

**Understand and Working With Perseveration and Repetition:
There's Often A Wish or Desire Behind the Repetition**

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A very interesting phenomenon occurred during a recent session that should be highlighted because it is a paradigm for working with many children who have challenges in auditory processing and language and exhibit repetitive behavior and perseveration. This is a general principle that is important not only for such children, but all human relationships benefit as well.

During the session, Darren's mother was doing great and being patient with him, helping Darren reason things out. When Darren was tapping his fingers, his mother asked him what he was feeling. "Mad" was his answer. Then she asked him what other emotions he was feeling: "Sad" and then "Talking." His mother was able to zoom in on the emotion "Mad" in combination with "Talking" and asked Darren how mad he was about having to talk and he was able to show her with gestures—a little mad, a lot mad, etc.. This exchange was based on "reading" Darren and understanding what he was trying to say. Verbally, he wasn't able to express these feelings and got distracted, but his mother was able to help him come back to the subject by being patient and "reading" him.

Later in the session, another opportunity for this kind exchange arose. Darren was talking about having a birthday party and wanted his Aunt Mary to come. However, Aunt Mary lived far away and wasn't able to come. We were nearing the end of the time for the session and Darren's mother was in a hurry to get through all the things that we needed to address. Rather than being patient with Darren and helping him talk about his feelings in wanting Aunt Mary to

come to his party, his mother resorted to doing the thinking for Darren, solved the problem for him, and ended up giving him a lecture and Darren ended up just repeating himself and getting perseverative around Aunt Mary and the party.

With patience and “reading” Darren, his mother could have let this play out and reassured Darren that they would try to find where Aunt Mary lived on the map when they got home and continue the conversation then. Discussions around why he wanted to see Aunt Mary and that he misses her and how he would feel about Aunt Mary not coming to the party and what would make it easy for her to come and what would make it hard for her to come, could have taken place over many days around all the different emotions he was feeling. However, under the pressure of time, she resorted to filling all the blanks for Darren and thus let a golden opportunity pass without taking advantage of it. This is a good illustration of how everyone can resort to under pressure in similar situations – thinking for the other person instead of helping them think for themselves.

Many children and teenagers with Darren’s challenges repeat themselves and get involved in these kinds of perseverative patterns. When a child, teenager, or adult, for that matter, who has these kinds of challenges and repeats himself, he is often trying to let you know what he wants and to make a point. Instead of filling in the blanks for him, try to read the person. They will often be like a poem or a puzzle because they may get distracted in their own thoughts, jumping from subject to subject and then coming back to the original subject. You can help by giving the person multiple choices (good answer first, then silly answer). Try to listen with a “third ear,” piece together what the person is getting at, describe the feelings around this desire, and then introduce the reality (Aunt lives far away, is ill, etc.) into the back and forth discussion where the person is doing a lot of talking. Substitute depth for repetition – that’s the

key. When you don't read the person with these kinds of challenges, you will often get repetition and perseveration. In reading the person, you can get into a deeper conversation about what's on their mind and try to have an in depth discussion that elaborates on their emotions, etc.