. For this reason, the most important goal of this intervention is to encourage parents to a) be creative about trying different strategies, and b) provide the parents with the skills necessary to carefully evaluate how their behavior affects the play encounter with their children. Let the parent know that she is the expert on their child. It is up to her to decide what works for her child and what does not. You may say: *"Obviously, there is no 'easy fix'. Every child with autism is unique and strategies that work with one child might not work with another. We view this intervention as sort of a toolbox. We will cover a range of different topics (here, you can point to the examples given on 'Overview I', page 2 in the workbook). For each of these topics we will use a number of different strategies to find out what works for your child and what does not."*

Remind the parent that this project is not only a parent training but also a research project. The fact that this intervention is part of a research project has several important implications: First, this intervention is rather narrow in content. That is, we will exclusively focus on play interactions. Second, we need to carefully document how the interventionist presents the intervention to the parents (treatment fidelity). That is, we will try to videotape the interventionist during conversations with the parent. Third, we do the exact same intervention with many different families, which means that the parent's feedback will influence how this intervention evolves. Finally, to prevent subject attrition you should remind the parent that the outcome and follow-up assessments are extremely important to us (they are the reason for why we can offer this intervention for free!!!).

4.4. Work with the parent to develop a profile of the child's communication skills.

The handouts in the workbook (pages 3 - 6) provide the framework for this discussion. You may start this conversation with an open-ended question: *"How does [child] communicate with you? How does he let you know that wants something or needs your help? How does he let you know when he wants your affection?"*

(1) Explain that children typically communicate for three basic reasons: to connect, to request, and to share. Discuss each of these communicative functions, one at a time. Start by describing how children connect to other people (e.g., during people games); then move on to talk about children's requesting behaviors. Finally, talk about how children share their interest in an object with other people (cover both children's responsiveness to bids for joint attention and children's initiations of joint attention).

(2) For each of the three communicative functions, start by showing the parent video-clips of typically developing children; then ask the parents about their child's communication during similar situations. Enter the information provided by the parents into the workbook. Finally, show the parent a few clips of their own child interacting with a stranger during the ESCS (Alternatively, you may first show the ESCS clips and then ask whether the "observed behaviors seem typical for how the child may act during everyday situations?"). Use this discussion to establish a profile for the child's communication skills – help the parent to appreciate the child's strengths but also recognize her difficulties. The communication profile characteristic for most children with autism includes: a) strengths during people games; b) strengths when requesting objects or assistance (even though the child's communicative means may be rather simple); and c) deficits in joint attention/ sharing an interest.
(3) Conclude this discussion by reviewing the video of this session's MCX. Help the parent to notice the child's communicative signals; also help the parent notice that (very likely) the child has difficulties including the parent when playing with a toy (joint attention deficit).

How to conclude the discussion of the child's communication skills? Essentially, the child's joint attention deficits provide the rational for this intervention. That is, this intervention aims to promote social encounters where parent and child successfully coordinate their attention, maintain a shared interest in a toy, and act towards a mutually agreed goal (e.g., building a tower). In the context of these shared encounters, children will be encouraged to (a) respond to the parent's behaviors (e.g., imitate parental behaviors, respond when the parent attempts to direct the child's attention), and (b) take active steps to include the parents in their toy-directed activity (e.g., referencing the parent when interesting things happen, directing the parent's attention to interesting toys or events).

Ideally, you want to use the child's communication profile to develop the rationale for our intervention. In some cases, it is difficult to develop this argument during the first session (e.g., the child may show some joint attention behaviors, the child's parent may have difficulties understanding the significance of the child's joint attention deficit). If you get the sense that the parent has difficulties understanding (or accepting) this intervention's focus on shared toy play, don't feel like you have to sell this agenda to the parent; our rational will become clearer as the intervention progresses. You may evaluate what the parent concluded from the above conversation by asking: *"How would you feel if [child] would show you something he had found?"* The important message of session one is: Children with autism (including her own child) show a characteristic pattern of strengths and weaknesses in their communicative behaviors. The intervention will focus on how to encourage a range of communication behaviors during toy play.

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

The involvement of fathers: In our experience, it is important that you get to know the child's father. It is also important that the father has a rough idea of what the intervention is about. In order to accomplish this goal we encourage fathers to participate in the first intervention session. For some fathers, this is a lot to ask. Other fathers may be disappointed to hear that the remaining sessions will primarily focus on mothers. If this is the case, you may decide to involve the father in the video-feedback portion of each intervention session.

The parent may be nervous about being videotaped: Particularly during the first session, most parents are nervous about being videotaped. Allow enough time to establish rapport and make her as comfortable as possible. Be understanding and emphasize the advantages of video-feedback. Describe that nowadays video-feedback is frequently used in order to train therapists and teachers. Also, let the parent know that you are aware that being videotaped makes most people uncomfortable, including yourself. Let her also know that most people get used to it rather quickly. Finally, if you notice that the parent is uncomfortable watching herself on tape, focus the video-review portion of the first session exclusively on the child's communication (rather than parent behaviors).

What if the child's communication profile is atypical for autism? Even though most children with autism participate with enjoyment, eye contact and appeals during a song & tickle game, they may not play games such as rolling a ball back and forth. Also, some children with autism rarely request objects or help (they might just go and get the toys themselves or tantrum if this is not possible). Other children may show some joint attention behaviors. If the child you are working with is somewhat atypical for autism, talk to the parents about what you think is unique to their child. Don't force the child to fit the profile that we think is characteristic for autism. This is particularly important when selecting video examples from the ESCS.

What if the parents have issues of their own concern? Parents rarely get the chance to sit down with a professional to discuss their child. Therefore, many parents use this opportunity to raise issues of their own concern. Topics that frequently come up are: a) how to deal with the school district/ regional center in order to get services; b) how to deal with the child's behavioral issues; c) their own sadness and frustrations with parenting a child with a disability etc. Remember, the most important goal of the first session is to develop a working relationship with the child's parent – take your time to listen and talk about the parent's concerns. Remember, the simple fact that you take the time to listen and acknowledge the parent's issues may be sufficient in addressing these issues for now (reflect back what you hear).

What if you run out of time? The first session covers a lot of information. In addition, since this is the first time that you and the parent meet, you (the interventionist) may be a little bit nervous as well. Under these circumstances, it is all too easy to resort to a lecturing style of communicating. Throughout the first session, ask questions to encourage the parent's active participation: "How is it like to play with him?", "How does he let you know when he wants something? ", etc. One good opportunity to encourage the parent's active participation is when reviewing the videos of the ESCS or MCX. Make sure to give the parent sufficient opportunity to comment and describe her observations.

Topic 2: What do I hope to accomplish during play?

1. BACKGROUND

Parents of young children with autism can frequently point to a long list of developmental goals that they perceive as important to be worked on: skills that they wish their child to acquire; behavior problems that they wish to overcome; interpersonal relationships that they wish to support, to name a few. Parents pursue some of these goals themselves during interactions with their children – other goals may be delegated to professionals (e.g., therapists, teachers) or relatives (e.g., father, siblings). During today's session we will encourage the parent to reflect on her goals. Particularly, we will focus on goals that are relevant in the context of shared toy play. We will approach these goals from two different angles. First, we will talk about play interactions in general. That is, when the parent thinks about shared toy play, which goals seem important? We will use a Q-Sort methodology (Play Goal Q-Sort) to spark a discussion about this topic. Second, we will review the videotape of this session's MCX to find out which goals the parent actually pursued during the play interaction. In reviewing the videotape, the parent will be encouraged to comment on the motivations that underlie specific parental behaviors and strategies.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Videotape an episode of MCX
2.2. Videotape an episode of Therapist-Child Interaction (TCX).
2.3. Present & discuss the Play Goal Q-Sort (PGQ).
2.4. Review the videotape of this session's MCX to identify and discuss parental goals.

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring the Play Goal Q-Sort (PGQ).
3.2. Bring 'Topic 2' of the Parent Workbook.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. Videotape an episode of MCX.

Generally, you will introduce the episode of MCX exactly as described in Topic 1. By the second session, the parent will likely be more comfortable with the idea of being videotaped. If this is the case, you can be less elaborate when introducing the MCX.

4.2. Videotape an episode of Therapist-Child Interaction (TCX).

As the intervention progresses, interactions between the PI and child will become increasingly important as a teaching tool (Therapist-Child Interaction; TCX). You will play with the child to a) get a better understanding of what it is like to play with the child, b) systematically try different strategies to learn how the child responds in different situations, c) give the parent a chance to observe her child interacting with a different adult, and d) model specific interactive strategies for the parent. In order

to effectively demonstrate interactive behaviors during subsequent sessions, it is important that you establish rapport with the child early on. After the episode of MCX is videotaped, tell the parent that now you wish to trade places with her. Let her know you will play for 10 minutes with the child and that this interaction will also be videotaped. Between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you to guide where the parent focuses her attention during the TCX For example, you may ask her to think about the goals that you seem to be pursuing during shared toy play.

4.3. Present & discuss the Play Goal Q-Sort (PGQ).

Prior to discussing a new topic, it is usually helpful to point to one of the 'Overview' pages in the workbook (e.g., Overview I) and explain how the topic fits into the overall intervention. You may say: *"As I mentioned last time, during the first three sessions we will discuss issues to think about before we sit down and play with [child]. Last week, we talked about your child's strengths and difficulties with regard to communication; today we will focus on our own goals. What is it we wish to accomplish when we sit down a play with [child]?"* A short discussion of how the new topic fits into the overall intervention gives you two key opportunities; to remind the parent of the previous session's topic and to help the parent keep in mind that today's topic is just one small step towards the overall goal of this intervention.

Session two focuses on the parent's goals. When the parent sits down and thinks about shared toy-play, which goals seem important? What visible steps does the parent take to pursue these goals during MCX? First, we will talk about play interactions in the abstract. Introduce the Play Goal Q-Sort (PGQ). You may say: *"Today, let's talk about the kinds of goals you currently have for [child's name]. I would particularly like to hear about those goals that you work on when you and [child's name] are playing together. In order to get us started, I brought seven cards. Each of these cards displays a goal that a parent might pursue during play. I would like you to look at these cards and put them in order, according to how important you believe it is to work on each of these seven goals."* Depending on your perception of the parent's need, you may briefly explain each card:

Making sure that my child and I find a toy that we can both be excited about. Example: Following the child's lead, imitating the child's behavior, or playing with toys that my child likes.

Prompting my child to make choices and request objects or help. Example: Prompting my child to choose between different toys or withholding toys to get my child to request.

Controlling my child's challenging behaviors. Example: Preventing my child from leaving the room, preventing temper tantrums, interfering when my child plays repetitively, or teaching appropriate behavior.

Connecting with my child emotionally. Example: Engaging my child in physical rough and tumble games or playing turn-taking games.

Prompting my child to use spoken language. Example: Prompting my child to name objects, respond to questions, or request using spoken words.

As long as my child is enjoying him/herself, I try to stay out of his or her way. Example: Allowing my child to do whatever he/she likes even if the activity may be repetitive.

Teaching my child how to use the toys properly. Example: Building a house from blocks, pretending to feed a baby doll, or loading blocks into a dump truck.

Once the parent is finished sorting the cards, copy her responses into the workbook (pages 8 – 10). Ask her to briefly comment on the items she ranked as most and least important. Also, ask the parent if there are any other goals that she views as important *(e.g., teaching my child how to use a variety of toys; establishing social situations that are gratifying to both mom and the child; etc.)*. Again, enter parent's response into the workbook. Throughout this conversation, be as neutral as possible. Encourage the parent to explain her thinking; because some of the goals displayed on the cards offer many interpretations, ask her to explain what the goals mean to her; it may be helpful to talk about the difficulties she had in deciding what seems more or less important (i.e., sometimes everything seems important). Sorting the cards gives the parent a few minutes to reflect on her goals; remember it is her *reasoning* that we are after in this exercise. If the parent emphasizes goals that you disagree with, reflect back what you are hearing rather than trying to sway her to your point of view. <u>As always, allow for silent moments and give the parent an opportunity to talk.</u>

4.4. <u>Review the videotape of this session's MCX to identify and discuss parental goals.</u>

So far, we have talked about the parent's goals in a general way. Now, we will focus this conversation by discussing thoughts and goals that the parent has in mind during specific moments of play with her child. To help the parent verbalize some of these thoughts we will review the MCX recorded earlier during this session. Encourage the parent to describe and explain her actions. Why is she choosing this course of action? What behaviors is she trying elicit from her child? What is she trying to accomplish? To which tasks is she paying attention? Ask the parent to describe her intentions about what is happening on the video. Remembering to remain as objective, you may also offer your own descriptions of the parent's behaviors (e.g., *"So here it seems you are offering the child a choice; here you are making sure that he stays in the room; here, you are teaching him how to build a tower"*). The most important task of this session is encouraging the parent to reflect on the goals that guide her during play. Be curious rather than judgmental and you will find that these discussions can be very interesting. Parents appreciate the opportunity to explain their behavior, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to accomplish certain goals. Throughout this conversation, summarize the parent's responses in the workbook (pages 8 – 10).

During the first session, we started to develop the rationale for this intervention. That is, given the child's deficits in joint attention, this intervention aims to promote social encounters that allow parent and child to successfully coordinate their attention, maintain shared interest in a toy, and act towards a mutually agreed goal (e.g., building a tower). In the context of these shared encounters, children will be encouraged to (a) respond to the parent's behaviors (e.g., imitate parental behaviors, respond when the parent attempts to direct the child's attention), and (b) take active steps to include the parents in their toy-directed activity (e.g., referencing the parent when interesting things happen, directing the parent's attention to interesting toys or events). <u>Ideally, we will conclude this session by drawing a connection between the parent's goals and the goals of the intervention.</u> Often, this connection emerges

naturally. However, sometimes there is a gap between the goals of the parent and the goals of this intervention. Unfortunately, since this is a research study, our ability to adjust our goals to the needs of the parent is limited. If you sense the parent has difficulty understanding or accepting this intervention's focus on shared toy play, don't feel you have to sell our agenda to the parent; our rationale will become clearer as the intervention progresses. Nevertheless, below are some suggestions for how to think and talk about gaps between parental goals and the goals of this intervention.

Less is more. The most frequent realization that parents come to when watching themselves on tape is just how hard they work to keep their child engaged. Children with autism need support in many different areas, and parents do their best to keep up with all those needs. It is common for the quantity and variety of goals to overwhelm both parent and child. Let the parent know that playing with a young child with autism can be a difficult and demanding task. Each of the challenges they face is a long-term process. Let her know that setting priorities is often necessary. Frequently, the most important message of the second session is that doing less is okay. To address one of the child's needs satisfactorily, the parent may need to put aside other goals for the time being. Getting permission to set priorities comes as a great relief to many parents. When observing the TCX, parents are often struck by the simplicity of the interaction. Whenever you play with the child, remember this: your goal is to engage the child in a shared activity, nothing more.

Sometimes there is a gap between what we want to do and what we actually do. Often, you and the parent will notice a gap between her general goals (as evident during the Q-sort conversation) and the specific goals she actually pursues during the play interaction (e.g., as evident when reviewing the MCX). Often, the parent's behaviors are influenced by situations as they arise (e.g., she may put a lot of energy into dealing with behavior problems) rather than her general goals. Similarly, some of the parent's specific behaviors may seem inconsistent with her general goals (e.g., the parent may spend more time teaching skills than she had thought). When such discrepancies occur (e.g., a goal that is ranked very low in the Q-sort receives a lot of entries in the workbook when reviewing the MCX), it is interesting and informative to learn the parent's perspective. For example, it is very frustrating to constantly find yourself dealing with the child's behavior problems when your goal is to establish shared interest in a toy.

Addressing the goals of this intervention may open the door to addressing a range of other parental goals. At first, the goals mentioned in the Workbook may not seem compatible with each other. However, as this intervention progresses, a new insight may become evident; shared interest (coordinated attention) between child and parent is the foundation for a range of other goals, including adult directed teaching and language acquisition (i.e., it helps the child to interpret the speaker's intent). Further, because successful interactions between parent and child are gratifying for both parties, they often foster a natural reduction in challenging behaviors. In some cases it may be helpful to cite research findings: *"Research shows that shared activities with toys are closely linked to children's emerging social understanding and spoken language"*.

This intervention aims to extend children's communicative repertoire. Parents of children with autism often choose activities that capitalize on children's communicative strengths: people games, requesting games, and teaching games. Developing a shared interest during toy play is often ranked low in the hierarchy of parental goals; because it is so difficult for children with autism to include others when playing with a toy, it may seem to be an unattainable

goal. However, we believe that this goal of shared interest *can be* attainable through the collaboration of parent and interventionist. Further, we believe children's expanding language acquisition will be a byproduct of the children's expanded ability to share interest in a toy.

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

What if the parent has difficulties articulating her own goals? Some parents are insightful about their goals and find it easy to comment on their actions. Other parents might find this task difficult and have little to say. If this is the case, offer the parent objective descriptions of her behavior and help her generate ideas about the function these behaviors may serve. Be sure to ask her whether your interpretations are accurate and invite her to correct your assumptions. Additionally, you can model descriptions and interpretations of your own actions by reviewing the TCX recorded during this session.

What if the parent is passive during play? Some parents are passive when playing with their children (sometimes parents suffer from depression or don't know how to act). This is difficult for two reasons: first it can make the parent uncomfortable when watching herself on video or talking about her goals when there is little she is doing to comment upon; second, if the parent is disengaged, watching the MCX may not stimulate enough conversation about parental goals. To deal with the first issue, try shifting the focus of the conversation towards the challenges of playing with the child rather than parental goals. To deal with the second issue, you may choose to review the TCX in addition to the MCX. If you choose to include the TCX, you can talk to the parent about your own goals and ask her to comment upon them.

Topic 3: How do I develop a special play time routine?

1. BACKGROUND

For most children with autism, play interactions are successful some of the time. At other times, shared play encounters can be very difficult to accomplish. The first goal of this session is to help the parent recognize these "ups and downs" in the child's ability to socially engage. We will help the parent describe how the child engages during a good moment; and we will identify child behaviors that indicate that he is struggling during play. Once the parent is accustomed to talking about this variability in the child's behavior, PI and parent will reflect on factors of the physical and social context that may contribute to this variation. Contextual factors to consider include: whether the play encounter is embedded in a familiar routine, the presence of distractions, the selection of toys available to the dyad, the presence of stimuli that elicit challenging behaviors, and the child's mood. What all these factors have in common is that they are usually in place *before* parent and child sit down to play. Thus, to positively influence these factors, parents must plan ahead to set-up the play environment in ways that are conducive to successful play. Finally, we will help the parent to develop a "Special Play Time Routine" that can be incorporated in the family's day-to-day life.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Videotape episodes of MCX & TCX.
2.2. Discuss the "ups and downs" in the child's social engagement.
2.3. Review MCX/ TCX and discuss the physical and social context of play.
2.4. Work with the parent to develop a "Special Play Time Routine".

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring 'Topic 3' of the Workbook.
3.2. Bring a toy bag and toy gift for child. Pick a toy from the toy set that the child enjoys and that is likely to spark a shared activity between parent and child.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. <u>Videotape episodes of MCX & TCX.</u>

See 'topic 2'.

4.2. <u>Discuss the "ups and downs" in the child's social engagement.</u>

The degree to which a child with autism can participate in play changes from moment to moment and from day to day. Parents are usually familiar with this variation; they may talk about it in terms of "having a good/bad day" or "being in a good/bad mood". By helping the parent identify child behaviors that reveal such "ups and downs", we can help the parent develop three affirming concepts: First, *some* "ups and downs" in the child's social engagement are out of the parent's control. This is important to remember on a day when things are more difficult than usual. Let the parent know that

"bad days" happen, even as part of intervention sessions. Second, how the child plays on a "good day" is a useful measure for setting realistic goals and determining success. Finally, the child's ability to socially engage can be influenced by the social and physical context of the play encounter. By encouraging the parent to think about these influences while reviewing the TCX and MCX, we are empowering her with the awareness of those aspects over which she *can* exert control.

Start by encouraging the parent to describe situations when the child's social engagement during toy play was at its best; also ask the parent to describe situations when the child was struggling during play. You may use the following questions to lead this conversation; summarize the parent's responses in the predefined spaces in the Workbook (page 11):

(1) *"As compared with other play encounters, was today's MCX more or less successful than usual?"*

(2) *"How does the child act when he/she is struggling during play?"* The child may be easily distracted, engage in challenging behaviors, be overly active or extremely passive, withdraw from social interaction, engage in stereotyped or ritualized behaviors, or otherwise behave in ways that detract from the play encounter.

(3) *"How does the child act when he/she is successfully participating in play? How does he play when he is having a good day?"* The child may be calm and able to sustain his attention, happy and joyful, or responsive parent behaviors and requests. The child might also approach the parent and initiate social activities, or engage by observing or imitating the parent's actions.

4.3. Review MCX/ TCX and discuss the physical and social context of play.

At the end of today's session we will help the parent to develop a "Special Play Time Routine" that can be incorporated in the family's day-to-day life. An important result of a "Special Play Time Routine" is that it makes the *parent's behavior* more predictable to the child and thus helps the child to participate with increasing levels of success. Equally important is that a "Special Play Time Routine" also makes the *child's behavior* more predictable to the parent; this allows her to gradually shape the social and physical context of play in a way that maximizes the child's engagement. In this way, a "Special Play Time Routine" enables the parent to learn from previous interactions and fine-tune the play context according to the child's needs (e.g., where the interaction takes place, how long it lasts, which toys should be available, etc.).

Before we determine how such a "Special Play Time Routine" may look for this particular dyad, the parent and interventionist must review the MCX/TCX to identify aspects of the social and physical context that seemed to have influenced the child's social engagement during these interactions. We will focus on the following aspects (see Workbook, pp. 13 – 14); summarize the parent's responses in the predefined spaces in the Workbook.

(1) A special play-time benefits from a ritual for when and how it starts. *"How did today's interaction start?"*

(2) A special play-time benefits from a familiar location with few distractions. *"Was there anything during today's interaction that seemed to distract the child?", "Did the child stay in*

the room?" To discuss the role of distractions you may encourage the parent (either hypothetically or even literally) to get down on the floor and look at the play area from the child's perspective.

(3) A special play-time benefits from a well chosen and familiar set of toys. "*Were the toys of interest to the child?", "Which toys did the child play with today?", "Did the toys elicit shared play with parent or were they more likely to encourage solitary play?", "Were there toys that elicited repetitive play?"*

(4) A special play-time benefits from a play environment that does not bring about challenging or dangerous behaviors. *"Did the child display challenging or unsafe behaviors during today's interaction?", "How were they triggered?"*

(5) A special play-time should end on a happy note. This builds success upon success and encourages parent and child to look forward to their "Special Play Time". *"How did today's interaction end?"*

Even though video-feedback is well suited for starting a conversation about the social/physical context of play, it is important to broaden the context and explore the parent's experiences outside of the videotaped interactions. For example, the beginning and end of the interactions are usually not captured on our videos; similarly, the intervention sessions often provide sufficient structure to prevent challenging or dangerous behaviors from occurring. Start this conversation by reviewing the videotapes (MCX/TCX). Don't feel like you have to watch the entire 20 minutes in real time; feel free to fast forward or skip to specific moments that seem relevant for this topic. Once you finished reviewing the videos, ask the parent about her experiences with play *outside* of the context of this intervention; this conversation should be fairly systematic and cover all five areas outlined in the workbook (pp. 13 – 14), which you will continue to document in the predefined spaces of the Workbook.

Play Routines: Generally, if the child is familiar with the play situation, he will demonstrate more competence in managing the play encounter. A familiar routine helps the child to: a) anticipate when play is about to start; b) know which behaviors are expected; c) learn the rules of the games being played; d) predict the parent's behavior; and e) anticipate when play time is about to end. A good way to illustrate this point is to describe the ritual used as part of this intervention: Every week, we enter the home with our suitcase; we unpack the toys; parent and child start playing; after ten minutes, the parent pulls back and the PI takes a turn playing, etc. Usually, by the third intervention session, the child begins to display familiarity with the routine that is noticeable to both you and the parent. . For example, you may notice that the child greets us at the door, spontaneously helps unpack the suitcase, show less challenging behaviors during play, etc.

Presence of Distractions: Play will only be successful if the parent and the toys are the most interesting things in the room. As much as possible, identify stimuli that compete with the child's attention (e.g., noises, siblings, attractive objects beside the toys, etc.). Also, you and the parent should discuss the number of toys that are available to the child at a given moment in time as well as their organization. Many children with autism are easily overwhelmed when there are too many toys are out on the floor, or when these toys are poorly organized. Finally, it may be

necessary for you and the parent to reevaluate the location of play. The following factors should contribute to the decision: a) where the child usually play; b) the child's need an enclosed space (i.e., a room with a door); c) which objects (e.g., TV) are likely to distract the child's attention.

Selection of Toys: Different toys elicit different kinds of behaviors. Some toys elicit repetitive or self-stimulatory behaviors; some toys elicit people games (e.g., ball); some toys are difficult to share (e.g., computer, puzzles); some toys elicit language (e.g., books, toys with pictures). In part, the child's behavior can be modified by only making available those toys that are conducive to the play encounter..

Preventing Behavior Problems. A variety of objects or events can elicit behavior problems. We understand it is important for the parent to learn strategies for responding effectively to challenging behaviors. However, development of discipline strategies is not purpose of this intervention. Because success of the "Special Play Time" relies on mutual enjoyment of a shared activity, it is best to avoid the triggers that lead to conflict between parent and child during this play encounter.. For this reason, we will help the parent to *anticipate and prevent* challenging behaviors by planning ahead and removing stimuli that may give rise to these behaviors: (1) Remove objects that the child might break; (2) Choose a play area that makes it difficult for the child to leave; (3) If the parent is concerned about self-stimulatory behaviors, remove materials that elicit these behaviors (we will talk about this some more during Topic 5); (4) provide a structure that helps the child transition between activities, such as a warning that helps the child anticipate these changes.

Ending on a happy note. It is important to end the play interaction while the parent and child are still engaged and happy. Autism can make play interactions difficult and they often don't go very well. When the play interaction *does* go well, parents frequently try to make it last as long as possible. As a consequence, parents work very hard to keep the interaction going, long after the child has lost interest; often the play encounter is ended only after the child has become upset. This is an unfortunate pattern. A good strategy is to end the play interaction when parent and child are still engaged and happy. It is important that parent and child end the interaction *together* and learn to establish a ritual for ending play that is mutually acceptable (e.g., cleaning up together, having a snack, selecting a video to watch). In establishing a play-time ritual, the question of how long to extend the play encounter becomes important. The length of time for the play encounter should be determined by the ability of parent and child to remain engaged and happy. At first this may be a very short amount of time, but the length of the play encounter will naturally increase as parent and child accumulate successes. Ending on a happy note is important so that parent and child create good memories and begin look forward to their "Special Play Time."

4.4. Work with the parent to develop a "Special Play Time Routine".

At the end of the session, encourage the parent to develop a "Special Play Time Routine" that can be incorporated in the family's day-to-day life. Hopefully, the previous discussion gave you plenty of opportunity to emphasize the importance of a play-time routine. Reiterate your point and help the parent develop realistic goals. At this point, the frequency of the "Special Play Time Routine" is less important than its *predictability* and the parent's *commitment.* Ask the parent to think about how much time she can make available for the "Special Play Time Ritual" and then encourage her to make a commitment to that time. Ideally, parent and child will play on a daily basis; however, if this seems unrealistic, be careful not to make the parent feel guilty. Encourage the parent to be realistic about

what is possible (it is more gratifying to *increase* the frequency as she is able than to *decrease* frequency if her aims have been too ambitious). Similarly, parent and child should start with a relatively short play period (e.g., maybe 5 or 10 minutes) that lengthens as it becomes appropriate. Again, the frequency and length of play should be extended only after parent and child have experienced success. When you and the parent have agreed upon a realistic goal (i.e., frequency, duration) for the "Special Play Time Routine", you can encourage her commitment to this routine. You might say: *"The more consistently you are able to make time for this Special Play Time Ritual, , the more tangible the effects will be for you and your child."* Finally, we will use two additional techniques to help strengthen the parent's commitment to this "Special Play Time Routine":

Toy bag idea. To help the parent initiate this "Special Play Time Routine", provide the parent with (a) a toy bag and (b) a favorite toy from our toy set. These materials will help the parent to build on the play ritual we have established during the intervention sessions. The toy bag should include one toy (out of our play set) that is chosen (a) because the child seems to like it and (b) because it is likely to elicit shared play between parent and child. Talk to the parent about which toys she should add to the toy bag. Remind the parent that this toy set should be changed or amended based on the dyad's success with individual toys.

Special Play Time Journal. Starting with today's session, each topic of the workbook includes several pages of a Special Play Time Journal. The Special Play Time Journal includes short questionnaires intended to encourage the parent to reflect on the "Special Play Time Routine". The specific questions will change with each topic of this intervention. For each topic, we provide the parent with two such questionnaires. Introduce the Special Play Time Journal and invite the parent to use them as a means of reflecting on the successes and challenges of the "Special Play Time Routine". That is, after two separate play interactions during the upcoming week, instruct the parent to sit down for 5 minutes and complete this questionnaire. The questions for Topic 3 are as follows:

(1) How did the special play time start?

(2) Overall, was your child in a good mood?

(3) Was there anything that distracted your child?

(4) Which toys did you play with? Were there activities that did not involve toys?

(5) Did your child do anything dangerous or challenging?

(6) Did the play time end on a happy note?

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Using video feedback to identify relevant aspects of the physical/social context. Sometimes, the role of context is particularly apparent when comparing one interaction with another. For this reason, it may be helpful to contrast the interactions videotaped during the third session to videos from the previous sessions.

Topic 4: How to tackle play one step at a time?

1. Background

The fourth session brings us to the heart of this intervention: the goal is to clarify our concept of parent-child interaction and the features that define its success. Toward this end, we will help the parent become sensitive to her child's attentional cues and their significance. Additionally, we will outline the progress of the intervention from this session onward. Most of the content covered during the previous sessions was designed to prepare the parent to be willing and able to process the information being presented today. Some individual pieces of this information have been presented before – today we will tie these pieces together.

2. Overview

2.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/ TCX.
2.2. Discuss last week's "Special Play Time Routine".
2.3. Develop the concept of 'sharing an interest'.
2.4. Provide the parent with an overview of the subsequent sessions.
2.5. Review the videotape to identify moments of shared attention.
2.6. Explain the assignment for this week's play time.

3. Preparation & Materials

3.1. Bring workbook Topic 4 & Overview II.

4. Tasks & Topics

4.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/ TCX.

See 'topic 2' for instructions on videotaping episodes of MCX/TCX. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you guide the focus of the parent's attention during the TCX.

4.2. Discuss last week's "Special Play Time Routine".

During the third session, we helped the parent develop a "Special Play Time Routine" that can be incorporated in the family's day-to-day life. After MCX/TCX has been videotaped, take a few moments to discuss the parent's experience with this "Special Play Time Routine". Ask the parent to talk you through her notes in the Play Time Journal. This conversation has two main goals: First, to strengthen the parent's commitment by noting the frequency of the "Special Play Time Routine", showing curiosity about her play experiences, and praising her successes. Second, you can help her to further refine the "Special Play Time Routine" by evaluating any toys that need to be replaced, adjusting the frequency and duration as is appropriate to the dyad, and addressing any other aspects of the play ritual that need attention. Remind the parent that maintaining this routine is essential for seeing tangible results during the upcoming weeks.

4.3. Develop the conceptual framework of this intervention.

During the first three sessions we identified several important ingredients of successful play: the child's communication skills, goals the parent pursues during play, and how the child's behavior is influenced by social and physical context. During this session we will integrate these topics and develop the conceptual framework of this intervention. Your aim is to develop and emphasize the following three features:

The parent's interactive behaviors during play. The success of play interactions depends on several factors. Some aspects, such as the child's skills or mood, are beyond the parent's immediate control (Topic 1). Other aspects, such as the social and physical context of play, are effectively addressed by planning ahead (Topic 3). Finally, the success of play interactions is influenced by behaviors that the parent displays during the interaction: her response to her child's communicative signals; when and how she chooses to initiate new activities, and the play behaviors that she models for her child. Topics 4 through 8 share a common feature; they all focus on the behaviors and strategies that the parent employs during play.

This intervention focuses on shared interactions that involve toys. Research on typical development teaches us an important lesson; the dyad's ability to engage in a shared interest with toys or external events has a strong impact on the child's emerging ability to interpret other's intentions, and spoken language. In contrast, during the first intervention session, we observed that the participating child finds it difficult to include his parent when playing with a toy, joint attention deficit. Given this deficit, this intervention will focus specifically on interactions between parent and child that involve toys: we will explore what it means to share an interest with this child and develop strategies that foster the engagement of shared interest.

What does it mean to share an interest in a toy? Sharing an interest in a toy involves three basic steps. Bring the parent's attention to pages 17 – 18 of the Workbook.

(1) The first step is to establish a *shared focus* of attention: At the most basic level, a shared interest requires that two people attend to the same object/event at the same time.

(2) The second step is to establish a *shared goal* in acting on the toy: Once parent and child attend to the same toy, the next step is to establish a common goal in acting on the toy. Here it becomes important that the parent uses the toy in a similar way as the child; parent and child need to be engaged in the same activity.

(3) The third step is to establish *shared control* over the activity: Once parent and child are engaged in similar activities with the same object, they have made important progress towards establishing a shared interest. However, an important ingredient is still missing. An activity that is truly shared requires that the child recognize the parent's involvement. For example, the child may take active steps to include his parent by showing her one of the toys, or the child may incorporate or imitate one of the parent's suggestions. The third step becomes very obvious when the parent experiences the child referencing one of the toys with excitement, but describing shared control in preparation of this moment is subtle and can be difficult to articulate. One analogy that that can illustrate this point is the example of a satisfying conversation between adults; talking about the same topic at the same time is

not enough to spark a good conversation. A conversation becomes interesting when both partners respond to, and elaborate on, each other's contributions; collaboration is key for establishing this spark.

4.4. Provide the parent with an overview of the subsequent sessions.

The three steps introduced above follow a natural hierarchy. That is, lower steps need to be mastered before higher steps can be tackled; these three steps provide the general outline for the remaining intervention sessions. During each step, the parent faces unique challenges and decisions. In addition, each step comes with its own way of evaluating success during play. For example, during the first step, success is achieved when parent and child are attending to the same toy at the same time. You may point to page 22 in the Workbook (Overview II) to give the parent a short preview about the remaining topics of this intervention. Be concise; providing too much detail can be overwhelming to the parent. During the subsequent intervention sessions, it may be helpful to refer the parent back to this Overview II when introducing a new topic.

First step: Shared Attention

(1) Basic Questions/Topics: Who gets to choose the toys?

(2) Evaluating Success: Are parent and child attending to the same toy at the same time?

Second step: Shared Activity

(1) Basic Questions/Topics: Who is the expert on how to play with the toys?
How do we use language to accompany the shared activity?

(2) Evaluating Success: Are parent and child engaged in similar activities?
Are parent and child synchronized when moving from one toy to the next?

Third step: Shared Control

(1) Basic Question: How do we make play more balanced between mom and child?

(2) Evaluating Success: Does the child take active steps to include the parent in his play?

4.5. Review the videotape for moments of shared attention.

During today's session we will start with the first step of *shared focus*; using video feedback, we encourage the parent to notice the child's gaze direction. We will underscore two different aspects; use page 19 of the Workbook to take notes:

Moments of shared attention: An important goal of today's video feedback portion is to help the parent identify moments where parent and child focus on the same toy at the same time. This serves two useful functions; it encourages the parent to carefully monitor the child's gaze direction and it defines success solely on a shared focus of attention, parents will usually be able to identify several tangible episodes of interaction they can feel good about. Many parents of children with autism perceive play interactions as dreadfully long and feel like nothing is being accomplished. Being able to demonstrate several episodes of successful interaction (coordinated attention) is an important accomplishment of this session. By offering such a simple goal during this session, we make successful play more attainable; a key step for the parent and child to build on those successes.

How the child's attention transitions from one toy to another. When talking about a shared focus of attention, it is particularly important to talk about how moments coordinated attention come about and how they end. While reviewing MCX/ TCX, help the parent to describe how the dyad transitions from one toy to the next. *"Who chooses the toys?"; "Who decides when the dyad is done playing with a toy?"; "How does the dyad negotiate the next focus of attention?"* We will cover this issue more systematically during Topic 5.

4.6. Explain the assignment for this week's play time.

Encourage the parent to continue with her play time routine. Also, encourage her to spend some time to reflect on two of her play sessions that occur during the upcoming week (Special Play Time Journal). Ask her to focus her reflections with the following questions:

(3) Which was the first toy that you and your child played with?

(4) How long did you play with this toy?

(5) How did your child use the toy?

(6) How did you use the toy?

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Which strategies are right or wrong? Some parents want to know whether they are doing things right or wrong. Be careful how you respond to these questions, judging behavior in terms of "right or wrong" is counter-productive to our aims. Instead, help her to answer her own questions by evaluating the success of her behavior. Rephrase the question: is the parent's behavior effective in establishing a shared focus of attention?

Talking off topic. The focus of today's session is establishing a shared focus of attention. Therefore, the conversation must be limited to the child's focus of attention only; how parent and child use these toys will be discussed during the subsequent sessions.

Topic 5: Who gets to pick the toys?

1. BACKGROUND

During this session we will start to talk about specific interactive strategies that are aimed at establishing and maintaining a shared focus of attention. As described, in the context of this intervention shared attention is defined narrowly; it refers to an adult and child attending to the same toy at the same time. The emphasis of this conversation is how parent and child transition from one toy to the next. Success will be measured by the dyad's ability to establish and maintain a shared focus of attention during play.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.
2.2. Talk about week's "Special Play Time Routine".
2.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing shared attention.
2.4. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring workbook Topic 5.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.

Videotape the episodes of MCX/TCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 and section 4.2 of Topic 2 to refresh your memory of the procedure. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you to guide the parent's attention during the TCX. Today's session will focus on how adult and child collaborate in picking the toys with which they will play. When playing with the child during the TCX, focus on the transition between toys and model a range of different strategies that may help the child to be successful in these moments..

4.2. Talk about last week's "Special Play Time Routine".

Review with the parent her experiences of the "Special Play Time" Journal activity you assigned in the previous session. For specific instruction, refer to section 4.6 of Topic 4.

4.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing shared attention.

During this part of today's session, parent and PI will review the videotaped MCX/ TCX aiming to identify strategies that are effective for managing shared attention with this individual child. To effectively manage shared attention with her child, the parent will need to master three basic skills: (1) Learning how to evaluate the effectiveness of her own behavior. (2) Learning to pay close attention to her child's gaze direction, respond to her child's interest, and follow her child's lead. (3) Learning to adjust her behavior to the child's level of engagement. You can help the parent gain these skills by

prompting her to examine her own strategies, encouraging her to try new strategies, and modeling for her how to carefully observe her child's responses. Remember, for this intervention, your role is to enable *the parent* to assess these interactions; it is not your role to judge their efficacy – even if she asks for your opinion. Parents face a range of different situations that require the flexibility to employ different methods of interaction; the Workbook illustrates four basic situations (page 23).

First Situation: The child approaches a toy and is engaging in 'constructive' play. In this situation, it is easy to see that following the child's lead may be an effective strategy for establishing shared attention. Unfortunately, these situations may be rare.

Second Situation: The child approaches a toy and engages in 'non-constructive' play. Prior to discussing effective strategies for a situation in which the parent perceives that child's behavior as 'non-constructive' (i.e., repetitive), it is important to clarify the parent's definition of 'non-constructive' play and the reasons she is concerned about the child playing in this way. The distinction between constructive and repetitive play is subjective; behavior that seems like constructive play to one parent, may be perceived as repetitive play by another parent. Often there are two distinct reasons for parents concern about their child's repetitive play: (1) Repetitive play often tends to be solitary in nature; the activity the child chooses can make it difficult for the parent to get involved and the parent may feel excluded. (2) By repeating the same simple action over and over, the child may fail to discover new features of the toy (i.e., new ways of using the toy). At this point in the intervention, we will focus on the first concern. The second concern will be addressed in a comprehensive way during Topic 8. For now, the issue is how to create a shared focus of attention that is independent of how the child chooses to play. For some dyads it may help to encourage the parent to join the child's interest in the toy. For others, it may be more productive to remove a specific item that elicits repetitive play from the toy set. Finally, it may be indicated to redirect the child's attention to a different toy. When redirecting the child to a different toy, consider the following suggestions:

Redirecting the child to a new toy is only worth the effort if the new toy makes it easier for the parent to become involved; switching one 'repetitive toy' for another one may not move the interaction forward.

Review MCX/TCX to determine how the child responds to the adult's attempts at redirecting the child's attention. *How effective are adults at redirecting the child's attention? Which strategies are most effective at introducing a new toy?* These questions are empirical and can only be evaluated by reviewing the video material.

Carefully choose the toy you are about to introduce based on the child's preferences. Redirect the child's attention a toy he has liked in the past.

When introducing a new toy, it is easy to slip into what we call the 'entertainer style'. The 'entertainer style' describes an interactive pattern where the adult introduces a new toy and is being ignored by the child; the adult may then decide to try a second, third and fourth toy. With every new toy, there is a decreased chance of the child responding successfully; the child may become overwhelmed, perceive the adult as intrusive, and ignore her altogether. For this reason, it is more effective to carefully pick

one toy and introduce it (if necessary) in several different ways. Encourage the parent to be persistent when introducing a new toy.

Introducing a new toy should not be a power struggle. To prevent a power struggle, it is important that the adult t find ways of drawing the child's attention to the toy (the new toy must become the most interesting object in the room). For example, the adult may perform an action that he knows the child enjoys (e.g., building a tower). Similarly, by starting an interesting action and leaving it unfinished (e.g., stating to line up cars but leaving a few cars 'out of order') the adult creates an opportunity for the child to join her play.

When introducing a new toy, once you are successful in recruiting the child's attention, it is important to create an opening where the child can join the activity. Frequently, it is a good idea to model a play act but then pause for a few moments so the child can approach the toy. This strategy is important for evaluating the child's interest and gives the child a sense of control.

Third Situation: The child attention jumps from one toy to the next. When children are overwhelmed, it is difficult them to sustain their attention and they jump from one toy to the next. During these situations, it is a good idea to organize the play area by removing extraneous toys or moving toys t aside. If the child is getting overwhelmed because of the adult's engagement, it is time to slow down. In some cases, it may be effective to provide the child with structure rather than following his lead.

Fourth Situation: The child does not approach any of the toys. The goal of this intervention is to encourage shared activities that involve toys. This is difficult to accomplish if the child does not seem interested in toys. If this is the case, the adult faces the double challenge of (1) trying to get the child interested in a toy, and (2) engaging the child socially. In these situations, it is often more productive to initiate a game that does not involve a toy (i.e. a people game), and then *gradually* introduce a toy into the exchange. For example, the parent could initiate a game in which the child anticipates her tickles; gradually, she may encourage the child to take turns (e.g., by establishing eye contact to request another turn); finally, the parent may start to incorporate toys into this exchange (e.g., by using a car to drive up the child's leg to tickle the child).

You may start the video feedback portion of this session by introducing the parent to the four prototypical situations described above. This may be followed by a discussion about which of these situations seem most relevant for the individual child. Enter the parent's responses in the predefined spaces of the Workbook (pp. 24-27). Continue by reviewing MCX/TCX. You may find it helpful to not watch the entire videotape, but rather to focus on moments when parent and child transition from one toy to another: *"How do these transitions come about?", "Does the parent/PI ever try to redirect the child's attention?", "Which strategies are effective at redirecting the child's attention?", "What happens when the parent joins the child's toy engagement?", What if the child is playing repetitively?"* Throughout this conversation, stay on topic and focus the discussion exclusively on the child's gaze direction and parental strategies that influence the child's focus of attention. How parent and child play with the toys once a shared focus has been established will be discussed during Topic 6.

4.4. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

Encourage the parent to continue with her Special Play Time routine. Also, encourage her to reflect on two of her play sessions that occur during the upcoming week (Special Play Time Journal). Ask her to focus her reflections on the following questions:

(1) Which toy did you play with first/second?

(2) If you picked the toy, what was your child doing before you brought it out?

(3) If your child picked the toy, how was he using the toy?

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Don't be dogmatic about 'following the child's lead'. The goal of this session is to promote the frequent occurrence of shared attention and to discourage lengthy episodes when parent and child attend to different toys at the same time. In figuring out which strategies work for parent and child, don't be dogmatic about 'following the child's lead'. Remember, it is the parent's role to assess the child's needs at a given moment. In some cases, children may be very good at responding to parental redirection. Keep the discussion as objective as possible by using the videotapes to indicate the success of specific strategies.

Shared attention is the foundation of successful play. . Subsequent topics of this intervention are dependent on the ability of parent and child to coordinate their attention when playing with a toy. For this reason, it is important to make meaningful progress towards this goal before proceeding to Topic 6. The amount of time necessary to complete this topic varies significantly from dyad to dyad. In most cases, you will need to follow Topic 5 with one Coaching Session to provide some opportunity to practice specific skills. In rare instances, this extra session is not necessary. In other instances, (particularly if the child has a hard time getting interested in toys) it is indicated to schedule two Coaching Sessions before proceeding to subsequent topics in this intervention. Do not continue to Topic 6 before there is some basic mastery of shared attention.

Emphasize parental success. Coordinated attention is an attainable goal, even for the most severely affected children; this is one reason why it serves as a cornerstone to this intervention. Be very enthusiastic about the dyad's successes and let the parent know that even short moments of shared attention are an important step towards successful play.

Topic 5: Who gets to pick the toys?

6. BACKGROUND

During this session we will start to talk about specific interactive strategies that are aimed at establishing and maintaining a shared focus of attention. As described, in the context of this intervention shared attention is defined narrowly; it refers to an adult and child attending to the same toy at the same time. The emphasis of this conversation is how parent and child transition from one toy to the next. Success will be measured by the dyad's ability to establish and maintain a shared focus of attention during play.

7. OVERVIEW

7.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.
7.2. Talk about week's "Special Play Time Routine".
7.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing shared attention.
7.4. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

8. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

8.1. Bring workbook Topic 5.

9. TASKS & TOPICS

9.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.

Videotape the episodes of MCX/TCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 and section 4.2 of Topic 2 to refresh your memory of the procedure. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you to guide the parent's attention during the TCX. Today's session will focus on how adult and child collaborate in picking the toys with which they will play. When playing with the child during the TCX, focus on the transition between toys and model a range of different strategies that may help the child to be successful in these moments..

9.2. Talk about last week's "Special Play Time Routine".

Review with the parent her experiences of the "Special Play Time" Journal activity you assigned in the previous session. For specific instruction, refer to section 4.6 of Topic 4.

9.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing shared attention.

During this part of today's session, parent and PI will review the videotaped MCX/ TCX aiming to identify strategies that are effective for managing shared attention with this individual child. To effectively manage shared attention with her child, the parent will need to master three basic skills: (1) Learning how to evaluate the effectiveness of her own behavior. (2) Learning to pay close attention to her child's gaze direction, respond to her child's interest, and follow her child's lead. (3) Learning to adjust her behavior to the child's level of engagement. You can help the parent gain these skills by

prompting her to examine her own strategies, encouraging her to try new strategies, and modeling for her how to carefully observe her child's responses. Remember, for this intervention, your role is to enable *the parent* to assess these interactions; it is not your role to judge their efficacy – even if she asks for your opinion. Parents face a range of different situations that require the flexibility to employ different methods of interaction; the Workbook illustrates four basic situations (page 23).

First Situation: The child approaches a toy and is engaging in 'constructive' play. In this situation, it is easy to see that following the child's lead may be an effective strategy for establishing shared attention. Unfortunately, these situations may be rare.

Second Situation: The child approaches a toy and engages in 'non-constructive' play. Prior to discussing effective strategies for a situation in which the parent perceives that child's behavior as 'non-constructive' (i.e., repetitive), it is important to clarify the parent's definition of 'non-constructive' play and the reasons she is concerned about the child playing in this way. The distinction between constructive and repetitive play is subjective; behavior that seems like constructive play to one parent, may be perceived as repetitive play by another parent. Often there are two distinct reasons for parents concern about their child's repetitive play: (1) Repetitive play often tends to be solitary in nature; the activity the child chooses can make it difficult for the parent to get involved and the parent may feel excluded. (2) By repeating the same simple action over and over, the child may fail to discover new features of the toy (i.e., new ways of using the toy). At this point in the intervention, we will focus on the first concern. The second concern will be addressed in a comprehensive way during Topic 8. For now, the issue is how to create a shared focus of attention that is independent of how the child chooses to play. For some dyads it may help to encourage the parent to join the child's interest in the toy. For others, it may be more productive to remove a specific item that elicits repetitive play from the toy set. Finally, it may be indicated to redirect the child's attention to a different toy. When redirecting the child to a different toy, consider the following suggestions:

Redirecting the child to a new toy is only worth the effort if the new toy makes it easier for the parent to become involved; switching one 'repetitive toy' for another one may not move the interaction forward.

Review MCX/TCX to determine how the child responds to the adult's attempts at redirecting the child's attention. *How effective are adults at redirecting the child's attention? Which strategies are most effective at introducing a new toy?* These questions are empirical and can only be evaluated by reviewing the video material.

Carefully choose the toy you are about to introduce based on the child's preferences. Redirect the child's attention a toy he has liked in the past.

When introducing a new toy, it is easy to slip into what we call the 'entertainer style'. The 'entertainer style' describes an interactive pattern where the adult introduces a new toy and is being ignored by the child; the adult may then decide to try a second, third and fourth toy. With every new toy, there is a decreased chance of the child responding successfully; the child may become overwhelmed, perceive the adult as intrusive, and ignore her altogether. For this reason, it is more effective to carefully pick

one toy and introduce it (if necessary) in several different ways. Encourage the parent to be persistent when introducing a new toy.

Introducing a new toy should not be a power struggle. To prevent a power struggle, it is important that the adult t find ways of drawing the child's attention to the toy (the new toy must become the most interesting object in the room). For example, the adult may perform an action that he knows the child enjoys (e.g., building a tower). Similarly, by starting an interesting action and leaving it unfinished (e.g., stating to line up cars but leaving a few cars 'out of order') the adult creates an opportunity for the child to join her play.

When introducing a new toy, once you are successful in recruiting the child's attention, it is important to create an opening where the child can join the activity. Frequently, it is a good idea to model a play act but then pause for a few moments so the child can approach the toy. This strategy is important for evaluating the child's interest and gives the child a sense of control.

Third Situation: The child attention jumps from one toy to the next. When children are overwhelmed, it is difficult them to sustain their attention and they jump from one toy to the next. During these situations, it is a good idea to organize the play area by removing extraneous toys or moving toys t aside. If the child is getting overwhelmed because of the adult's engagement, it is time to slow down. In some cases, it may be effective to provide the child with structure rather than following his lead.

Fourth Situation: The child does not approach any of the toys. The goal of this intervention is to encourage shared activities that involve toys. This is difficult to accomplish if the child does not seem interested in toys. If this is the case, the adult faces the double challenge of (1) trying to get the child interested in a toy, and (2) engaging the child socially. In these situations, it is often more productive to initiate a game that does not involve a toy (i.e. a people game), and then *gradually* introduce a toy into the exchange. For example, the parent could initiate a game in which the child anticipates her tickles; gradually, she may encourage the child to take turns (e.g., by establishing eye contact to request another turn); finally, the parent may start to incorporate toys into this exchange (e.g., by using a car to drive up the child's leg to tickle the child).

You may start the video feedback portion of this session by introducing the parent to the four prototypical situations described above. This may be followed by a discussion about which of these situations seem most relevant for the individual child. Enter the parent's responses in the predefined spaces of the Workbook (pp. 24-27). Continue by reviewing MCX/TCX. You may find it helpful to not watch the entire videotape, but rather to focus on moments when parent and child transition from one toy to another: *"How do these transitions come about?", "Does the parent/PI ever try to redirect the child's attention?", "Which strategies are effective at redirecting the child's attention?", "What happens when the parent joins the child's toy engagement?", What if the child is playing repetitively?"* Throughout this conversation, stay on topic and focus the discussion exclusively on the child's gaze direction and parental strategies that influence the child's focus of attention. How parent and child play with the toys once a shared focus has been established will be discussed during Topic 6.

9.4. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

Encourage the parent to continue with her Special Play Time routine. Also, encourage her to reflect on two of her play sessions that occur during the upcoming week (Special Play Time Journal). Ask her to focus her reflections on the following questions:

(4) Which toy did you play with first/second?

(5) If you picked the toy, what was your child doing before you brought it out?

(6) If your child picked the toy, how was he using the toy?

10. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Don't be dogmatic about 'following the child's lead'. The goal of this session is to promote the frequent occurrence of shared attention and to discourage lengthy episodes when parent and child attend to different toys at the same time. In figuring out which strategies work for parent and child, don't be dogmatic about 'following the child's lead'. Remember, it is the parent's role to assess the child's needs at a given moment. In some cases, children may be very good at responding to parental redirection. Keep the discussion as objective as possible by using the videotapes to indicate the success of specific strategies.

Shared attention is the foundation of successful play. . Subsequent topics of this intervention are dependent on the ability of parent and child to coordinate their attention when playing with a toy. For this reason, it is important to make meaningful progress towards this goal before proceeding to Topic 6. The amount of time necessary to complete this topic varies significantly from dyad to dyad. In most cases, you will need to follow Topic 5 with one Coaching Session to provide some opportunity to practice specific skills. In rare instances, this extra session is not necessary. In other instances, (particularly if the child has a hard time getting interested in toys) it is indicated to schedule two Coaching Sessions before proceeding to subsequent topics in this intervention. Do not continue to Topic 6 before there is some basic mastery of shared attention.

Emphasize parental success. Coordinated attention is an attainable goal, even for the most severely affected children; this is one reason why it serves as a cornerstone to this intervention. Be very enthusiastic about the dyad's successes and let the parent know that even short moments of shared attention are an important step towards successful play.

Topic 6: Who decides the 'correct' way of using the toys?

11. Background

This intervention aims to promote the parent's ability to initiate and maintain a shared interest in toys with her young child with autism. At the most basic level, having a shared interest means paying attention to the same toy at the same time. Establishing such episodes of shared attention was the focus of Topic 5. Once parent and child begin to successfully manage the transitions from one toy to the next, a new question arises: *"What do we actually do with the toy we are attending to?"* The goal is to find a shared activity with this toy. It is important to emphasize that success with this shared activity results in shared enjoyment, providing a natural reinforcement for the dyad's efforts to coordinate their attention. Simply put, when engaged in a shared activity, the child discovers that playing with their parent is *fun*. Topic 6 begins the development of play encounters where parent and child use the same toy in similar ways. Play encounters that foster a shared activity require the parent to learn two skills: (1) She and her child display the same complexity of play acts; if the child uses the "birthday cake toy" to explore the Velcro that attaches the candles to the cake, the parent should also engage at this level of exploration , and (2) She and her child progress at the same pace in moving from one activity to the next; if the child needs five repetitions of a given activity before he can move on to the next one, the parent allows him enough time to satisfy this need. Your role in Topic 6 is to encourage the parent to be responsive; to adapt her behavior to both the complexity of her child's play acts and her child's pace. The primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining a shared activity lies with the parent. During Topic 8 we will explicitly talk about how to expand the child's play once a shared activity has been established (shared control).

12. Overview

12.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.
12.2. Talk about week's "Special Play Time Routine".
12.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing shared activities.
12.4. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

13. Preparation & Materials

13.1. Bring Workbook Topic 5.
13.2. Select one or two older sessions that successfully demonstrate shared attention. These clips can be shown in case today's MCX/TCX does not offer enough opportunities for illustration and discussion.

14. Tasks & Topics

14.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.

Videotape the episodes of MCX/TCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 and section 4.2 of Topic 2 to refresh your memory of the procedure. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you guide the parent's attention during the TCX.

Today's session will focus on how adult and child collaborate in choosing the toys with which they will play. When playing with the child during the TCX, focus on establishing a shared activity by matching the child's complexity of play acts and pace.

14.2. Talk about last week's "Special Play Time Routine".

Review with the parent her experiences of the "Special Play Time" Journal activity you assigned in the previous session. For specific instruction, refer to section 4.4 of Topic 5.

14.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective strategies for establishing activities.

When introducing Topic 6 to the parent, it is helpful to review the overall goal of this intervention (see Overview II in the Workbook, p. 22), highlight the progress parent and child have accomplished so far. Remind the parent, as you have pointed out in previous sessions, that today's topic is just one more step towards creating a shared interest during toy play. In typical development, shared activities naturally arise from the contributions made by both partners. In autism, this kind of collaboration is often challenged because most children with autism find it difficult to interpret and respond to parent's intentions and goals. This intervention addresses the challenge with a two-step process of developing interactions that are *truly* collaborative. We have already begun the evolution of the first step; encouraging the parent to carefully observe and join the child's ongoing activity. As parent and child become accustomed to engaging in the same activity, with the same toy, at the same time, they become ready for the second step. The second step encourages the parent to gradually expand the activity and introduce new ideas; this added dimension comprises Topic 8. *Before* starting to expand the activity and introduce new ideas, it is of critical importance that the parent *first* be able to join her child's spontaneous activity for these key reasons:

The child needs to discover that playing with other people can be fun. Most children with autism have very specific ideas about how to play with the toys and are easily irritated if another person tries to change their preferred activity. This irritation frequently leads to the child withdrawing from the interaction; turning his back to the adult, showing distress, taking the toy away from the proximity of others , or disengaging from the toy altogether. For the adult, this apparent rejection can be hurtful; it is so unusual for a child to turn away from us when we are ready to play. As a result, adults often use clumsy tactics that unintentionally escalate these situations; they may chase after the child, demand specific actions, or even tease the child to elicit a response. Over time, frequent experiences of this kind often create the maladaptive expectation that playing with others is frustrating and unpleasant. It is common for a child with autism to leave the room, or at least turn away, once an adult enters the room with a box of toys. This kind of withdrawal behavior is best understood as the result of a long history of interactions that (from the child's perspective) were not satisfying. A central goal of this intervention is to help the child change these maladaptive expectations and learn that playing with other people can be fun. To establish the necessary trust, it is important to start by joining the child's preferred way of using the toys. To view this concept from a personal perspective, imagine a socially uncomfortable situation – such as a job interview. To elicit the most informative articulation of experience and capabilities, the savvy interviewer knows he must put the applicant at ease; beginning with familiar topics, like background and interests. The same dynamic applies when playing with a child with autism.

The best teaching occurs within the 'zone of proximal development'. In teaching a new skill to any child, it is important to start by evaluating the child's current skill level. Only if the teacher understands the child's current abilities will he be able to scaffold the acquisition of new skills. Similarly, by joining her child's spontaneous way of using the toys, the parent gains necessary insights about the child's point of view. This understanding allows the parent to develop sensitive and effective strategies to help her elaborate her child's play as he's ready.

As described above, criteria for evaluating shared activities include (a) how often parent and child display the same complexity of play acts and (b) how closely parent and child have the same pace in moving from one activity to the next (see Workbook, pp. 33-35). The video-playback portion of today's session will encourage the parent to carefully observe and join her child's spontaneous way of using the toys: the complexity of his play acts, as well as his pace; Enter the parent's responses in the predefined spaces of the Workbook (p. 35).

Complexity of play acts. The complexity of play acts in children with autism is frequently limited. Symbolic or pretend actions are rare, and even functional play is frequently limited to simple cause-and-effect toys, putting pieces on a magnet board, pushing a car, stacking objects, or making sounds on a xylophone. Often, children with autism spend a lot of time with simple manipulations, such as lining up objects, or looking through colored blocks. In contrast, play behaviors of the parent are sometimes much more complex: she may try to initiate make-believe scenarios or use blocks to build literal structures, such as a house. When reviewing today's videotapes, you can help the parent to carefully describe her child's actions: *"What is it that the child likes about this particular toy?" "How does the child use the toy?*" In contrast, how does the parent use the toys? If you observe a gap between how the child uses the toys and how the parent uses the toys, share this observation with the parent. Also, in instances where such a gap occurs, you and the parent will gain important insights by observing how this mismatch influences her child's subsequent toy engagement. An effective exercise (to be done either during the session or afterwards) is to have the parent engage in 5 minutes of toy play, imitating everything her child does with the toys. This allows the parent get a feeling for how her child uses the toy and learn what is enjoyable about his way of using the toy; this also helps the parent to adjust to her child's pace.

Using the toys creatively. Joining the spontaneous activities of children with autism frequently means that parents need to use the toys creatively. The parent must allow herself to depart from conventional ways of using the toys. The more she can adapt to her child's way of playing, and the more she is able to creatively use the toys, the easier it will be for her child to discover the enjoyment of playing with others.

Joining repetitive actions. At times, a parent may be uncomfortable joining her child's repetitive play. This is a very sensitive topic that, depending on the circumstances, can be addressed in many different ways. For example, you may remind the parent that a shared activity starts with the child's preferred activity. If the parent introduces new ideas from the start, she may risk losing the child's interest altogether. Some challenges associated with repetitive play have already been discussed during Topic 5. Three additional comments may be helpful at this point:

It is possible that the child's repetitive actions are a consequence of the child's limited play skills rather than an attempt at "self-stimulation". It is easy for parents of children with autism to overestimate her child's play skills; *all* children's play during early stages of development is frequently repetitive. When we think about a 12-month old who repeatedly drops the spoon on the floor we may describe his behavior as "a scientist in the crib who is experimenting with the laws of gravity and his parent's reactions". For a child with autism, adults are much less likely to give the child this benefit of the doubt.

In deciding whether a parent should join the child's repetitive actions, it is important to consider the parent's comfort level. For this intervention, it is important that the parent enjoys play *as much as* her child does. If a specific child behavior makes the parent uncomfortable, we must be respectful of her emotions.

Encourage the parent to be decisive about choosing, or not choosing to join a specific child action. The parent also needs to clearly communicate her expectations to the child. It is common for a parent to be uncomfortable with a specific action and yet be reluctant to invest the effort of redirecting her child. As a consequence, the parent may half-heartedly join her child, communicating more and more impatience all the while. This ambivalence sends mixed messages; it is confusing to the child and not productive for either party. If the parent decides to join the child's action for now, encourage her to feel good about her decision; if the parent decides to redirect the child's attention, remove that specific toy from the play area altogether. The key is commitment to the choice she makes in the current play encounter, she can reevaluate her choice for the next play encounter.

Establishing a shared pace. In addition to the complexity of the dyad's play acts, it is important that the timing of parent and child is synchronized, that they engage in a shared pace. Specifically, the parent must notice how often the child changes his focus of attention, repeats the same actions, modifies his actions, or responds in a given moment. Again, encourage the parent to adjust to the child's pace. To foster the success of the parent - child interaction, the following issues should be considered:

Don't under-estimate the time it takes your child to process information. A good illustration of this point is our 'triple stacker toy'. It takes most of our children many weeks to figure out how this toy works. Often, you can observe from week to week the child's increasingly advanced discoveries about the toy's features (e.g., that there are different shapes, that the shapes vary in size, that the square pieces need to be assembled first, and that each shape comes with a different top piece). You may have to remind the parent that even a seemingly simple toy may take the child a long time to figure out, going through many repetitions. It is important that the parents give the child enough time to make these discoveries. What seems repetitive to an adult might not be repetitive for a child during early stages of development.

Don't feel like you have to perform for your child. One interactive pattern that can be frequently observed is that a parent shows his child many different actions or toys in rapid succession while the child watches passively; the parent is effectively putting on a show for the child. If you observe such a pattern, remind the parent that her child needs to be an active participant. Encourage the parent to make pauses; giving the child time and space to join in. By pausing, the parent will also be able to determine the child's interest in the current activity; if he is really interested, he will initiate another turn.

Be careful to notice when your child is getting over-stimulated. Sometimes, particularly when a child is tired, his pace may speed up and his behaviors may be come hyper. Signs of over-stimulation may include; shifting attention from one toy to the next, pulling out more and more new toys. In this situation, it is counterproductive to match the child's pace; instead, the child may benefit from an adult who is calm and able to provide structure.

14.4. Explain the assignment for this week's 'Special Play Time'.

Encourage the parent to continue with her 'Special Play Time Routine'. Also, encourage her to reflect on two of her play sessions that occur during the upcoming week (Special Play Time Journal). Ask her to focus her reflections on the following questions:

(1) Which toys did you play with first/ second/ third?

(2) How did your child use the toys?

(3) How would you describe your child's pace?

15. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Today's MCX/TCX might not have included prolonged episodes of shared attention. This session is concerned with what to do once shared attention has been established. Given that interactions vary from session to session, it is a good idea to prepare for the possibility that today's MXC/TCX includes little shared attention. In this case, use previous videotapes for illustration and discussion during the session that covers Topic 6, or provide a (second) Coaching Session on Topic 5 *before* proceeding to Topic 6

What if PI and parent disagree about the child's play level. Above, we emphasized that the parent's play acts aim to mirror the play acts of her child. At this point it is important to focus the discussion on the play behaviors that the child displays during MCX/TCX. Don't get drawn into a discussion about the child's play skills in general (e.g., the child's capacity for pretend play). Emphasize that the parent has to respond to the child's *current* behavior, those he is displaying *today*. Questions about the child's *best* behaviors, "zone of proximal development", will be discussed during 'Topic 8'.

Teasing behaviors. Parents of young children with autism frequently feel excluded during play. A common interactive strategy (that is also promoted by some interventions) is to interfere with the child's activity. Interfering frequently elicits a social response from the child (e.g., withholding toys from the child, undoing the child's actions, putting toys out of reach, sticking objects down the child's shirt). All these behaviors (particularly when they are implemented in an insensitive way) could potentially interfere with the emergence of a shared activity. In an extreme case, the child may get upset or withdraw from the interaction. In other cases, these tactics may disrupt the flow of the interaction. If these behaviors interfere with successful play, use video-feedback to evaluate the consequences that these tactics have on the child's behaviors. Encourage the parent to be perceptive of the child's signals.

History of unsuccessful interactions. The idea that a child's social withdrawal may be (in part) a function of a history of play interactions that the child perceived as unsuccessful may be painful for the parent to hear. If you decide to share this thought with the parent, be careful not to induce any feelings of guilt. Emphasize that a certain level of frustration may be inevitable in autism. Given the unusual nature of these children's interests and the difficulties they have communicating their intentions and goals to others, it would be logical for them to experience a certain level of frustration during social interactions. Emphasize the parent's opportunity to create positive expectations during responsive play interactions.

Dealing with extreme irritation. Sometimes, children are irritated as soon as the parent approaches the child or touches any of his toys. If this is the case, the least intrusive strategy to join the child's ongoing activity is to verbally comment on the child's experiences vis-à-vis the toy. Commenting will help the child to become more comfortable with the parent's proximity (see also Topic 7). Encourage the parent to get excited about these baby-steps.

Topic 7: How do I speak to my child during play?

1. BACKGROUND

During the last sessions we encouraged the parent to become attuned to her child's behaviors and pace, allowing her to join the ongoing toy engagement in a way that is meaningful to her child. By joining, the parent will be able to (a) develop insights about her child's intentions and goals, (b) connect with her child by establishing a shared activity, and (c) provide her child with the expectation that playing with another person can be fun. Topic 7 continues the development of balance between "following" and "elaborating" during play; Today's session will focus exclusively on the parent's use of spoken language. The parent's linguistic expression has a powerful impact on the efficacy of this intervention for three reasons: (1) word-choice is a behavior that is easy for both interventionist and parent to describe and identify concretely; (2) many of our non-verbal actions, such as gestures, play acts, facial expressions, and even attitudes are influenced by the spoken language we choose; by helping the parent towards mindful choices of spoken language, you are also helping her affect a broad range of parental *behaviors*; and (3) since language learning is a major concern to parents of children with autism, many parents are eager to focus on the verbal aspects of this intervention.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.
2.2. Talk about week's "Special Play Time Routine".
2.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective language use.
2.4. Explain this week's "Special Play Time" assignment.

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring Workbook Topic 7.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. <u>Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.</u>

Videotape the episodes of MCX/TCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 and section 4.2 of Topic 2 to refresh your memory of the procedure. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you to guide the parent's attention during the TCX. Today's session will focus on how the adult uses spoken language to communicate with the child during play. When you play with the child during the TCX, be mindful with your own choices of spoken language, making sure to use a broad range of pragmatic forms, including description, praise, and suggestions. The child's response to these various pragmatic forms will alert the adults to what is effective spoken language for this individual child.

4.2. <u>Talk about last week's "Special Play Time Routine".</u>

Review with the parent her experiences of the "Special Play Time" Journal activity you assigned in the previous session. For specific instruction, refer to section 4.4 of Topic 6.

4.3. Review MCX/TCX and discuss effective language use.

Children acquire language during interactions with other people. One goal of this topic is to help the parent present her language in ways that make it easier for the child to process. Most children who participate in this intervention have very limited expressive language skills; this may be due to a lack of understanding or the child may have trouble using language functionally during natural interactions. Additionally, it is difficult to gage the child's receptive language: the child's ability to respond to a request may be affected by attentional deficits, limited motivation to meet the parent's expectations, or limited expressive language; at other times, a parent may overestimate her child's receptive language due to the child's exceptional memory for specific social scripts. For these reasons, parents often don't know exactly how much language their child comprehends; this makes it hard to employ language that meets the child's level of understanding. Page 41 of the workbook summarizes four recommendations for speaking with a preverbal child. Briefly review these recommendations:

(1) Use language that sounds friendly, warm and exciting – after all, communication should be fun.

(2) Keep the balance – talk to your child and allow space in between your words.

(3) Use short sentences, and highlight important words.

(4) Use language that describes something your child is looking at or doing.

The first three recommendations are general and are often obvious to parents. If this is not the case, elaborate with concrete examples from the videotape; you may need to rely on the speaking models used during the TCX. The remainder of this conversation addresses the fourth recommendation: We encourage the parent to use descriptive language. During previous sessions we encouraged the parent to carefully observe the child's gaze direction, pace, and complexity of play acts. We emphasized that the emergence of a shared interest often requires the parent to walk a delicate line between "following" and "leading", encouraging her to start her interaction by joining the child's spontaneous engagement with toys. These specific parental strategies all involve a range of non-verbal behaviors including following the child's gaze direction, mirroring the child's way of using the toys, pointing to toys the child is already looking at, etc. Even though we have not made this point explicit so far, the balance between "following" and "leading" is *also* expressed in our use of spoken words. Some utterances aim to *lead* the interaction, these include: commanding or requesting a specific behavior, asking questions that imply a suggestion, and making statements that criticize or seek to correct undesired behaviors. Other utterances aim to *follow* the child's spontaneous engagement, these include: describing the situation, describing the child's actions, describing your own actions, providing praise, and using fun words. Topic 7 continues the discussion of finding the balance between "following" and "leading", focusing specifically on spoken language.

During the video-feedback portion of this session, you and the parent will concentrate on the pragmatic function of parental language. You may say: "During play, parents talk for various reasons. Today, I would like to have a closer look at how we use language during play. Let's review today's interactions and listen carefully to the kinds of things we say." The Workbook illustrates seven specific messages that parental language might convey: (1) making a suggestion or telling my child what to do next; (2) asking a question; (3) telling my child when he does something wrong; (4) describing my child's

actions or focus of attention; (5) describing my actions; (6) praising my child or saying something kind; (7) expressing excitement by using 'fun words'. Review today's interactions for parental language use; stop the tape after each of her utterances; discuss its underlying intention; and enter a checkmark in the corresponding cell on page 42. After reviewing the videotapes, discuss the profile uncovered by the coding process. When interpreting the results, focus on the general picture rather than individual utterances; as always, your role is to encourage the parent to assess the efficacy of her choices, rather than to pass judgment on those choices.

Compare how parent and PI use language in different ways. It is most helpful to review and compare several short clips, rather that viewing the entire MCX/TCX. There is value in comparing the differing language use of yourself and the parent, but there is also value in comparing *moments* (1) when parent and child succeed in establishing a shared activity, and (2) when parent and child are struggle to establish a shared activity. Descriptive language is often conducive to the success illustrated in the first moment; directive language is often associated with the struggle illustrated in the second moment. This observation provides the context to reframe the overarching goal of this intervention: To provide children with descriptive language, we need to first establish a shared activity.

Many parents are accustomed to using directive language; using descriptive language with a young child with autism is an acquired skill. During the early sessions of this intervention, many parents use language primarily to communicate requests and demands. As this intervention progresses, directive language typically decreases, leaving a void that needs to be filled with other kinds of language use. During TCX and coaching you have the opportunity to model the skill of using descriptive language; imparting this skill to the parent is an important goal of this intervention. Remind the parent that learning to use descriptive language may seem awkward at first, but with practice, it will become second nature.

Research on typically developing children emphasizes the role of descriptive language in fostering children's acquisition of spoken communication. Descriptive language is particularly important during early language development (younger than 15 months) when joint attention behaviors are being consolidated. Similarly, the language development of a child with autism may also benefit from language input that describes his focus of attention and ongoing activity. Aside from this linguistic argument, there are several other reasons for why descriptive language can be an effective technique when interacting with a child with autism:

Language is useful to maintain an emotional connection. Even if a child does not understand all the words we use, language allows us to establish and maintain a continuous connection with the child. Language can be used to establish a friendly atmosphere for the play encounter. Using a warm tone of voice, laughter, or praise are ways language can help to make play a gratifying experience.

Language can be the least intrusive way of joining the child. As mentioned in Topic 6, some children with autism do not allow other people to touch their toys. The parent may gain the child's trust by sitting next to him and using language to highlight interesting moments of the child's actions or venture a guess about his intentions and goals. Descriptive language is arguably the least intrusive way of joining the child's ongoing activity.

Language can be used to "assume positive intent". Frequently, children with autism show behaviors that disrupt the play encounter. These behaviors are difficult, in part, because of how they make *us* feel. If the child throws a toy in the corner we may feel provoked; if the child turns away we may feel rejected. In these situations, language can be used to re-interpret and describe the child's actions in a way that assumes positive intention. For example, if the child throws a toy in the corner the parent may say *"all done car"*. Choosing such an interpretation serves three important functions: (1) it maintains the positive tone; (2) it helps us deal with our own feelings of rejection; (3) it allows us to continue the interaction, even when we find the child's behavior challenging. The relationship between a parent and child is made stronger when language is used to foster unity, rather than escalate conflict.

Language is useful to gain insights into the child's point of view. During the last session we encouraged the parent to mirror her child's actions to gain insights about how her child perceives a toy, and what features make it likable. By describing her child's actions and venturing guesses about her child's perceptions, the parent is using language for a two-fold advantage; she strengthens her powers of observation and communicates an interest in seeing the world from her child's point of view.

4.4. Explain the assignment for this week's play time.

Ask mom to maintain her play routine and ask her to briefly reflect on two of her special play sessions using the enclosed questionnaires. You may introduce today's questions by saying: *"During this week's "**Special Play Time"** we would like you to do an experiment. Play as you normally would, being conscious of the language you use. Use descriptive language as often as possible. To help with this, you might imagine yourself as a special camera that documents [the child's] activity for someone who cannot see."*

The questions included in this week's Special Play Time Journal are as follows:

(1) What did you describe?

(2) What kinds of suggestions did you make?

5. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

What if the parent doesn't know what to talk about during play? Some parents find it difficult to verbalize without being directive. In these cases, it is crucial to illustrate that language can be used to describe many different aspects of the play encounter; you can do this with the language you model during the TCX. Encourage the parent to remain verbally involved throughout the play encounter; emphasize the importance of practice in acquiring this skill. The "special camera" exercise described above can help the parent improve both her powers of observation and her ability to verbalize those observations. Using description allows the parent maintain a shared activity and feel included in her child's play.

As the interventionist, it is up to you to decide which parts of the tape to review. The purpose of reviewing the videotape is to illustrate effective language use. Coding a whole videotape of

parental utterances can be tedious in addition to making the parent feel self-conscious; two or three minutes of interaction may give a useful representation of how the parent uses spoken language during play. Whether you review the entire tape or just a few minutes depends on the interventionist's assessment of need. In some cases it is instructive to contrast parental language across two different circumstances; perhaps a situation where parent and child are engaged in a shared activity with a toy, versus a situation where parent and child are in the process of negotiating the next activity. Finally, reviewing TCX may be helpful in expanding the parent's pragmatic repertoire. Be sensitive to the possibility that a parent may find it uncomfortable to compare her language use to that of a professional; this is a good opportunity to remind her that she is the expert on her child.

Topic 8: How do I make play more balanced between me and my child?

1. BACKGROUND

All of the sessions leading up to this day have underscored the importance of the adult's response to the child's signals: following his lead when choosing the toys; playing with the toys in the way he likes ; adjusting to his pace; and describing his actions. In being responsive to the child's signals, the adult took on the responsibility of assuring the success of a shared activity. Now that such shared activities occur more frequently, it is time to delegate some of this responsibility to the child. It is time to create opportunities for the child to be responsive to the adult. Topic 8 develops a play encounter where parent and child *share control* over the play materials and activities.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.
2.2. Talk about week's "Special Play Time Routine".
2.3. Review MCX/TCX and take notice of child behaviors that acknowledge the parent's involvement as well as effective strategies for encouraging these behaviors.
2.4. Explain this week's "Special Play Time" assignment.

3. PREPARATION & MATERIALS

3.1. Bring Workbook Topic 8.

4. TASKS & TOPICS

4.1. Videotape episodes of MCX/TCX.

Videotape the episodes of MCX/TCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 and section 4.2 of Topic 2 to refresh your memory of the procedure. In addition, between MCX and TCX, take a few moments (while sitting on the floor) to briefly introduce the topic of this week's session. A short introduction will help you to guide the parent's attention during the TCX. Today's session will focus on how the child acknowledges the adult's involvement and how the adult can encourage these behaviors. When playing with the child during the TCX, implement a range of strategies that encourage the child to acknowledge your involvement (see below).

4.2. Talk about last week's "Special Play Time Routine".

Review with the parent her experiences of the "Special Play Time" Journal activity you assigned in the previous session. For specific instruction, refer to section 4.4 of Topic 7.

5. REVIEW MCX/TCX AND TAKE NOTICE OF CHILD BEHAVIORS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THE PARENT'S INVOLVEMENT AS WELL AS EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING THESE BEHAVIORS.

Up to now, the goal has been to become responsive to the child's focus of attention and engagement with toys. Responsiveness enables parent and child to attend to the same toy at the same time (shared attention) and use the toy in a similar way (shared activity). In the context of shared activities, the child learns that playing with others can be fun. Play encounters based on a shared activity provide the context in which many other behaviors can occur. During Topic 7, we emphasized that moments of shared activity are the relevant context for parents to use descriptive language. In addition, shared activities provide the foundation on which a range of more advanced child behaviors can become possible, such as social referencing and imitation; the child can now take active steps to acknowledge his parent's involvement and to include her in his play.

The video-feedback portion of today's session has two important goals: (1) MCX/TCX enable identification of child behaviors that indicate active steps to include his parent during play; (2) we will identify effective strategies that parent and PI use to encourage these behaviors. The Workbook illustrates six specific behaviors that children use to include their parent during toy play (pp. 46-47). Review today's MCX/TCX to identify examples of these behaviors. Most of these behaviors are subtle and easily missed during play. Help the parent to notice these behaviors and help her to understand their significance; convey to her that even displaying a few of these behaviors during play is a reason to be excited. These behaviors are closely tied to the core deficit of autism; progress toward inclusion behaviors is a major accomplishment. The six behaviors described in the Workbook are listed below; write brief descriptions of the observed behaviors in the predefined spaces of the Workbook (pp. 46-47). In addition to these six behaviors, there are other ways in which a child seeks to include his parent during play; spoken language, proximity seeking, requesting objects or help, and dumping toys next to the parent on the floor).

Was there a moment when your child observed what you were doing?

Was there a moment when your child joined you while you were playing with a toy?

Were you able to get your child interested in a new toy? Did the child respond when you showed or offered him a toy?

Did your child try to imitate something you did?

When your child was playing with a toy, did he ever make eye contact with you?

Did your child point to or show you something he liked?

The second goal today's video-feedback is to describe the context in which these behaviors occur and the strategies used to encourage them. The parent can structure her interactions in a way that makes social behaviors of this kind more likely to occur. Use this conversation to underscore two earlier

points: (1) the social behaviors described above are most often displayed when parent and child are engaged in a shared activity with a toy. When parent and child are engaged in different activities, these social behaviors from the child become rare. (2) Most of the strategies discussed today emphasize the parent's role in leading the interaction, in contrast to following the child's lead. Parents need to walk a delicate line between "following" and "leading" when playing with a young child with autism: being responsive to her child's attention and joining his activity enables the parent to engage her child in a shared activity; however, if the parent only plays exactly like her child, there is very little for him to imitate, respond to, or comment upon. This balance between "following" and "leading" must be adjusted from moment to moment. For example, during the first few minutes of a play interaction, it may be important to follow her child's lead in order to set a positive tone.); once a robust shared activity has been established, it is increasingly possible for the parent to successfully introduce new ideas or lead the interaction.

In addition to discussing the strategies that parent and PI used during MCX/TCX, the Workbook describes six strategies that are often effective in encouraging the target behaviors mentioned above (pp. 48-53); make sure to review all strategies that apply.

Elaborate with care. Showing your child a new way of playing with a toy is a good idea as long as he or she is able to follow along. Remember, your child will be more responsive to small changes than to big ones. Small changes are powerful.

Capitalize on unexpected events. If you want your child to share his/her excitement about something that happened, exciting things need to happen. It is fun to make a big deal about small things.

Imitate your child. Children with autism often seem to get lost in their activities. If you want them to look up at you, you need to do something to attract their attention. A powerful strategy to attract your child's attention is to imitate his/her actions.

Create openings so your child can join you. Sometimes, children with autism are passive. They watch what other people are doing but find it difficult to join into their game. It is important that you create opportunities that allow your child to join in. For example: Create suspense to draw your child into the game; every now and then, back away from the toy; bring out an identical toy; start an activity that your child enjoys, like lining up cars, but stop before the task is completed.

Play pointing and showing games. Pointing games can be played with many different toys beside dominos: books, shape sorters, pop-up-pals, and magnet boards to name a few. The only rule is: point to objects at which your child is already looking. Similar games can be played to model and practice the showing gesture.

To begin, offer only your child's favorite toys. It is common for a child with autism to ignore another person who offers them a new toy. You help your child be more responsive when the toy you offer is one of his favorites.

5.1. Explain the assignment for this week's "Special Play Time."

Encourage the parent to maintain her "Special Play Routine" and ask her to *briefly* reflect on two of her special play sessions using the enclosed questionnaires. The questions included in this week's Special Play Time Journal are as follows:

(1) Was there a moment when your child observed what you were doing?

(2) Was there a moment when your child joined you while you were playing with a toy?

(3) In which situation were you able to get your child interested in a new toy?

(4) Did your child try to imitate something you did?

(5) When your child was playing with a toy, did s/he ever make eye contact with you?

(6) Did your child point to or show you something s/he liked?

6. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Topic 8 is comprehensive. Topic 8 covers a lot of content. For this reason, it is recommended to use one of the coaching sessions to wrap up its content. For example, helping the parent effectively identify the target behaviors may require using an entire session. Questions about the context might be addressed during a coaching session. Coaching sessions are well suited for describing, showing, and practicing specific strategies that elicit a range of social and communicative behaviors.

The child's social behaviors are subtle and easily overlooked while you are playing. When watching the videos, the parent can be discouraged at moments she failed to respond to the child's behaviors. Reassure the parent that a child's social behaviors are subtle and easily overlooked while in the act of playing together. You can reassure the parent by pointing out behaviors *you* missed during TCX.

Shared activities provide the context for effective teaching. Most parents understand the importance of being responsive to the child's attention and actions, but they are often surprised that the subject of "teaching" is hardly mentioned during the first seven topics of this intervention. During Topic 8, you can emphasize that once a shared activity has been established, a parent is in an excellent position to teach her child new behaviors.

Coaching Sessions 1, 2, & 3

1. Background

Over the course of this intervention, parent and PI cover a series of 8 topics. These topics form a hierarchy; some level of mastery with earlier topics must be achieved before later topics can be addressed. For example, it is necessary that parent and child first learn to coordinate their attention (Topic 5) before the PI can move on to discuss strategies for imitating (Topic 6) and elaborating (Topic 8) the child's toy-directed actions. Since different parent-child dyads progress at different rates, this intervention offers three additional intervention sessions (referred to as Coaching Sessions). These sessions are used to elaborate on topics that require additional attention. Usually, the three Coaching Sessions are used to elaborate on Topics 5, 6, and 8. However, if the interventionist is convinced that the task of coordinating attention (Topic 5) requires additional attention, you are at liberty to use two Coaching Sessions to elaborate on this topic. If, on the other hand, the dyad progresses quickly in terms of coordinating attention (Topic 5), the interventionist could use all Coaching Sessions to elaborate on Topics 6 or 8. Timing of the three Coaching Sessions is entirely up to the interventionist. The format of these sessions is flexible. However, you are strongly encouraged to use coaching and modeling strategies to practice specific interactive skills. Sessions may also include the use of video-feedback.

Overview

1.1. Videotape an episode of MCX.
1.2. Discuss and practice specific strategies.
1.3. Explain this week's Special Play Time assignment.

2. Preparation & Materials

2.1. Prepare important issues for coaching and modeling. Coaching and modeling techniques are difficult to implement; they require the PI to identify specific aspects of the child's/parent's behavior, provide concise feedback, and maybe suggest a specific behavior for the parent to try. Even though the PI's comments must be adjusted to the moment, you may find it helpful to review old videos prior to the coaching session and identify a few behaviors/strategies that could be addressed during the Coaching Session. Before going into the session, you need to identify at least five behaviors as effective targets for modeling and coaching.

2.2. Bring two more homework sheets for the corresponding Workbook Topic.

3. Tasks & Topics

3.1. Videotape an episode of MCX.

Videotape an episode of MCX as you have done in previous sessions; you may refer to section 4.2 of Topic 1 to refresh your memory of the procedure.

3.2. Discuss and practice specific strategies.

Coaching Sessions are designed to elaborate on an earlier topic. To do so, you will use two techniques: modeling and coaching. During this session you will alternate between TCX for modeling, and the MCX for coaching. Skillful modeling and coaching is an art that continues to develop; as an interventionist gains varied experiences working with diverse families, self-confidence and competency increase. The basic performance benchmark of modeling and coaching is providing *frequent* and *specific* feedback; this means you are continually offering concise observations throughout the play encounter. When *modeling* specific strategies, provide the parent with a running commentary on *your* actions and her child's responses. When *coaching* the parent, provide her with continuous feedback on *her* actions and her child's responses. Since the interventionist is giving feedback in real time during the interaction, your comments need to be specific and concise. Avoid long explanations, they interfere with the play interaction and are counter-productive. Finally, the majority of your feedback to the parent must accentuate the positive contributions she makes to the parent-child dyad. When you need to bring attention to a non-productive behavior, favor an example of your actions to make the point. You may choose to model such a behavior for demonstration purposes during the TCX.

After ten minutes of MCX are videotaped, sit down on the floor with the parent and briefly summarize the topic that you are elaborating today; briefly review the concepts introduced during the previous session and then describe the specific behaviors and strategies that you will focus on today. Now you have two options: (1) You can instruct the parent to continue playing with her child and proceed with an episode of *coaching*; (2) you can take a turn playing with the child and proceed with an episode of *modeling*.

Modeling. Before you start playing with the child, give the parent a brief preview of the strategies you will model. While you play with the child, provide a running description of your actions and the child's responses. Generally, you aim to model strategies that lead to success. However, sometimes it is more efficacious to model strategies that lead to failure. This can be beneficial in two ways: First, the parent needs to see that certain strategies don't work. For example, attempts to redirect her child's attention are consistently unsuccessful while her child is engaged with another toy. Second, mistakes are an important part of learning. The parent needs to figure out which strategies work and which ones don't; attempting to be perfect will not achieve this aim. It's helpful for her to see you purposefully use a strategy just to confirm that it *doesn't* work. Failure is okay, and even encouraged, when it leads to learning.

Coaching. Coaching happens during the parent's play encounter with her child. As they play, you are providing verbal feedback that describes the actions and reactions you observe and offering specific suggestions to optimize the dyad's interaction.

The success of coaching depends on your ability to effectively comment on the behaviors of parent and child and provide specific suggestions. The success of modeling depends on your ability to effectively direct the parent's attention by commenting on your own behaviors. The PI may use verbal feedback in the following ways:

Reinforce a specific action of the parent with the offer of *specific praise*. These kinds of statements help the parent to identify interactive behaviors that are effective. In contemporary learning theory, positive reinforcement makes up the majority of your

feedback. Such positive reinforcement can come in two shapes:

(1) By praising a specific behavior that, for whatever reason, the PI happens to like. This kind of reinforcement is artificial in that the interventionist's opinion of which interactive behaviors are productive is arbitrary. Such artificial reinforcement is incompatible with empowerment, use these comments sparingly. Statements such as, "*Great job following the child's lead; good waiting for the child to initiate; nice how you included a toy into the people game*" are inherently judgmental and must be used with great care.

(2) By commenting on a specific response in the child's behavior that occurred as a consequence of the parent's interactive behavior. Such comments reinforce specific behaviors and help the parent identify the consequences of her actions. Describing positive responses in the child's behavior will help the parent assess for herself what works and what doesn't; this is the most productive feedback you can offer. Statements such as, "*Notice how much he enjoys this game; now you really have his attention; see how he became attentive when you followed his lead*" are immensely empowering because they offer empirical, relevant gages of success

Let the parent know when a specific action of hers is counterproductive, using *gentle correction*. In some situations, the parent needs to know that a specific behavior of hers is counterproductive. However, such corrections must be handled with delicacy; you have two options for providing corrective feedback.

(1) You can let the parent know that you don't like a specific behavior of hers. Again, this kind of feedback is artificial because the interventionist's decision of what constitutes good or bad behavior is arbitrary. However, the advantage is that you are able to intervene before the parent's behavior produces negative responses from the child. The efficacy of statements like "*Now you're leading the interaction; now there are too many toys on the floor; try not to introduce too many toys in a row*" will depend largely on your rapport with the parent and her trust of your judgment.

(2) Another way of correcting counterproductive behaviors is to describe negative responses in the child's behavior. Corrections phrased this way have a powerful effect because such feedback helps the parent distinguish effective from ineffective behaviors. The disadvantage of these corrections is that they depend on child's negative responses to occur. These upsets can reinforce the dyad's expectation of a negative dynamic. Statements such as, *"He turned away from you when you introduced the second toy so soon; see how hard it is for him to attend to you when there are o many toys out on the floor; he doesn't seem interested in the blocks"* offer usable information when spoken tactfully.

To suggest a specific interactive behavior or strategy by *offering directives*. One of the biggest advantages that coaching has over video-feedback is that you can suggest specific behaviors to the parent that are relevant in the given moment. This is an auspicious time for the parent to acquire new skills: "Wait a little longer so the child can choose a new toy; try to get him interested in the blocks; why don't you start by tickling his feet, count to three and freeze until he initiates another turn".

There are many ways to comment upon what you observe beyond praise, corrections, and directives. Some utterances, including humor, can help loosen-up this potentially awkward situation.

3.3. Explain the assignment for this week's play time.

Encourage the parent to maintain her "Play Time Routine" and ask her to briefly reflect on two of her special play sessions using the enclosed questionnaires. Generally, we ask the parent to answer two additional questionnaires that correspond to the topic being addressed in today's session.

4. COMMON ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING THIS SESSION

Try not to interrupt the flow of play. The most effective way for an apprentice to acquire a new skill, like baking bread, involves repetition of modeling, practice, and feedback. If you work with bread, this sequence is easy to establish because one can recreate a specific recipe, systematically modify some ingredient, and thus gradually change the results. Learning how to play with a child is different; each situation the parent faces is unique and difficult to recreate. Consequently, modeling a strategy that would have been helpful to the parent 15 minutes ago is useless, it is impossible to recreate the former situation. For the issues that come up during a *coaching* episode to be effectively addressed during a *modeling* episode, it is important that these two episodes follow closely in time. This can be most easily achieved when parent, child, and PI all sit on the floor and take frequent turns playing. However, the frequency of such turns is limited by the child's ability to shift attention between parent and PI; sometimes it takes children a few minutes to adjust to a new play partner.

During a coaching session the child is almost continuously involved in play. It might be difficult to keep the child's attention for such a long period of time. If the child is getting tired, you should end the modeling/coaching portion of today's session and continue the discussion of today's topic by reviewing MCX/TCX on video.

Remind the parent to keep playing while you comment. When you comment on something you see or make a suggestion, it is important that the parent continues to play with her child. You don't want the interaction to come to a halt every time you have something to say. Often it is helpful to emphasize at the beginning of the coaching session that you don't expect her to look at you, or reply, when you talk. Remind her that she needs to hear your brief comments while continuing to play with her child.