

Web-Based Radio Show

Learning to Communicate, Problem Solve, and Use Ideas and Words

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I want to welcome you to our web-based radio show. This is Stanley Greenspan. Today we have a continuation of last week's topic. We are going to spend today's show, as we did last week and the next couple weeks, really breaking down Floortime into its detailed components. Today we are going to talk about strategies to enhance back-and-forth communication, shared social problem-solving interactions, and the beginning of learning to use ideas and words. As you remember, last week we talked about the fundamentals of sharing attention, of relating to others, and becoming purposeful, and the first steps of becoming a two-way communicator.

Many of you have written in asking me to also talk about the more advanced stages of thinking. I should mention that tomorrow, Friday, sometime between 9:00am and 9:45am, I'll be on the Today Show, which is NBC, and I'll be talking about the advanced stages of thinking in school-age children. Also, not next time, but the time after, we'll talk about the advanced stages of thinking in much more detail on this show. So we will get to the advanced stages of reflective thinking and abstract thinking the show after next for those who have inquired about that. And all of this builds; you can't get to the advanced stages of abstract thinking until you have mastered some of the fundamentals. So today it's going to be how we can enhance back-and-forth communication, problem-solving interactions, and begin to learn to use ideas and words.

As you recall, just for those who missed last week's broadcast, we talked about the fundamentals of attention, relating and communicating. We also talked about what it really means to follow a child's lead; that following a child's lead doesn't simply mean doing whatever the child does, or taking your cues from your child. It means beginning with your child's interest. It could be your child's interest in moving a car, or your child's interest in aimlessly wandering around the room. Then you have to build on that. I want you to think for a moment how you would build on that; how you would build on a child aimlessly wandering around the room. Think for ten seconds just what you would do with that. Would you, for example, just aimlessly wander with the child? Would you get in front of the child and try to block the child? Would you build a


moving fence around the child where you put your arms around him without actually holding him so he has to move them up or down to get out of your grasp? Would you be a little doggie getting caught between his legs so he has to hop over you? Think for a second. Which would be your preferred strategy if your child were aimlessly wandering around the room? And, now that you've decided what you would do, what I would like to tell you is that all your choices are okay. This is like a multiple choice question where there's A, B, C or D or "all the above." Well this is "all the above" because any strategy that helps your child relate to you, whether it's being a little dog or getting caught between his legs, or a moving fence, or a blocking of his path, or even being a wandering minstrel with him, humming and making sounds with him, if you listen to him, once in a while he seems to enjoy the similarity of what you are doing together, all would work. The goal is to build on your child's interest. Follow his lead. But then, step it up a notch and say, "How do I use that to mobilize the critical stages of relating, communicating, and thinking? How do I use that to help my child start this journey - if he's not relating, to start relating?" So you've got to create a challenge using his interest or his lead as a signal for what that challenge is. Now sometimes the children who are very, very challenging, the only way, or the best way to start that relationship is with lots of sensory-based, pleasurable, emotionally joyful play. And sometimes it's lying on the floor, rolling over each other. Sometimes it's simply holding and rhythmic rocking. There's no substitute for just lots of joyful relatedness. And for children who are just beginning the journey, who are very avoidant, and maybe only have a few types of sensations they like, like maybe rhythmic movement in the air playing an airplane game or being swung in a swing, that can be the beginning of the relationship. So don't hesitate to start with rhythmic, sort of synchronous, sensory-based play with holding and moving together, rolling around together, lying next to each other, making funny noises at one another or together, and just being joyful. What it all boils down to is finding something that you and your child can enjoy that's fun together. And often that requires an exploration of the child's sensory system to find out what kind of rhythmic movement, what kind of touch such as firm pressure, what type of airplane game, what type of crawling game might be mutually enjoyable. I'm assuming here that while you may not love crawling on the floor with your child, you'll enjoy his or her joy. And so by mutually enjoyable, it will be contagious, you'll be infected by your child's joyfulness as you begin this shared activity. So that's the way to start the process going. But as we talked last week, once you get that joyful relating going and some shared attention going based on your child's own natural interests, then don't be afraid to bring in things that you know your child is interested in such as their favorite toy, their favorite food treat, or their favorite movement game. You can make that available and then the child can choose among three favorite possibilities and you and your child can then engage together. But once you've done that, once you've gotten the shared attention and some joyful relating going, we talked about purposeful communication. This is all by way of introduction to today's focus on more complex purposeful communication. But to get the purposeful communication started, as you recall, we create an opportunity for the child to do something based on their own needs, that we help them do - reach the toy



they're trying to reach and then bringing it a little closer. They still have to reach it and take it from our hand. We make finding our hand creating a challenge. We may get playfully obstructive, as I mentioned before, by being a doggie caught between their legs and they have to go around us. That creates purposeful two-way communication; purposeful interaction. So basically what we do is we create little challenges or obstacles that get between the child and what the child is trying to do that helps the child not only relate to us, but do something purposeful to us. And this becomes the basis for two-way communicating. So as we talked about last week, we want to be very animated and exchange subtle facial expressions. You want to go for that gleam in the child's eye. You want an open circles of communication by following the child's natural interest, but then help the child close the circles of communication by creating a challenge. And to treat all the child's behaviors, even seemingly random ones, as potentially purposeful, because when you get between him and what he's trying to do, the behavior becomes purposeful. As I mentioned, you can help him get things he wants to, but you can also create roadblocks. Don't do too many things to the child. Get the child to do things to you. In other words, if the child wants a tickle, just don't tickle him in five different places, tickle him in one place. Then he has to gesture with a hand or sound to show you he wants a tickle again, or where he wants the next tickle. If a child likes to play "bouncie," let him bounce on your tummy. Lie down and put the ball on your tummy and let him jump on you and the ball together. So this is the way we begin engagement and two-way purposeful communication.

Now the next step in this process is what we call "shared social problem solving." Here's where the goal becomes creating many, many circles of communication in a row. We want to have the child not just have a two-way back-and-forth, or a three-way back-and-forth, where you smile and they smile, and then they make a sound and you make a sound, or where the child is aimlessly wandering and you put your arms around them without touching them, and then push your arms up and they continue walking. That's one nice circle. So now we want to get to the point where the child can have many circles in a row. We go from one to three, from three to five, and then five to ten, and then ten to fifteen, and fifteen to twenty. Once you hit twenty circles in a row, then you get into what we call a continuous flow of back-and-forth communication because once a child can do twenty-plus circles with you where the child is taking the initiative, not just reacting to your tickle or your sounds or your movements, but is initiating as well, once a child can do that, they can do it as long as you're willing to engage them, to keep the ball rolling. So, the steps of shared social problem solving or getting a continuous flow of back-and-forth communication are to create extra steps in your Floortime play. For example, if a child is moving the car and you say, "The car won't move, what should we do?" And you block it with your hand. You can create barriers or obstacles such as with a car, there's a pretend policeman blocking the way and the child either has to knock the policeman down or go around the policeman. You want to be even more animated in your voice. Every time your child begins pulling into their own world, begins absorbing a little bit, you've got to accentuate your liveliness in your voice, become more animated, become more compelling. Almost pretend like you're giving a lecture and the people in


the first row are beginning to fall asleep, or you're telling a joke at a party, you begin increasing your affect. Your voice is more enthusiastic. It doesn't have to get louder. It just becomes more compelling, more expectant, and that's the first step of drawing a child back in. If that doesn't work, sometimes you have to move in and interfere with what your child is doing. Let's say they're beginning to play with their own fingers or wiggle their fingers to get lost in some self-stimulatory activity or just stare off at a fan. You might position yourself between the child and the fan. Or gently hold your child's hand and begin moving it to the rhythm of your voice, so instead of playing with his fingers, he's now holding your hand. And he may pull your hand away and say, "no." And that's fine. Let him have his way. But that's another circle of communication. And then slow motion wise, as he begins working with his fingers again and getting involved with a self-stimulatory, self-oriented play, you might once again say, "I'm gonna get that hand, I'm gonna get that hand." And he may pull his hand away before you even touch it. But what's happened now? You've got a little game going, a little cat and mouse game. You're a little cat, and you're going to catch his little mouse's hands. Anytime he pulls it away is another circle of communication. Then if you finally get his hand, you may say, "I got your little hand. You want it back?" And he's got to make a sound to get his little hand back. And again you don't want the child to get frustrated or annoyed with you, but just a little bit of frustration can get more circles closed. So there are many, many ways to increase these circles of communication. A great one is when your child has got a favorite toy or a favorite cookie and you hide it in your hand. Then he opens up the hand and he finds it. Then you take it back, or you take another little cookie out or a little treat out, and now you hide it in both hands, not showing him which hand it's in, and he's got to search in the two hands for it. He looks in one, oops it's not there. Now he's got to look in the other. And now he's gotten two circles. The third time you put your hands behind your back and he's got to now not only look in your hands he's got to first go around to your back side and then find your hands and open up both hands. So now we've got four or five circles. Next, we might have a little dolly hide his little cookie. The dolly might run away and hide in another part of the room and he has to go chase her. Or, you might hide the dolly so fast with his little cookie that he doesn't see where it is and he's got to search all around the room, but you help him with clues, pointing here or pointing there. Where could it be? Now he's got five to ten circles. The key thing is to help the child become very, very motivated. There's no substitute for motivation. And that always requires us coming back to our first basic point, which is to follow the child's natural interest. So what started out as one game by moving a car may turn into "I'm gonna get your finger" game, when the child gets preoccupied with looking at his or her hands or fingers. So don't feel the need to stick to the game you start with. That's the whole idea of it. The child showed an interest in moving a car, but then quickly shifts to a self-stimulatory activity. That can become the new focus. You may get five or ten circles. Whenever parents tell me, "Gee, I've run out of ideas. I don't know what to do. I don't have anything left in my bag of tricks," my answer is always the same. Stop, relax, and observe for a few seconds, and let the next idea come from your child. And don't take anything for granted. Whatever your child does, or whatever your child is



doing should be the basis for the next circle of communication. And then you create some challenges around that activity, around whatever your child is doing. So we gave the example of the self-stimulatory activity, but it could be any activity your child does. We see lots of children who are distracted by their own actions. They start waving their hands and jumping and running. And it seems aimless to us, but they're actually getting excited by just movement. And it seems to be that their hands or legs are almost moving on their own. They don't seem to have any obvious purpose to it. And sometimes this is very distracting for the child because they can't focus on us while they're being so busy moving their arms. And here it's very effective to say, "oops, you've got great moving arms. We're gonna play the moving arm game together." And you try to catch their hand in your hand and move in rhythm with them. Now you're both moving arms together. If they try to pull away, again that becomes a basis for the, "I'm gonna catch those hands" game. Sometimes the child will let you move your arms together and you can start sort of rhythmic interactions, and then actually begin making a sound game together exchanging different kinds of sounds. And those are very important circles of communication because they give rise to language. A great thing to set up when you're trying to get many circles of communication going after you've gotten your child to be purposeful is to set up little obstacle courses. If your child likes to be swung or likes an airplane game, or likes little tickle games, they may have to get to you through an obstacle course. Mommy might be at one end of the obstacle course while Daddy's helping them figure out how to get through it. They might have to climb through things, over things, around things, jump on something. This could be done again with the help of a caregiver. Another great strategy is sometimes to find an elevated place, like a bed or a platform that's elevated a little off the ground, or a very wide balance beam that's a few inches off the ground, or even a foot off the ground, and just make sure that the ground is soft in case the child should fall. Arnie Miller up in Boston - his center really pioneered this concept of using elevated platforms. He found, and we've found as we have done this as well, that it seems to help children focus and attend and concentrate, just being off the ground. Something about struggling with their own postural control and gravity seems to help them organize their nervous system a little bit. And this makes it easier sometimes to get interaction. Sometimes they want to get down and you can negotiate and have circles of communication in terms of getting down off the platform, or making up games where you go up on the platform with them. There are many, many different ways. The key, again, is to follow your child's lead.


This stage of getting to a continuous flow of back-and-forth interaction is by far one of the most important parts of Floortime, and one of the most important parts of a child's development. Almost all the children I see, many who will come in with lots of words, some who can repeat whole books, but are not able to yet be creative and logical thinkers, or hold a regular conversation, many of them are doing math and reading as well. But they still get self-stimulatory or self-absorbed, and again don't hold that expectable logical conversation that we would see of other children of the same age. Usually there's a big missing piece, even if they score well on a structured language test. And the big missing piece is this level of the continuous flow of back-and-forth pre-

verbal or communication with gestures or actions. In other words, many children don't master to this level well enough. And this is a critical foundation for language, for logical thinking, and for higher levels of abstract and reflective thinking. So weakness at this level tends to hold back higher levels and also tends to keep the child symptomatic in terms of self-stimulatory behavior or repetitive perseverative behaviors. There are children, for example, who are teenagers now, who I have worked with who have learned to type because of an oral-motor problem where it's hard for them to pronounce their words and can have very abstract, complicated conversations through the typing, tell you how they feel. But it's hard for them to have a two-way conversation where you talk to them or type something back to them and they say something back to you. In other words, they're still in and out of their contact with the external world, even though when they're in contact they can share a very complex and abstract thought. But it's still an in-and-out pattern or a pattern of contact and self-absorption. And so their ability to solve problems, to stay reality-based, and to fully enjoy social relationships, and to progress as high as they might academically--where you have to stay reality-based for long periods of time, is not as optimal as it could be. And often with these children we go back and strengthen this level of establishing a continuous flow of back-and-forth communication. So if children were already verbal, we do it with a combination of gestures and words together. Where the child is typing, we may have the child gesture to us, type out what he means, vocalize as best he can, and have a real two-way conversation. And as we get that started and as we improve that, we see the quality of thinking improving. It's never too late to establish this level. We've had the honor of consulting with some 30- and 40-year olds with autistic spectrum disorders who were missing this critical ability, and when we got this cooking, we saw language and cognition improve a bit. There's a little boy who came in the other day who only talked in little, what I call "fragment islands." He would say "car outside" and then jump to "blue toy" and then jump to "orange shirt." So it's hard for the adults - his mommy and daddy, and his helpers who came with him, to make sense of what he was saying. We started noticing that he wasn't getting a continuous flow of back-and-forth communication. He would be self-absorbed, then come out with a phrase, and then go back into a state of self-absorption. And so we worked on the continuous flow using gestures, using some of the games that I just mentioned to you, and at the same time, we tried to get him to verbalize as much as possible while we were doing these interactive games. By the end of the session, for the first time in his life, he answered a "why" question, and he showed some ability for putting the ideas together logically. He wanted to go out the door and we said, "Why? Why?" We gave him two choices, "To play or to go to sleep?" He said, "Go out to play, go out to play." And that was the first time he had ever answered a "why" question. And on follow-up, he's continued to be more logical and continued to use more complex language with sentences that have even two ideas in them since we've been working on this continuous flow of back-and-forth communication. This is just a recent example. But there are many, many, many children who, where we have strengthened this level, we've seen language and cognitive abilities and academic abilities and social skills all strengthened. When you think about it, unless you're in a two-way continuous flow of back-and-forth



communication, it's very hard to stay reality in touch with the world, because your reality has to be sampled constantly. If you're in the world and then self-absorbed, and then in the world and then self-absorbed, you're only getting little samples of reality. You're not getting a continuous picture of reality as it exists. But if you're attentive to the world and you're interacting in the world in a continuing way, as we like to see it, it's healthy growth and development, then you're in constant contact with reality. Well that's very important because that constant contact also helps you regulate your mood. You can get feedback from your environment. You can respond to mommy's facial expression or daddy's facial expression, or their hand gestures, or their body posture, or their tone of voice, so you can tell when they're getting a little annoyed and you better not behave aggressively. So it helps you regulate your behavior and regulate your moods. It helps you work in social groups; to know what to expect in school where there's a lot of non-verbal communication as well as verbal communication that requires constant contact with reality. And most important, it helps your reality testing. It helps you be logical because you have to interact with the world to be logical. You have to have logical bridges between what you're feeling and what someone else is feeling; and what you're saying and what someone else is saying. And you can't do that with an in-and-out pattern, where you become self-absorbed and then interact. Now we all need time where we can imagine and fantasize or we tune into our own world. But that, too, can be an organized logical decision, not simply an automatic pulling away from the world. So we can decide to take some time to daydream or to relax, or just to ponder our favorite thoughts. But that's a distinct conscious logical choice, not the product of a kind of automatic uncritical self-absorption. So that's why this problem solving interaction is so vital and so critical.


Very briefly before we come to some of the questions, I want to take you through different types of children, how we would work with them, and help them become more of a continuous-flow interactor, and a more purposeful two-way communicator. One type of child is a child who is very under-reactive to touch and sound, may have selected areas of over-activity, but generally is difficult to engage, and difficult to facilitate intentionality with because the child tends to be easily self-absorbed and easily lost in his own world because they're so under-reactive to sensation that the sound of your voice or your facial expressions don't register very much. It takes a lot of energy and animation before the child even looks in your direction. Now this child may be over-reactive to certain kinds of sounds, like high-pitched noises or low noises like you might hear from a vacuum cleaner or a boiler. But for the most part this is a child who is under-reactive. Sometimes he may also have low muscle tone, so it's hard for him or her to take initiative and do things. Now the under-reactive, self-absorbed child, if you want to get a continuous flow going, you've got to really be animated and energized up. There's no choice but to be a high-energy person. And if the mommy and daddy or the caregiver or the educators or the therapists are the kind of low-key easy-going individuals, they've got to make an accommodation and operate out of their typical character for this child. And we all have to learn to stretch ourselves. So here we have to be very animated and it's very important to find things the child is interested in. So we've got to pay close



attention because within the self-absorption we'll see favorite little activities that are, again, playing with his fingers, or whether it's moving a car back and forth, we'll see lots and lots of clues as to what we can do to help him become more and more purposeful and intentional. And the key is to get the child to do something to you - to take action. This child's biggest challenge is in taking initiative. So we're basically flirting with the child, enticing the child to take initiative on us. Anything from a favorite cookie, to a favorite tickle game, to a favorite horsie ride, to letting him know that he's sitting or lying on your spot on the floor. And as you nudge him over to take over his spot, see if he'll nudge you back to get the spot back. But the key is animation and high energy and challenging the child to do to you for that under-reactive child.

Now then we have the other extreme - the child who is very over-reactive and easily overloaded. He holds his ears quickly; he gets over-stimulated by a light touch. The child may get out of control by his own movement patterns - that if he starts moving too much, the movement itself tends to over-stimulate him. And this child may get irritable or have tantrums easily, or be very distractible by everything in his environment because it's so difficult for the child to be calm. And so what we want to do is help that child be regulated and calm. So here we do the opposite. We're high energy or animated, but in a very soothing, calm regulated way, finding that tone of voice that soothes the child. So we're not going to try to be over animated with this child, but trying to do what we can to try to be soothing, yet compelling and interesting. Same principles - follow his lead, extend the circle of the communication, get into to multiple circles of communication, but in a very soothing, regulating way.

A third type of child is probably the most challenging. This is the child who gets overloaded and distracted by their own movement patterns; who is very active and often very avoidant. As soon as we approach the child, the child is off to another part of the room, but always moving, always active, and seems to be so avoidant that we can't capture them even for a second, even if we try to play our "moving fence" game where we put our arms around them, and then they pick up our arms, it's hard to do because they're so active. And this child is waving their arms, jumping up on the couch, jumping off the couch before we can get on the couch, etc., etc., etc. Here what we have to do is help the child be less distracted by their own movement. One of the favorite strategies I have for a child who's so active and so moving is to try to capture the child's movement into a joint movement. So here one of my favorite activities is as the child is running and jumping and moving their arms, is to try to capture their hands in your hands, and begin moving together, and try to be rhythmically interactive with the child at the child's activity level. Then gradually down regulate with the child, into slower movement patterns; slower rhythms. The child may pull away, but we may get a purposeful action like, "no." Then we play the "capture the hand" game. And with this child we try to go from fast, to medium, to slow, to super slow, to try to get a pattern of regulation cooking. So here I would call it the "locking the hands" game and the "moving together" game and then the "regulation" game, where we try to go from super fast, to medium, to slow, to really slow motion and back up to fast again. So the child is learning to regulate activity



and realize that they can then achieve a lot of pleasure from interacting as they are regulating activity together. For this child, too, it's very important to find things they're interested in that they'll become more purposeful to achieve. But the first step of that might be helping them slow down a bit and get their motor patterns organized. Recognize though, that this child may be distracted by his or her own movement, and that makes it especially difficult.

There are other children who may be especially difficult to get a continuous flow going because they seem to self-absorb so rapidly, right after you get interaction. You may get a very good interaction where they reach for a toy and then you seem to lose them and you can't get the next step. You can't them to roll that toy, or if it's a ball, let's say, back to you. And if you roll it to them, by the time you do, they seem self-absorbed and staring out the window or looking at a fan, or they're very avoidant. So the key here is when a child, who you lose very quickly - you're only getting two or three circles - is to become very, very quick at increasing your affect and upping the stakes. In other words, don't tolerate, even for a split second, losing the child. Don't tolerate even for a split second the child self-absorbing. So as soon as you lose the child for a second, increase your affect. If that doesn't work, move in with some playfully obstructive activity, so that the child is getting used to a continuous flow of back-and-forth interaction. Often we wait too long, and then the child is lost in his or her own world. So we have to kind of be observant, and as soon as we lose that eye contact, as soon as we lose the emotional contact, increase your affect quickly to pull the child back in. So it's all a game - you're talking to a sleepy friend and you've got to constantly increase that emotionality to pull that person back in. Then add on playful obstruction, so we can have playfully obstructive activities where we get to cream the child in what they're trying to do in a playfully obstructive way to pull that child right back in. So if he starts looking at the window, we get in front of them and block their pathway. "You can't run away from me, I'm every place!" is the name of the game. It's the "I'm every place" game. And that's the key to that very quickly self-absorbed child. Move quickly, be quick on your feet, pull the child right back in, so that that child gets used to that rhythm and you've got to elevate your own affect very, very quickly. Now as you're doing this, to get to the beginning stages of using ideas, which we'll talk about more in detail next week, as you're getting continuous flow going, you begin adding in words. So it's no longer good enough for the child who is searching your hands for the toy, you simply open your hand. Now he's got to say, "Cookie, cookie!" if he's trying to get the cookie. Or if he wants to open that door, he's got to say, not just take your hand and put it on the door and help you open it in a multi-step interaction. Now you're going to say, "ope, ope, ope" and the child will say "open" as you're opening the door. Initially you can cue the child up with a word, but then help the child think it through, and say, "open or close?" So first you just tell him the word being repeated as their doing it so they know what it means, and then you start giving choices, "open or close," always giving them the good choice first and the bad choice second. And that way we have the child begin attaching a word that is now a complex interaction pattern. But the words always have to be tied to meaningful

interactions and to meaningful actions. And we're going to be talking about that more next week.

What I want to do now is turn to our caller. And if you'll just hold on for one second we're going to take a call from Trish. Hold on. Hello, this is Dr. Greenspan. Okay we'll go to caller 2, then come back to caller 1. Hello. This is Dr. Greenspan. We're having a little trouble with the technology. What I'm going to do is read the question from Trish:

Hello, Dr. Greenspan. I want to thank you for the excellent information you're providing to parents and other concerned persons. I recently became aware of the broadcast and have some catching up to do. I was especially interested in the broadcast on the misdiagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders. This indeed was reassuring information for me. You see my daughter is now four years two months. When I began working with her she was two years and two months. At that time I am convinced she would have diagnosed with autism, although I believe wrongly.

Hello, Georgia. Yes, I can hear you. What I'm going to do is I'm going to just repeat your question live to the audience.

You have a seven-year old daughter and she seems to get anxious or worried in different situations like when she goes to Girl Scouts. When she needs to take the bus home, she's worried if it's a different bus, or will it be on time, or will her friends be on the bus with her. She gets worried, gets upset, and cries sometimes, and she worries a lot and there is a lot going on.

SG: Does she have any language problems or communication problems or school problems? And she did well in standardized testing, and she did well in school, I take it. She sounds like she has friends and likes to communicate with her friends. Well, one of the things we see - and again, since I don't know your daughter personally or don't know a lot of details - let me talk generally about children who get worried easily and this will be good for all the parents who have children who worry easily. Often children who worry and are fearful and always thinking about the worst things that can happen and want to have absolute certainty in their lives - make sure that bus will be there on time; like adults who have that pattern do, adults who have that kind of anxiety and worry and want certainty in their lives. Usually such individuals, children or adults, are very sensory hyper-responsive or sensory reactive. And they are also very reactive to their own emotions. So frequently we can find that they're sensitive to certain kinds of sounds or certain kinds of touch. And even if we can't identify a specific one, the overall personality of a person who's tuned into the details, who tunes into the trees very well, notices everything, and therefore they can easily get overloaded. Then they're very emotionally reactive. So it's as though a person were being over-stimulated in a sense by so many different feelings at the same time because they're so clever and so smart and taking everything in. It's like too much is happening in the world all the time. And then the desire for certainty is the desire to control that; to regulate that. You're looking for order. You're trying to keep from being totally overwhelmed by your own awareness of

the world. And because you experience all your emotions so intensively, you're feeling disregulated all the time. And your attempt to get regulated is your attempt to bring certainty. So there are two general approaches we like to take. There's a book I wrote about it. It's called *The Challenging Child*. In it there is a chapter about the child who's very easily worried and anxious, and very, very reactive. That will give you more detail on this subject. But in the meantime, some general principles are; the long-term goals for a child like this is to help him do two things: (1) help them be more calm and regulated. Now sometimes children with this pattern are very, very verbal, but they may not always be as gifted with their motor skills or their ability to plan and sequence complex actions. Or their ability for what we call visual spatial thinking to sort of see the forest for the trees. Now, how is your daughter on those two skills, like her motor skills – her fine gross and motor? She's average. And how is she at seeing the forest for the trees. You know, seeing the big picture versus focusing on details? She's very much into detail. Yes. So what we want to do is do a lot of calming and regulating games. We want to improve actually the motor skills, because that gives a child confidence in their bodies. So dance or ballet or sports are very good. Sometimes occupational therapy evaluation is helpful, just to fine-tune them and see if there are other activities that can be done. Also, for big-picture thinking, I recommend a game called "thinking about tomorrow," where you actually anticipate tomorrow and anticipate the good things that will happen and the bad things, the scary things, and you talk about the feelings for each. The good things and feelings for the scary things, and you also talk about what other people will feel who you might be in contact with as part of this. And then you also anticipate what you routinely do, get scared or worried, and whatever else you might do, like call home or see the teacher. And by anticipating tomorrow and looking at the whole day and the whole range of feelings, then you look for themes in your feelings. And you look for themes as the kind of person you are. Is this going to be a scary day or an easy day? Are you a person who is the kind who gets scared easily and overload easily? So you become a better big-picture thinker by doing more big-picture thinking, because you're not just talking about the bus, you're talking about the whole scope of the day. You may even visualize the day and actually draw it out by drawing on a piece of paper or putting it up on your bulletin board so the child can picture the day. And then you also work on self-calming activities, like relaxing your muscles. You've got to take your deep breathing in and out slowly, and counting to three. And also, picture images that are reassuring and comforting, like I'm going to be with mommy soon. And as you work on calming activities, and as you work on big-picture thinking, and as your child identifies the situations that make him feel kind of scared or worried, you're really working together on how to self-calm on the one hand, and how to be a better big-picture thinker on the other hand. Also, children who worry easily often are less comfortable with the assertive aggressive side of life. And so angry feelings are little harder for them, because it's more scary. And so talking about when children annoy them or upset them, say "Gee, what are you feeling? I know you wouldn't do it, but if you were the king or queen of the whole world, what would you like to do, a little Johnny or Susie?" Or, "What would you like to do to get even with your teacher?" And even though parents don't want to hear about the

aggressive fantasies of their children, it's only a fantasy and only talk. And the child understands the difference, particularly a child who is very verbal. Between that and the actual doing of it, they're getting comfortable talking about the angry side of life also tends over a long time to reduce fears. It's also very important for the mommy and daddy at home to create a very soothing, regulating, comforting setting. So you're not jumping into the child's fears and anxieties with them, but you're providing a kind of counter balance. The more anxious and scared they are, the more soothing and persistent you are. And both parents need to be involved. So, if a daddy's a workaholic and needs to get home a little earlier so the child doesn't feel so dependent just on mommy, for example, but there's a mommy and daddy to share with. So those are just some basic strategies to begin with. But it's very common. And take a look at the chapter in *The Challenging Child* on the children who worry and get anxious easily. (Caller asked a question) Well, what you do is you work it out with the child who is verbal. And you say, "What can we do or plan tomorrow so that it's more enjoyable, so that you're less scared?" So the child is part of the decisions. If everyone's rushing around and there's no time just to lie together with mommy on the couch, and talk about the day, and relax and maybe listen to music together, and there's no time to relax, then everyone is kind of running on high octane and the whole household is tense and nervous, and everyone is snapping at each other. So the idea is to create a rhythm at home, a comforting rhythm that's negotiated. And so it's not much mommy or daddy limiting the activity, but working with the child to kind of prioritize and say, "How do we make tomorrow a real fun day that's going to be calm and we can all enjoy it together?" Okay. Thank you for you good question. Okay. Bye, bye.


Now, what we're going to do is, I'm going to finish reading Trish's question. I'm sorry we couldn't get Trish on the line. Those of you who have been kind enough to call in, please keep trying. We're going to work out this glitch, but, as you can see, we're flexible here. So if we can't get it to operate so that we will actually hear the caller on the air, I'll do like I did. I'll take it through the other phone and tell you what they're saying and we'll get the question answered.

But let me read Trish's question. She was talking about the misdiagnosis of ASD. She was telling me about her daughter who is four years and two months old, and she began working with her on her developmental challenges when she was two years and two months. *At that time I am convinced she would have been diagnosed with autism, although I believe wrongly. I've been doing the things that you recommended on your first broadcast; the six principles. At this time she does 1 though 5 really well. What mommy's meaning here, is that she's attending and engaging, being a purposeful communicator, and getting into a continuous flow of back-and-forth communication - what we talked about today - and she is using ideas creatively, which we're going to talk about more next week. We're working on level six, which means we're working on logical thinking, two-way, back-and-forth use of ideas that are connected. I do get back-and-forth communication, but it continues to be limited. For example, the other day we were outside, and she screamed and yelled, "Scared!" I asked, "What is it?" She*

replied, "It's a bumble bee" and ran to me. This is just one example of our interactions. She makes frequent requests and comments, as well as pointing and saying, "Look." However, I have gotten some pressure from one family member to have her evaluated professionally because she can be completely oblivious to her. She's my sister-in-law. Her question to me is, "Don't you think there's something wrong with Trish?" I of course defended her vehemently. Now I happen to be a speech and language pathologist, but I work strictly with adults. At the same time I have many resources and the ability to discuss my daughter with experts in the field of early language. I believe and know from my own testing that my daughter is delayed or disordered in receptive expressive language. I have learned about all of the associated behaviors that are autistic-like. My daughter dearly loves my sister. She will yell out her name and run to her. She also interacts well with my assistant. There has been back-and-forth conversation between them. Another example is, they were out walking and met a couple, and my daughter said, "It's a man!" and then said, "Hi, man." Now I'm finally getting to my question. My daughter does not do well in her Sunday school class, but at times will sit in the corner and talk to her stuffed dogs. I have encouraged this at home. I see it as pretend play, and I often engage in the play to boost her language. I was told this is was very disruptive to the other students, which I don't deny. She also won't color for them. This apparently is not unusual for her at this class. She did, however, do very well during vacation bible school, when she went every day. But I realize now that they kept her engaged. Also, a different teacher was there. In fact, they said she was a model child. There were never any tantrums or misbehaviors. My questions are: How can I help her to be more cooperative, and am I wrong that she could be autistic? I apologize for the length and thank you for your patience, and any insight is greatly appreciated. Thank you, Trish.

Now, this is a wonderful question because it allows us to answer the bigger question that many of you have. Of course, I don't know Trish or her daughter, so I can't give a diagnosis on the telephone, but I can talk about the criteria for determining whether a child should be thought of as on the autistic spectrum, or thought of as one having just language problems, or motor-planning problems, or other sensory processing problems, which we call regulatory problems or regulatory disorders. That's a summary term. Put your left hand out wide and think of that as zero. Put your right hand out wide and think of that as ten, and your nose is five. I want everyone to stretch their hands out. The more your child is fully engaged with you with real intimacy and warmth, and other trusted caregivers, and the more your child communicates with gestures in a continuous flow of back-and-forth interaction, where you can have almost an endless conversation with smiles and smirks and head nods and silly little playful glances, and the more your child, when she does talk at whatever level, even if there's a language delay, talks meaningfully, "Mommy, I love you" or "Mommy, give me the juice" or "Oh I'm scared of the bumble bee," the more your child does that, the closer they are to the ten. Ten mean you may have a language problem or motor problem, but you are on a developmental trajectory or line that is not showing autistic spectrum-type symptoms.


On the other hand, the more self-absorbed your child is, the more they are in their own world all the time, that does not mean they're pretending play on their own. That means the more they seem impervious to their environment, the more they are in and out in their way of relating. In other words, the less they can get a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing going, the more when they use words or language, it's scripted - just repeating what they read in a book, less meaningful, not saying "Mommy, I love you," or "Mommy, I'm scared of the bumble bee," but just repeating seemingly fragmented phrases or from a book that's not meaningfully used to convey needs or wants or desires or feelings. So the more they're self-absorbed, the more they're not exchanging emotional gestures or signals in a continuing way, and the more they're using language in a scripted way or a repetitive way, the more they tend towards the ASD or the autistic spectrum side of the equation. Now, also think of this as a dynamic process. Children are not fixed. So if on your 10-point scale with your left hand the extreme being zero, and your right hand the extreme being ten, you should say, well my child is now a "four," that they engage a little bit, but they are a little self absorbed, they have a little bit of a capacity for back-and-forth emotional signaling, but only three or four circles in a row, and they have a few words they use meaningfully, but they also do a lot of scripting, so let's say your child is a four, that doesn't mean your child will always be that way. If you work with your child in a comprehensive program, we see children shifting over – becoming more engaged, moving over to a 5 or a 6 and then to a 7 or 8. We have a bunch of children now, not all the children we work with, but a subgroup of children who have become 9 and 10 on this scale where they are now teenagers and reflective thinkers warm and engaged and have lots of friends and empathetic and understanding of other people's feelings. They have very good theory of mind capacities and all of these started as 3's and 4's when we first began working with them. So it is a dynamic process – how you work with a child can make a big difference. For some children, more of a difference than others, depending on just how severe the initial challenges are and also, how comprehensive the program is. There are many factors that determine the rate of progress. Only the rate of progress itself can determine how the child is doing. So we shouldn't try to prophesize. We should work with the child, create an optimal program, and see how the child is doing. So for all those caregivers who are wondering if their child is on the autistic spectrum or not on the autistic spectrum, don't feel that that is an all-or-nothing decision. Think of it, again, as a continuum and think about how warm and intimate your child is, how spontaneous they are and their creative use of language, and how continuous they are in their exchanging of social and emotional signals. Based on that, you can tell to what degree they have the strengths that we want for all children. The goal is to help strengthen these capacities on all children. So for Trish and the example that she used, I would say to ask these three questions and make your own decision. As a speech pathologist, determine where your child is. In general, when a



child is 7 or 8 or more on this hypothetical scale, I usually feel the child is doing very, very well in terms of affect and we only continue to strengthen it. If the child is at a 6 or anything beyond a 5, I feel they are moving in the right direction and we try to get them up to a 7, 8, or 9. So think of it as a dynamic process. Now all children, particularly children who are sensory reactive, are going to be shy with certain adults and they are going to relate better to some adults than others. All children will become self-absorbed in busy, noisy environments some of the time if they are sensory reactive. Other children, if they are sensory craving and moving, will become more active and more of a fireball in busy, noisy settings. So all children will have their own different patterns. If you want to assess where a child is in this 10-point scale I just mentioned, take the best that the child can do with the most comfortable adults the child is with. In other words, I'm less concerned with how the child does with peers or with a new teacher or in Sunday school. I'm more concerned with what happens at home in the intimacy of a warm, comforting environment with caregivers the child loves and trusts. That's where you can see what a child can do. Now if the child can't do it in all settings or can't do it with peers or can't do it at school, that's something the child can learn to do gradually. For the child who is shy or over-reactive, we gradually expose them to more complex social situations. But that doesn't make the child evidence an autistic spectrum disorder. So you take the child in their most intimate settings and see how the child does there. That's one of the reasons why it's so important to have parents involved in evaluations. Frequently, assessments of children to determine if they have autism or not or other developmental problems, separate the child from their parent and the child is in a stressful situation and may evidence behaviors that are not showing the best that the child can do. So we always want to see the best that the child can do under the most favorable circumstances and that shows you what the child has.

So think about this issue of autism, not autism as a dynamic process – be a gray area thinker about it, not an all-or-nothing thinker, and make your own decisions about where you think your child is on this continuum and then work with professionals accordingly. If children have language problems or motor problems, make sure you have a comprehensive program that addresses their needs, including a very active home program with a very active Floortime component. Consult our websites, www.floortime.org and www.icdl.com . Consult our websites and take a look at our book, *The Child with Special Needs* and also our book, *Building Healthy Minds*. They are both Perseus books and they will provide additional guidelines to answer this question.

So thank you for your good questions. Next week we are going to talk about helping children create ideas, be creative thinkers, and also become logical thinkers. So



the topic for next week is becoming creative thinkers and learning to connect ideas together and becoming logical thinkers. So it will be how to help children with special needs and all children become creative and logical thinkers.

Thank you for joining us today and we will speak to you again next week.