

Web-Based Radio Show


Floortime: Everywhere, All the Time

How follow our child's lead, harness their pleasure and their excitement and their enthusiasm, tailor our interactions to their individual ways of processing experience and information, and help them climb their developmental ladder – learning to attend, relate, engage, communicate, and think

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I want to welcome you to our Floortime topic for today's Web-based Radio Show. Today's topic is about Floortime. It's "Floortime all the Time Everywhere" or "Floortime Everywhere all the Time." As you know, for the last few weeks we have been talking about the principles of setting up a program for children with autistic spectrum disorders and other developmental types of challenges. We have been also talking about the goals for children who have developmental challenges, including autistic spectrum disorders, and how every child is unique. And as we have been talking about these general principles, we've described what we call our DIR Model – our Developmental Individual Difference Relationship-based model. As you recall, the "D" part stands for understanding each child's, what we call, functional developmental capacities. That is the capacities of the child to attend, engage with warm and love and compassion, to interact purposefully with gestures and emotions such as smiles and head nods and smirks, to be able to engage in what we call social problem solving in a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing like taking people by the hand and showing them things, to use ideas creatively like in pretend play or meaningfully, "I want an apple" or "Mommy I love you" and then to use ideas logically, "I want to go outside because I want to play" or "I want daddy to chase me." So those are our six functional developmental capacities that we call technically, "Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities" because emotions fuel them. We want to promote that in each and every child, regardless of where they start. Then we show how every child is unique and different in terms of the ways that they process information and experience – how they take in sights and sounds, how they move, how they respond to sensations – some



children for example are over-reactive to touch and sound. Some children are under-reactive and they need a lot of energizing and wooing. Some children need more visual support. Some children need more auditory support. So by tuning into each child's unique way of processing experiences and forming learning relationships based on that, we promote the child's mastery of their functional developmental capacities. That is, we help them climb their developmental ladder, but to do that we need to meet them where they are.

So those are the principles that we have been talking about. We have been showing how the goals for our children should not be simple things like sitting at a table, although that can be important sometimes, but the bigger things of relating and communicating and thinking creatively and logically. Those should be our goals for our educational system and for all of us at home. One of the techniques that is part of our DIR Model, remember last time we talked about how to set up a program and select a proper program and before that we talked about educational and home environments. One of the techniques that we emphasize is what we call, "Floortime." Floortime, as you know, has become a shorthand term for the whole DIR Model, for the whole approach we use as well. But it is really a specific technique within this general approach. In Floortime, we follow our child's lead, we harness their pleasure and their excitement and their enthusiasm, we tailor our interactions to their individual ways of processing experience and information, and we help them climb their developmental ladder – learning to attend, relate, engage, communicate, and think. That's a tall order for Floortime, particularly when you are supposed to just be having fun. But the irony is, the more fun you're having, the more these bigger goals of climbing the developmental ladder and mastering relating, thinking, and communicating will happen.

Now today's topic is "Floortime All the Time Everywhere." In other words, Floortime should be done 20 minutes or more 8 or more times a day often, for many children, and this could be done in the home. But on nice days it could be done out in the backyard. It can also be done in the supermarket. Also it can be done in the neighborhood at the playground. It can be done with other children, with siblings or with peers. It can be done with just the adult and the child – just the two of you. It can be done in the bathtub. It can be done cuddling in bed. It can be done when you're tired, exhausted at the end of the day and the child has had a full day of school and doesn't want to do anything but sit and stare at the wall, and when you're tired and all




you want to do is lie down on the floor. It can be done in all these situations and in all these places. So it's Floortime all the time, everywhere.


Now what are the general principles of doing Floortime all the time and everywhere, in addition to our prescribed times? As you recall during our prescribed times, you do it 20 minutes or more at a time and it can be done in many different places as well, we're devoting ourselves entirely just to Floortime. But there are a lot of 5 or 10 minute bursts here and there when you're doing the laundry, when you're washing the dishes, when you're tinkering out in the backyard, when you're cutting the lawn, or when you're at the supermarket. How do we make sure these little time periods and all these special times with our children when they are along with us can be meaningful Floortime activities?

First let's just review very quickly what Floortime really is. Floortime, as we said, is following your child's lead and harnessing all the six fundamental functional developmental capacities from attending all the way up to talking and thinking and communicating. By meeting the child at the level they are at and working with then on what they are having difficulty with – if they are having trouble relating, we woo them into relationships; if they can't get gesture, we encourage them to gesture by putting a toy on our head and they have to gesture that they want it. So we always try to challenge them to harness their natural interests, to move further up the developmental ladder. They can't yet use words but they are gesturing and problem solving with us, we'll give them the sounds and see if they can imitate it as they are opening the door, "op, op, op". So Floortime is meeting the child where they are, but harnessing as many of the six levels as we can up to the level the child is capable of engaging in. But it is also tailoring these interactions to their unique differences – wooing and energizing the under-reactive child; extra soothing for the over-reactive child; more visual support for one; more auditory support for another; the child who can't plan and sequence actions, give them lots of quick feedback; the child who can do 3 or 4 step actions, harness that and challenge them to do 5 and 6 step actions. So Floortime is meeting the child where they are, tailoring to their individual differences, and helping them move up the developmental ladder.

Now how do we do this in these different settings we talked about? And after we talk about some examples of doing it in different settings, we're going to talk about some of the common mistakes we make, some of the common assumptions that are not true for Floortime that we often make about Floortime. But first let's talk about some




examples of how to do this in different settings. One of the biggest opportunities is with peers or siblings because parents often say, “gee, I can’t get any time alone with Johnny or Susie because little Sally is there all the time or little Timmy is there all the time.” Well that’s great! We want the peers or the siblings involved, and we often recommended, as you know, 4 or more peer play dates a week so children get used to using their interactive skills and their communication skills with peers. So when there are siblings or peers present, it’s group Floortime. And it’s good initially to not have too big a group. So you may want to have just one other child so maybe there are three of you, one adult and two children. Then maybe build to yet another child if another child is there. And if it’s a big family, by all means have both parents on the floor helping divide the 6 children in the family into two groups of 3, or get a helper in. And the principle is, each child gets to be the leader for part of the time. So let’s say you have two children – two siblings or two peers – so you’ll have your child with the autistic spectrum disorder be the leader first or second. And they may go for 15 minutes being the leader. Then the other child is the leader for 15 minutes. And the leader gets to set the pace – gets to choose the toy and the activity. Then you, as the adult, try to bring in the other child as much as you can into the interaction. So for example, let’s say the child who is the leader is just jumping around, and seems to be involved in aimless jumping activity. So to the leader we say, “Ok, we’re going to play the jumping game.” And then you put on some music and jump rhythmically with the child. So you will encourage the sibling or the peer to jump with you and the other child and make it a jumping game. And if every time you jump near the child who has the challenges, he jumps away, we jump away with him. But soon we jump in front of him so he has to deal with us and then he purposefully may turn away and jump in the other direction, then we’ll jump in front of him really quickly and now it’s a cat and mouse game where we all jump together. Then what we might do to make it even more challenging, we’ll ask the other child to hold our hand and we’ll create a little circle, and we’ll create it around the child who is the primary jumper, who started the jumping game. And now the child who started the jumping game is in the middle and he wants to get out so he can jump to all four corners of the room. We say, “If you want to get out, you have to pick up our arms.” So now he either has to jump under or pick up our arms or break through the arms and we can make it real easy for him. Now we have a purposeful little game, and he’s gesturing because he is picking up our arms or making a sound like, “you pick up the arms” and pretty soon everyone is giggling and laughing and having a good time and you’re getting not only interacting, but you’re getting purposeful interaction.



Now let's say then it's the other child's turn to take the lead, and the other child wants to move the cars or trucks into the different houses that you have, the little toy houses. The little guy who has the challenges is wanting to aimlessly wander away. Well, how do we keep him involved while we are letting guy or gal #2 be the leader? This is even more challenging. So here, as for example, little Timmy is moving the car towards the house and little Johnny is aimlessly wandering away, we have to figure out how to bring him into it so we can challenge him or encourage him to come look and come see the car moving. But he may ignore us, so we may have to say to Timmy, "Timmy, we've got to get Johnny to help us open the door to the house because we can't get into the house and let your car in unless we have some help here!" And so we take the house to little Johnny and we go in front of him and we say, "Push this door open please, push this door open." And then we encourage Timmy to talk to Johnny and say, "push, push, push." And then we say to Timmy, "Can you show Johnny how to do this?" And Timmy pushes, and maybe if we're lucky, we get Johnny to copy. If we're unlucky, maybe Johnny kind of goes away and we try to get in front of him and say, "Should we show him how to push the door open?" with Timmy doing the leading. And we try three or four times, and each time we do it, if Johnny continues to play the cat-and-mouse game and fakes one way and then runs the other way, we say to Timmy, "Gee, Johnny is pretty good, we're going to have to be even more clever to get him to help us open that door," but then we'll open that door for Timmy and we'll say, "This time I'll do it" and then Timmy gets to put his car in the thing. But then the next time Timmy tries something, again we try to involve Johnny in it as his little helper. Sometimes we'll succeed; sometimes we won't. We're not going to get to Rome overnight. And we're not going to help Johnny be a cooperative player overnight. But over time, as we help Timmy engage Johnny by trying to get Johnny to be his helper and as we challenge him by getting in front of him and showing him what we want him to do and making it fun, we're getting more engagement and more purposeful interaction. Remember, our goal is not to get Johnny to open that door for Timmy or even to get Timmy and Johnny to talk to each other. It is to get them just to interact and relate to each other. So if Timmy is blocking Johnny with us, then he is going to have to go around Timmy and us, Johnny is beginning to relate to both of us.

And that's the first step. When we do it that way, over time Johnny starts relating more and more, pretty soon there are giggles and smiles, and what do you know – pretty soon Johnny is imitating what Timmy is doing and we're getting cooking at a more and more interactive level. It's a slow process. And there will be many




innovations. The key is not to get discouraged and to realize we are trying to get Johnny and Timmy interacting. For Johnny, though, it's simple engaging and being more purposeful. For Timmy, it's getting his truck into the house and maybe using words and describing where else he wants the truck to go.

Now let's take this out into the playground or into the backyard. Here we are more likely involved in a lot of gross motor activity – running, jumping, going on slides. Here too, the key is not to just be involved in activity. Activity should be fueling the fun. It is human interaction that counts. So who is going to help little Johnny up the ladder? Or when Johnny gets on the slide, Timmy and you are going to be blocking Johnny or you are going to be blocking Johnny and he has got to say, “let me go” or “ready to slide” or “open the door” or “down the chute” or something, or point – something so your arm moves up and he can go down the slide. Pretty soon, again we are getting engagement and interaction. Then as he is going up the ladder, all of a sudden little Timmy is standing by the ladder and who gets to go first and how are we going to decide that? So all this done through pointing and gesturing and facial expressions. What we are doing is creating lots of interactions that are fun for Johnny on the way to getting up and down the slide which he loves to do, or the same thing for going on the swing. So in the backyard or on the playground where there is a lot of motor activity that is fun, just insert yourself into the equation. And insert other children into the equation.

Now the supermarket is a great place. Many kids love to be in the cart moving around. But, hey – someone has to direct the cart! They can't just be on a ride without telling you where to go. So they get to point or show, make a sound to tell you which aisle to go in. And which can they want to take off. And there's no harm in taking some cans off the shelf. You can put them back on or they can help you put them back on. So the supermarket is a great playground because the cart is great and the lovely multi-colored cans are great, you can see what kinds of noise the cans can make as you knock it with your finger a little bit. All kinds of fun things can go on in supermarkets. The key here too, is to let your child be intrigued with the activity and insert yourself into the activity.

How about in your car on a trip? Here it's very helpful to have both mommy and daddy or an older sibling be with little Johnny in the back of the car while the other one is driving. And the person in the back can be playing all kinds of games. They could be looking at books together, but it's not just looking at pictures, it's pointing to the favorite picture, it's making sounds with the pictures, it might be little finger games or




finger puppets. All kinds of interactive opportunities can occur in that back seat of the car. What happens when there is only one parent driving the child? Well, again it's safer for the child to always be in the back of the car. It's tempting to have him ride in the front, but you can be talking to your child, playing sound games. If that is too distracting and you're the only one in the car, maybe that's the time when your child can just relax and listen to a music tape and enjoy rhythmic activity, and you can talk at red lights or talk at other times when you're not too distracted, and try to get sound games, little imitative games – any type of interaction will work.

Bath time is a great place for kids, particularly for those who like water. There are obviously little boats and soap and all kinds of things that can be played with in the bath. Bed time warm and cuddly, I mean that's wonderful for looking at picture books, but doing more quiet play. It could be playing "this little finger goes to market" or little backrubs. Again, here too it's the child directing you. Do they like this leg rubbed or that leg rubbed? Do they like this part of the back or that part of the back? What part of their face do they want rubbed? So it's relaxing games with the child directing you. And again, relaxing but interacting.

How about when you're really tired at the end of the day and the child is exhausted after school? Well, he doesn't need to veg out and just stare at the wall. You could lie down and relax. You could lie down next to him and when you all lie down, you can be again, doing things like rubbing his legs or rubbing his back, but on direction. Or moving his little toes – it could be a very quiet, relaxing, soothing game, but again interactive where he is showing you what he wants, putting one foot up or the other foot. These little purposeful interactions that build into big interactions, and that's what we need.


How about when your child is very energetic and wants to run around? Oh, this is great because now we can play our running games and we can play hide-and-go-seek, and we can play block-the-child so he has to get around us, or we could play various obstacle courses where he needs our help to negotiate the obstacle course. Again, the key is to insert yourself. It could airplane games where daddy picks up little Johnny or Susie, but they have to direction the action, saying "go, move, faster, slower, up, down" or just point or make other gestures that indicate the direction.

Now what are the common mistakes? These common mistakes aren't really mistakes, they are just principles that are not so self-evident about Floortime



everywhere all the time. So let me cover these because they will give you the general principles you want to be aware of, and ultimately make it more fun for you and more exciting. One is repetition. Many parents say, “What do you do when little Johnny just wants to do the same thing over and over again?” And the key thing here is with repetition, don’t just try to distract the child from the repetition. The child is moving the car back and forth, opening and closing the door, rubbing a spot on the floor – try to join the repetition, but make it creative from the inside. Get stuff behind his door, get your hand under the spot he’s trying to rub, put your hand to block the car so the car just can’t go in the direction he wants it to and he’s got to figure out a way around your hand. As soon as you insert yourself into the repetition creatively, it’s no longer repetitious. So he doesn’t have to give up the car or the door or his favorite rubbing spot or even his favorite visual game where he likes to look at the fan, you just need to insert yourself between him and the activity so he has to now deal with you. As long as you do something creative, he’s got to do something creative. As long as you never do the same thing twice, he can’t do the same thing twice. And that’s the goal: harness his energy and help him be creative.


What about aimless motor activity? The child who is just running and jumping and seems distracted by his own activity, every time you try to talk to him or engage him, his arms are waving and he is so involved with his own hands or fingers or looking at them that you can’t get his attention. Well, some children have such a hard time controlling their own motor actions that it does distract them. It distracts them from relating and communicating. So here we have come up with a very interesting strategy. First level is just to use more affect in your voice to try to pull them in, and be more expectant. See if that works. So just get more energy and more expectation in your voice. Like, “Hey, look what I have on my head!” with real energy. Second level is to match what they are doing and see if they’ll join you and you can get into a kind of rhythmic imitative game where you are moving your hands just like they are moving theirs and you dance together. The third level is to hold their hands. Say, “We can do that together! I like to move together” and move the hands initially in rhythm with what they are doing so you’re doing it together, you are moving your hands together or both running around together, but then begin moving their hands in rhythm to your voice as you talk to them. Let’s say you’re saying, “What are we going to do now?” – move their hands in rhythm to your voice like, “what-are-we-going-to-do-now?” so that their hands and their motor and their body is actually experiencing the rhythm of your communication. And what you are doing here is harnessing their synchrony, their



interaction with you. This is something we see in babies, doing automatically. But many children with autistic spectrum disorders may have a hard time doing this because of their motor planning problems and their problems with timing. So they have a hard time tuning into that synchrony. So we help them by holding their hands and moving rhythmically. I have seen many children who haven't been able to speak, begin speaking when we do that. They certainly can focus more. And sometimes they get annoyed with us and pull their hands away, but if we do it very gently and find the right rhythm, often they will enjoy and it will help them calm and focus and we get more back-and-forth communication with gestures and/or words. What about the child who runs away? Again, make that into a running away game with getting in front of him and blocking him.

Now one of the worries parents have is they say, "If I follow my child's lead, nothing much is happening. Nothing much is cooking." And the key is that you are following your child's lead to get it started, but you're not stopping at that. You're not simply doing what the child is doing, you're challenging the child to focus on you, to engage with you and exchange gestures with you. That why when a child is running aimlessly around, we'll start running with them, but then we block him so he has to get around us. We put our hands around him without actually holding him so he has to say, "Up Sesame" and get out from under our arms. So we are always challenging the child to master these six levels, not simply following his lead.

Now the other extreme is where we control and we lead and we don't follow. And we feel we have to have a bag of tricks to come up with. So we feel we have to tell the child what to do, where to do it, we have to have all these games that we can get started, but that puts a tremendous burden on the parent and it's also not harnessing the child's initiative. The child is being a follower. The child is just finishing the game the parent wants to start. So here the goal is, again, not to control the child, to challenge the child through following the child's lead. So when you say, "I don't know what to do," there's a simple answer. You don't need to know what to do. Observe what little Johnny and Susie are doing. They will give you clues as to where their interests are. Now it may be that you're saying, "Oh but all they are doing is running around; all they are doing is being aimless; all they are doing is jumping; all they are doing is looking at their hands..." That's something! That's very important. That's where their interest is. They are looking at their hands, you are going to hold their hand and say, "Which finger should I give you back?" If they want to run, we're going to put




on music and make it a dance game or start blocking them. They will give you the clue as to what they are interested in and that's where you build. So try to, when you are feeling the "I don't know what to do", take a step back, take a deep breath, count to 5, relax, and say, "What are they doing?" And however silly it seems or however repetitious it seems, however self stimulatory it seems – say, "That's where their pleasure is for the moment. How do I build on that? How do I join in?"

Also, another challenge is short bursts of interaction rather than a continuous flow. Frequently, if we are carrying the burden of the interaction, we come up with a little game and it gets two or three circles of communication, i.e., back-and-forth interaction, but then we run out of steam because we have to come up with another game. We have to have a continuous flow of back-and-forth interaction where we don't lose the child and the child doesn't become self-absorbed. So here the goal is to get that continuous flow. And you do that by following the child's lead and as soon as one sequence runs out, follow what he is doing next. Say, "Where is he taking it and how do I jump right in so we don't lose momentum – don't lose that back-and-forth flow."

Relating to this is a tendency to go for specific responses or correct grammar or correct pronouns rather than the continuous flow. So when children are verbal, often we are correcting them to say "he" vs. "she" or "me" vs. "you" or we are trying to get them to use a longer sentence. But that is not where the action is. The action is in the back-and-forth use of the gestures and words. I'd rather have a child using one word or two words and ten circles of back-and-forth communication than a sentence with 10 words and then becoming self-absorbed. Eventually the back-and-forth communication, even if it's just one or two words and one or two gestures but back-and-forth, back-and-forth, back-and-forth, in what we call a continuous flow and it will lead to longer and longer sentences. Remember the back-and-forth is harnessing the child's initiative.


Now before we take some calls from you all in just a few minutes, I want my colleague, Serena Wieder who is here joining me today to add some thoughts on. Then together we will take some of your calls.

SW: I thought I would just add a focus on the day-to-day real life interactions that occur whether you're getting ready to eat, or whether you're having to clean up, or whether you're going outside and having to get ready because these are all opportunities to help a child understand the reasons you're doing all these things as well as the sequences that are needed to carry them out. From the moment that your



child shows interest or starts to join you or just must do something that's really part of life, you want to focus on the reasons for doing some of these things. As they are getting out of the tub and they are so used to immediately being wrapped up with a towel, you might just pause for a moment and notice, "Gosh you're wet. What do you need?" And see if they'll look for a towel or wait for you to get it or grab it on their own. If they want a cookie, you could begin to eat and ask if they are hungry or thirsty. They begin to use the language of reasoning pretty early in the game and children become quite familiar with it and you'd be very surprised how they then begin to understand this language of problem solving and reasoning while you're doing your day-to-day things. One of the ways we can harness the child's interaction and engagement, is when you actually change some of the things you do in your usual way, the child will notice. Children are familiar with rituals and you don't always realize how much of the work you're doing. You're not always giving them a chance to do some of the work with you. And it's novelty and surprise that probably help them get more active so you can make little mistakes. What if you gave a child a fork when they needed a spoon? Or what if pouring a drink you might just give them a little bit and see if they ask for some more? But mostly the idea would be to create the novelty to get them to initiate and do some of the problem solving and doing it in the form of sequences. There are other ways we can encourage children to practice sequences. It's really being able to do the sequence that has the reason that will get them to do more of the work – have them pack their own little backpack if you're going to the park, what are the things you want to bring with you? If you're going to the pool, what if you're thirsty or hungry? Children expect these things. You know they are going to go to your backpack and open it up because they know what is in there. Put them to work in getting them to do some of these things.

Just to follow up on some of the things you heard Dr. Greenspan describing, being a partner is another very important idea which I find helps when we're working with siblings and peers. Any social gauge or ritual, you know, playing chase or ring-around-the-rosie or hide-and-seek or treasure hunt – it's very helpful if you become a partner or even better if you can get the sibling or peer date to be the child's partner and in that way you can practice some of those things that these children have seen happening at school or out in the park. So be a partner and think of yourself as the partner when you're working more in a group situation.



The other very important component here is, as your child climbs the ladder is to try to really start negotiating. When we want to do the day-to-day conflict resolution that is going to occur inevitably, you know, day in and day out, try to in a way avoid just a simple solution of “share” and start trading with your child. If you want something you have, what’s he going to give you? And if you don’t like the trade, what else can he go and get to get what he wants? So this might be with the younger sibling or it might be with a peer. Sometimes you can explore well can you do it together or do we have to wait? These are the multiple interactions that occur all day long in whatever we’re doing. So these are just a few thoughts and we can pick up on the questions and I can elaborate on specific problem solving things later.

SG: We’ll take the first question now. Hello?

Caller: Hi Dr. Greenspan.

SG: How are you?

Caller: Fine, thank you. Thank you so much for taking my call.


SG: Well, we’re pleased to have you with us. Let me hear your question.

Caller: Well, I have two questions. I have two sons, a 7 year old and a 5 year old. The 7 year old has been diagnosed with PDD and I don’t put a lot into these diagnoses basically that would be a good thing. My younger son has been diagnosed with just a language delay, and he’s doing beautifully. The language is coming along. My question is, for both of them, they are still not toilet trained. I have not been able to find the right strategy. I have another question regarding him, and that is that his language seems to come and go. At three years of age he was saying colors, maybe about 50 words, he was telling me backpack, car, school to tell me it was time for school in the proper order. His language was spontaneous, it was meaningful, and as I said, he would have it for a few months and then it would go for a few months, then come back. Essentially right now at age 7, I would say he is essentially non-verbal. But we know he can talk.

SG: How do you know he can talk?

Caller: We’ve heard the words.

SG: Do you mean recently or just historically?



Caller: Recently he said some words. If he is playing with a duck “bath”, but more recently the language seems to have almost stopped.

SG: Does he show you receptive understanding more recently?

Caller: Yes, that has increased.

SG: For example, how does he show you that?

Caller: He used to, it was very hard to understand if he was understanding anything in previous years. This year in particular, he is using the PECS System and so he’ll show you the picture. If he’s hungry, he’ll pick his picture for pasta.

SG: And what is the most complicated thing he can understand that you say?

Caller: Hmmmm. Probably one or two step commands.

SG: For example.


Caller: Let’s go take a bath, it’s time to stop watching tv.

SG: And that has been increasing all along.

Caller: Yes.


SG: Well there are a couple of thoughts. One I think, the issue of the language right now is the bigger issue, to try to help him use communication in a continually growing way rather than improvements and then some loss and then improvements and then some loss. I’ll talk to you about the toilet training as well. But in terms of the bigger issue. You may have already done this, but if you haven’t, it’s a good idea to have a consultation with a neurologist. Anytime any child, and again my comments here because I don’t know your child well enough to be that specific, but I’ll try to give you general principles and hopefully other parents can find useful for their children who may have similar kinds of challenges. But anytime there is progression and regression in functioning, it is very good to have a neurological consultation and if it hasn’t been done, to do a 24-hour EEG, not just a routine EEG.

Caller: We have had the routine and we have been to about four neurologists and we have had an MRI.



SG: Yes, you should have had the 24 hour EEG or have your neurologist consider that because you are getting some back-and-forth progression and regression, simply because there are some children who have a very subtle difference in their EEG pattern that actually may affect the expressive speech centers in the brain, or central nervous system, and if that is going on and can be diagnosed, there are some medications that are sometimes helpful. I don't like to recommend diagnostic procedures unless there is something that can be done as a result of getting the answer. So just getting an answer for an answer isn't always helpful, but if there is something practical that can be done, it's worth doing. So the 24 hour EEG will only pick up some of these subtle patterns. The regular EEG won't. And the MRI won't often pick up these subtle patterns. So that's why the 24 hour or overnight EEG is worth doing whenever there is progression and regression. That's for any child who shows that pattern. Typically some kids seem to be developing lots of language, then at 2 ½ or 3 or age 2 will lose a lot. In those situations, as well as in the situation you're describing, it's just reasonable to do. Often you won't find anything, and that's fine. But at least you're making sure there is nothing neurological that could be treated at the neurological level.

Then in terms of the overall intervention program, the key with the child who progresses and regresses is to get more affect, more emotion, more motivation into the use of language. So here is where doing lots of what we have been describing earlier on the show today, Floortime is very, very important, where the child is challenged to use their language. We also have a curriculum called the "Affect Based Language Curriculum" where we tie this language to emotion and affect. So if we want to teach a child to say "open" we put his favorite toy outside the door and he can point, he can use the PECS System, but he doesn't get the door open until he also says at least, "op, op". Many children with oral motor problems have trouble making their sounds and because this is hard work, have to learn to enjoy working hard. And to enjoy working hard, they have to be highly motivated. And so we have to create those motivational opportunities throughout the day and do lots of what we call Floortime, 20 or 30 minutes at a time for 6 or 8 times a day where they are really cooking, a lot of interactive gesturing, and a lot of use of sounds if not words, and with the symbol system being used like the PECS System or a computer based system with symbols where the computer talks for the child, that's all fine. But then we want them to talk also, or make their sounds. And we want them to learn gesturing – pointing, showing. We want to get that whole outflow track cooking.



Caller: His language seems to have actually gotten less since he has used the PECS System, and I'm wondering if he has become lazy.

SG: The only way a child becomes lazy is if we, meaning the educators and caregivers and all the people who work with the child, become lazy. So the PECS System itself, and any symbol system is a big help because it gives the child multiple ways of communicating. But we have to then challenge the child, once he shows us with a picture that he wants juice, to say, "ok, so you want the juice? Can you also tell me because I can't remember. What is it that you wanted? The moose or the juice?" You know what I mean? So you say, "joo, joo" so he has to say "juice" too, so the PECS helps him think about what he wants, and helps you challenge him to then get out the word. But there has to be a lot of challenging interaction. And it has to be at school as well as at home. That's the key.

Caller: He is also under-reactive based on last week's radio show, I decided. So he is a challenge.


SG: Yes, so you have to energize up, challenge him all the time, and it's not just the words – the whole outflow track. Getting him doing to his environment with his motor system, with his sounds, and if he can't get the words, get some sounds that are close to the word. And if you do that, and also get a hold of the "Affect Based Language Curriculum," and if there is nothing going on neurologically which I hope there is not, but in likelihood there won't be, we should see more continuous progress.

And then in terms of toilet training, it's hard with a child who doesn't yet answer "why" questions. It is hard for them to understand causality of toilet training, you know, "why" you have to do it. So the key there is really to make it fun, to make the bathroom enjoyable, and to break the task down into small steps, and have the child begin enjoying the patterns involved. We'll have something up on the website about how to help the child learn and master new challenges including feeding challenges and toilet training challenges, then look for that in the next week or two and we will give more details about toilet training.

Caller: We have feeding challenges as well.

SG: Yes, then this will give you a picture of both, it will be up in the next week or two on the Floortime website. Ok?

Caller: Thank you so much.



SG: Good luck to you.

Caller: Thank you, bye bye.

SW: The only thing I want to add is to also really put more emphasis on the oral motor work. I have found that that it can really be fun but it really needs the input. You're describing challenges with the motor planning and sequencing and know it relates both to the speaking and the toilet training, but I would try to probably go back and if you haven't done the oral motor work and the games and the blowing and the raspberries and get that going and work your way up again in terms the sound production, I would put an effort to do that much more systematically.

SG: Thank you very much, do we have another call waiting? Hello?

Caller: Hi there.

SG: Good, how are you?

Caller: Good, how are you?

SG: Fine, thank you for calling in.

Caller: Is this Dr. Greenspan?

SG: Yes.


Caller: Oh great! Thank you so much for taking my call.

SG: Oh, it's my pleasure.

Caller: I just want to let you know you have quite a following up here in southern Maine.

SG: Oh, wonderful!

Caller: Yes, I have a question. You touched upon it earlier about siblings. I have a 3 year old who is under the spectrum. He is non-verbal. And I also have a 16 month old who is just a pistol, and she requires a lot of attention and she's great. At those times when she is the leader when we are all doing Floortime together, my son often will get up and wander away. There are only so many times where I can get my daughter to play games such as "lets go find Sullivan" or "where-o-where-o-where-is-



Sullivan” – we do that quite a bit and we can get really animated, but on those times when she just doesn’t want to play those games...

SG: What does she want to do instead?

Caller: She wants me to be playing baby dolls and feeding her dolls. Or she is very good at pretend playing. But whatever it is that she is doing, she wants me right there. So I’m just struggling.

SG: Where does he go when he wanders off?

Caller: He’ll usually wander into his room and he will get a book and read a book by himself. Sometimes he’ll play with his trains.


SG: And where are you usually playing with her?

Caller: We have a living room where all of our toys are.

SG: Can you have them both in a room where the doors are closed so you are at least in one space together so he can’t wander to another room?

Caller: Yes, I can do that.

SG: That’s helpful for beginners so that whether it’s the living room - putting up some barriers up in the living room or going into one of the bedrooms, either her room or his room or another room in the house where you have the toy that they both want to play with, but he can’t wander off into another room. And then you make your task a bit easier because then you can stay in touch with him with your voice, even if she doesn’t want to get up, you can get up and woo him back in. Let’s say she wants the dolly to feed the other dolly. You’re saying, “Oh, well Sullivan has the food! Sullivan, Sullivan, we need you to give us some food!” And Sullivan ignores, ok? So then you can say, “Let’s get Sullivan to get the food” and she can say, “No” and she won’t do it. Then you can say, “You stay here with dolly, I’m going to get the food from Sullivan. Sullivan, Sullivan!” and you go over to Sullivan. You know what I mean? And then you get a little gesturing going with Sullivan. And then you come back to her and say, “I got the food from Sullivan.” So sometimes she may come with you to find Sullivan to get the food for the dolly or Sullivan could have the spoon or the fork or something else she needs. And when she doesn’t buy into that, you could do it and you could stay in vocal touch with her so you could say, “What are you doing? Are you feeding the dolly yet? Sullivan, give



me the food for your sister.” And so in one room, you can kind of keep the gesturing going because you can use your voice across space, you can be moving around quite a bit between the two children, it’s not just a huge space. You can keep both involved with your affect and with your voice and with your movement patterns without necessarily giving her the feeling that she has to always play second fiddle to her brother.


Caller: Ok. And would you consider interaction when I’m doing that and I’m saying, “Oh Sullivan, let’s get the food for your sister” and he’s not responding at all.

SG: Well, what you do is you try to get in front of him and get at least a gesture from him. So let’s say he just wants to move so you tell him that he has to give you something, you have to clap my hand or hold your hand out or do some kind of gesture to do what he wants to do. So by being playfully obstructive, he’ll do something and you’ll pretend that’s the food.

Caller: Ok. Now do we consider a whine? You know, he’ll cry out. If let’s say I want him to do something and he doesn’t want to do something.

SG: Well, try to find something that he wouldn’t mind doing. So it’s pleasurable. You try to get a pleasurable gesture or a pleasurable sound. If you can’t and you get a little whine, let it be an effective and purposeful whine, and say, “Ok!” so his whine is purposeful and not just a tantrum. Just a second – Serena wants to add a thought or two.

SW: I just wanted to mention that there are other ways you can strengthen their interaction and connections. One thing I like to encourage is they can be the messenger to each other. If you want to give Sullivan something, have your little daughter give it to him, or vice versa. But throughout the day, make it important to them that they can really help each other and give each other things, and that happens countless numbers of days he may tune into her more because she is going to be bringing what he wants. So that is another simple thing. The other thing would be to have things around in the room that you know are just going to take two people to do that is just fun like batting balloons or bubbles or having slinkies they can shake, you know, or using a hula hoop. Have things available so that she comes to see that it is also fun to do those things with her brother and he also will begin to notice that she’s not just someone who is going to get in his way or take you away from him. Do the day-to-day little investments where they have to help each other or are messengers for each other to strengthen those



connections. There are obviously other things you could do like having baths. There are many activities that Sullivan might enjoy that she would enjoy too. And have him there so there is more of a chance that he'll initiate it, and then she can join in. Or she might even initiate it. But if it's fun for him, he might join it and be his partner again. Ok?

Caller: Thank you very much.

SW: You're welcome.

SG: Thank you very, very much.


Caller: Thank you, Dr. Greenspan.

SG: Good luck to you.

Caller: Bye bye.

SG: Bye bye. Now we have a very good question here that I'll read the question and maybe you can give the first answer, and then I'll add on if I have anything further to say. *We're already involved in much Floortime and problem solving time. How about some fresh motor planning exercises that maybe I have not yet tried?*


SW: Uh, well, that's a very important question because we know how essential the motor planning is for being able to do what you want to do and getting what you want and being able to elaborate whether using toys as your language or words as your language. Mostly, I don't know what would be fresh and new to you, but there are just the standard, kind of sensory motor activities in gross motor play where you're running and climbing and jumping, and you are going to be doing this in an interactive way. You might be walking on the balance beam, you might be throwing a Frisbee, or using a hula hoop or jumping between different squares, you might be using chalk. So often you forget about some of the basic motor planning activities right in your day-to-day outdoor kind of play gives you many opportunities to practice some of these sequences. The other part of motor planning I find very helpful to focus on again relate more to problem solving. So you're talking about, and maybe you have done this but if you haven't, you know create the problems not so much in the direct way to frustrate your child, but letting your child encounter problems. So if he finds that something he likes is in a container or in a bag, start with the simplest level you need to help the child succeed. But can he open up different things to get what he wants? Can he unwrap his favorite book? Can he pull the string on a bow in order to untie his favorite toy? Can he



pull something apart that has gotten tangled up? A lot of motor planning involves just the real life kinds of sequences that you want to do if you want to do some cooking, if you want to set the table, wash the car – think of all the sequences you have to do if you are going to wash the car or even clean the windows and you have to learn to use a Windex spray thing, you know, have the different things you need in order to get it clean. A lot of things I find that most of you when something is really meaningful and has the relevance to them, and not necessarily the use of a toy in of itself, fixing things, having a tool kit available. Try to find meaningful things that there won't be a real outcome for and that's where you practice the sequencing and use your hands or use your whole body or use your feet to get what you need done.

SG: Well, I think that is a very, very good answer, Serena. Now let me throw another one at you while he have you going here. *What about children who are negative, who always say, "no, no, no, no, no" all the time, "no, no, no."*


SW: Well, you know we know in typical development that's good news. We expect it in a certain point of development because what it tells us is that this child has a sense of who he is. Children don't say "No" when they are one, but they usually start saying it when they are two. In a way, depending again on the degree to which your child can communicate, we want to accept a "no" and find out what they are saying "no" to so that that is actually a way of getting interaction. You can ask a child and they can say "no" to many different things. If you can get to the reasoning behind the "no" – so you don't want this toy or you want to eat this or you don't want to eat that – and eventually as you get the rhythm going, sometimes the "no, no, no" can be come just a silly, playful interaction, "is everything 'no'?" And other times the "no" could really be opposition to something your child doesn't like. You may want to explore what is wrong. But usually if you have a lot of "no" it indicates to us we have to start giving the child more choices. He has to have a vote. The "no" is his vote. If by giving the child a choice you kind of contain and narrow things. The issue is whether it is negotiable or not. In our approach we really want to fight the essential battles. We don't want to necessarily try to control everything the child does and if anything, if he has an opinion we will welcome it. So do pick your battles around the "no". If you need to, you could narrow it down to a choice. Sometimes you can be playful about it, sometimes you can turn it into a problem solving situation, "well is everything is "no" then what are we going to do?" Come at it as an opportunity to have that debate; to have that longer conversation where you may get it to the level of reasons, and you may not. Often,



though, after you give the child a chance to tell us, you can soothingly just let him know that, well, honey, we have to do it now. For some children you can approach this with kind of good news and bad news idea. Sometimes the “no” is to a transition, sometimes it is to something the child doesn’t like. So that would be another element of the “no”. But your child wants the “no” power. There is a point in time, often when children are anxious, when they don’t want surprises or things that are unexpected, that they become very controlling and they are kind of the boss. So you say, “ok, yes sir, yes general” and you humor your child and coax him into it. The issue really here is for you to think about how essential the issue is, but most things are not that crucial, and if you could get involved in this back-and-forth conversation, help your child feel he has a say in life and he has a say about himself, maybe he can come up with an alternative or a better choice or a reason, the “no” is just an opening to all the things we have talked about in doing Floortime.

SG: Now just an added thought about “no’s” or negativism, I have met many children who get a special hat and an award for being the best “no” person or the best “I can’t do it” person or the best “I don’t know” person in the whole wide world. So there is nothing better for a child than to be the best at something. And even to be the best at “I don’t know” or “no” or “I can’t” is still terrific. And interestingly and on a more serious note, as you help a child characterize what they are doing and make it kind of a fun thing, like “you are the best “no” guy in the world,” if they have some language and they understand that, it takes the edge off and instead of it being a hostile, angry thing, it becomes part of warmth and kind of fun and part of interaction. Also, what is a fun thing to do once you have changed the tone of it from a hostile power struggle into a fun game, is to play with the child a little bit, and as you are playing with him with it, you might say if his favorite thing is juice or a chocolate chip cookie, “Gee, would you like a chocolate chip cookie? Yes or no, but remember you are the ‘no’ person and you’re only allowed to say ‘no’.” And now he is in a dilemma, and you have a little twinkle in your eye. So you can make it a lot of fun also by posing paradoxical questions where he doesn’t want to say “no” and that all takes the edge and the tension off. The key thing is to, with negativism, is to counter it with warmth and soothing and lots of interaction, even around all the negativism. Serena’s suggestions and these suggestions are just some tactics to use in employing this broader principle.

Now the principles we have been talking about today - Floortime, All the Time, Everywhere – is helpful for all children, not just children with special needs. Not just



children with learning challenges and not just children who have language and motor and sensory processing problems. All children benefit from Floortime everywhere all the time. Because if the child doesn't have processing problems, can't process sound and sight and move easily, it is even easier for that child to learn the principles of Floortime and for the parents to do Floortime with the children. Look at the Floortime that's stewing, when we do it everywhere we are promoting the child's relating, their trust, their engaging with not just us but their peers and siblings. We are promoting their communication skills with gestures first and then with words. And we are promoting their thinking skills, explaining why they want to do something, we are going after their opinions. And then we can go to higher level thinking skills like, "give me many reasons why you want to play with that toy." And we can ask them to compare whether they like pizza better or whether they like chicken soup better. And they can learn comparative logical thinking. We can even get them to give us judgments about things, where they evaluate their own feelings and thoughts, "Gee what did you think about that little tantrum you just threw? Was that something you like to do or don't like to do? How did you feel about that little tantrum?" So we can help kids move up the developmental ladder regardless of whether they have challenges or don't have challenges. So Floortime Everywhere All the Time – we need to add one more phrase onto that. It's "Floortime Everywhere All the Time for Everyone." So that's going to our motto of our show. Floortime Everywhere All the Time for Everyone.

Thank you very much for joining us today. Next week we are going to have a very, very important show and a very interesting show. It's going to be on using the DIR Model, the Developmental Individual Difference Relationship Based Model and Floortime strategies to master the typical challenges of life including eating, toilet training, impulsivity, perseverative or repetitive behavior, self absorption, self stimulation, echolalia, oppositional behavior, and the like. We invite your questions in advance. Please email them to us, and we'll select a number to be on the air as we did today, so please email in your questions. And let us know, and it doesn't have to be about this topic for next week, it can be about anything you want, and we'll look forward to talking to some of you on the air and next week covering the DIR Model Floortime Strategies for the Challenges of Life. Thank you very much.