

## Web-Based Radio Show

### Helping Our Children Reach Advanced Milestones:


*How to help our children reach the more advanced milestones such as multi-casual thinking which is learning to think in shades of gray, giving different reasons for something and telling you the degree to which one reason explains something versus another reason; the ability to compare things and give you the degrees of the comparison; and the ability to think off an internal standard or sense of self*

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Sarah: Good morning and welcome to the Floortime Foundation's Web Radio Program, "Infants, Children, and Families," featuring Dr. Stanley Greenspan and Dr. Serena Wieder.

SG: I want to welcome you to today's Web-Based Radio Show. We have a very interesting topic today. As many of you know from prior shows, we have been discussing how to help infants and young children master each of their critical emotional and intellectual milestones. We have been discussing how to help children learn to focus and attend and enter into a shared world with their caregivers; we've been talking about how to help children engage with warmth and pleasure so that they want to look and want to be part of a relationship. We've also been discussing how to help children communicate with initiative and meaning, through gestures and sounds and smiles and different emotional cues; and how to organize these gestures in a back-and-forth way so that they can problem solve with them and take mommy by the hand and walk her into the play area and point to the toy they want. We've also been discussing how to help children with special needs and learning disabilities and other challenges master using ideas to speak, but not just to use words or describe pictures, but to use words meaningfully to describe how they feel, "I love you" or "I'm mad" or to describe what they want, "Please give me that" or "I want to go out." We have also been discussing how to help children learn to build bridges between their ideas so they can speak logically and think logically and communicate logically, so they can answer questions such as why they want to go outside – "Because mommy I want to play" or why they are




storming around the house with an angry look on their face – “Because I’m mad, my toy got taken away,” etc.

These foundations I’ve just been describing, the ability to attend, engage, communicate, use ideas, and think logically, are the beginning steps in establishing a child’s milestones that enable that child to become a communicator, a learner, and a part of meaningful and pleasurable social relationships. But there are more advanced stages. The stages that I have just described take us through what ordinarily occurs if there are no challenges in the first four years of life. The next six years of life, up to about age 10 and then from age 10 through age 16-17, constitutes another set of foundation building pieces. Now many colleagues and many parents, unfortunately, don’t expect their children or the children they work with to advance beyond these first six milestones. Some are not even ambitious enough in terms of some of our educational programs, even on these first six milestones. But we have found that many children with a variety of challenges – special needs, learning disabilities, severe emotional challenges – can progress not only through the first six milestones, but now master additional milestones. These additional milestones are interesting. They have to do with the subject of today’s talk and they have to do with such challenges as learning to think about multiple reasons for things, called multi-causal thinking which is learning to think in shades of gray, giving different reasons for something and telling you the degree to which one reason explains something versus another reason. The ability to compare things and give you the degrees of the comparison, “I like this better than that for the following reasons and I like it this much better than that.” And the ability to think off an internal standard or sense of self where a child can actually say things like, “Gee, I’m angrier than I should be in this situation” or “I agree with this author but disagree with that author because of my own personal experience and my own belief of what’s true about love or true about family patterns” etc., etc.


Now how do we help our children achieve these more advanced milestones? Again, I want to emphasize that we found at least for many children, these advanced milestones are not only possible, some of the children master them with enormous depth and subtlety. Some even master them better than children who don’t have these challenges, who don’t start off with difficulties in language or in motor planning and sequencing or in other developmental capacities.

So what’s critical is to see how much we can help children in general, whether they have challenges or don’t have challenges, master these capacities. It’s important



to emphasize that many children with no challenges at all do not advance through all these advanced thinking levels and all these advanced social levels as much as they could.


What is the critical factor that leads us to not achieve for our children and with our children this important goal of mastering the advanced thinking capacities? It has to do with how we work with the children, particularly how we work with them in educational programs, but also how we work with them in therapeutic programs and just in everyday interactions at home and how we work with them at our home DIR based and other related type programs. For example, if we are going to help a child learn to do gray area thinking and learn to give you the shades of gray. We can't engage the child with just polarized all-or-nothing type debates. So if the child says, "I want to go outside" and we just say, "No!" and the child says, "But, but, but..." and we say, "Be quiet and sit in the corner," we're not going to get subtle gray area thinking because we aren't encouraging debate. On the other hand, if the child says, "I want to go outside" and we say, "Well, not now Sweetheart" and the child says "But..." and we say, "But what?" and the child says, "But I need to go outside because I've been inside all day" and we say, "You do? Why do you need to go out right away?" "Well, because it's going to rain." "Well, how soon do you think it's going to rain?" "Right away." "Well, how do you know it'll be right away?" "Well, look at the clouds." "Well, I'm looking at the clouds but it looks to me like it's at least a half hour off before it's going to rain. We'll have plenty of time to go out and play." "Well, how do you know" the child says, "that it'll be a half hour?" "Well, you see that the clouds are way far over there. Now let's look at the clock" and so forth and so on. What we've done now is gotten into a nice gray area discussion about how far the clouds are away, we've gotten into the nature of time – what's a half hour – what it means to wait and be patient and delay, and in the end we can still keep the child inside until we are ready to take them outside. But through that debate, the child has learned to be a gray area thinker. But if we just say, "My way or the highway" or "No, no, no..." the child stays an all-or-nothing thinker. We may think we are teaching the child discipline, but we're actually teaching the child to be an extreme all-or-nothing thinker where it's either one way or another way. When that child throws a tantrum when they don't get their way or impulsively misbehaves at times we think it's because we haven't been disciplined enough. But in fact it's because we have been disciplined in a concrete all-or-nothing way rather than a gray area way. You can be firm and persistent and teach children values and to be very well behaved with good judgment and with gray area thinking where they can reason



through the reasons for their behavior. But if you do it in an all-or-nothing way, my way or the highway type way, you're likely to be encouraging the very polarized thinking, the all-or-nothing thinking that you want to discourage. You won't be encouraging the type of subtle reflective gray area thinking that we want to encourage. This is but one example. When it comes to reading comprehension, we read a passage with the child. If there are right answers and wrong answers, this simply encourages, again, more polarized thinking. This simply encourages one way or another way. Now certainly for certain math problems and certain other kinds of factual problems, there may be right answers and wrong answers. But if we overemphasize that type of learning and don't have enough of the opinion-based learning, "What do you think are the reasons for the Civil War?" and "Which ones are the most important ones in your view?" and "Let's compare your view with what the book is saying – the book is saying this and you're saying that, now how do you compare your view with the book's view?" In this way we can teach the child the facts in the books. We can teach the child to debate those facts, we can see if the child can back up his point of view with his own facts or whether he's just shooting from the hip, so to speak, an making it up. The child learns facts, learns debate, learns opinion, but most importantly learns to reason. Because when all is said and done, it's the reasoning and thinking skills that are important.

Now how we approach reading comprehension, then, will determine also whether we have a gray area thinker or an all-or-nothing polarized thinker. What I'm trying to emphasize is that for all children, children with special needs and children without any challenges, these are hard lessons – the advanced thinking lessons. The fact that we haven't been very successful historically in helping children with special needs achieve these advanced levels is in part because we haven't challenged them in the right way. Now children with special needs need more practice at these more advanced levels than a child without challenges, just like the child may have needed more practice in learning to walk or learning to sit up or learning to use words in the first place. It doesn't change here.


Now there are a lot of mistakes that we make in our basic assumptions about children with special needs that holds us back in terms of helping them become advanced reflective thinkers. The biggest mistake we make is to assume that a child can have age appropriate or typical language development, and yet not be age appropriate in their reflective thinking ability, because reflective thinking for the most part is conducted verbally. So if a child has an excellent vocabulary and can give you the



definition of all the different words and do very well in all kinds of structured language tests, I want to underline the fact that that child may still be significantly behind in their language development if they cannot reason with language; reason with words in an age appropriate manner. To be age appropriate in language means to be age appropriate in your using language to reason and think. So we see lots of children with special needs, some of whom have been diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder, who are thought to be age appropriate in their language development, or advanced because they have excellent vocabularies and they can sight read and even sound out text that is three years ahead of their grade level. So they are thought to be reading at 6<sup>th</sup> grade when they are only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. But, when we ask these children to describe what they read or have a debate with them about what they read, they are actually reasoning at two years below their age level. So they might be an 8 or 9 year old but only reasoning at a 6 year old level or even sometimes at a 4 year old level. They might be able to, in other words, give us rote answers, memorize scripts, dictionary definitions, but not be able to give rational cause-and-effect reasoning or gray area thinking or compare two things on a number of dimensions. When they can't do this, we have to be aware that this is a significant language challenge and needs to be worked with. This is not simply due to their Asperger's Syndrome. It is not simply due to their high functioning autism disorder. It is not simply due to their "language disorder" or their nonverbal learning disorder where they have visual spatial and motor planning. It is due largely to processing differences to be sure, but processing differences that are workable if we work with them in the correct way. These won't change if we just assume that the child has the ability or if we assume the lack of the ability is due to some broad syndrome rather than a specific processing problem that is workable with extra practice, if that practice is conducted in the proper manner. So we have to get rid of that false assumption that our children can do something that they yet can't do but could learn to do if we recognize they aren't doing it yet. This is a very common mistake.

Also, many of our educational programs for children without challenges are not focusing on reasoning skills and thinking skills, and so they are not creating the challenges that will help children learn to reason and think and use judgment and more advanced levels. They are focused more on this more factual all-or-nothing kind of learning which is not terribly helpful for them.


So with this background, now let's go back and look at each of the stages of advanced thinking in a little more detail and look at how we can promote these more



advanced levels in children with special needs as well as in children without special needs. The level we talked about last week as part of our fundamental foundations, the sixth level, has to do with connecting ideas together. This sets a starting point for the more advanced levels. So the first step in the more advanced levels of thinking is to make sure we have mastered all the basic levels – attending, engaging, simple gestural communication, problem solving interactions with gestures and emotional signaling, and using ideas creatively and that sixth critical level, using ideas logically – answering basic “why” questions such as “Why do you want to go outside?” or “Why do you like this book better than another book?” In order to help solidify these first six levels, you want to have long conversations with children using gestures and words, where they are very engaged and very motivated, and always help the child be both creative and logical at the same time. If the child isn’t making sense, help the child make sense. Play dumb. Say, “I’m confused, you were talking about the apple and now you’re talking about the car outside – how did we get from one to the other?” “Well,” the child might say, “I put the apple in the car and now we have to go to the car to get the apple.” If they can make that creative bridge even though they didn’t intend that originally, that shows a high creative and a high logical thinking ability. So go after the child’s opinions and have them connect the dots. Whenever the child seems confused or going off topic, let them connect it by your playing dumb. Don’t do it for them.

Once you have solidified these first six levels, then go for the multi-causal level. This is very simple. Keep going after the child’s opinion but ask for more opinions. If the child says, “I want to go outside” you say, “Why?” and he says, “Because I want to play” and you say, “Well, that’s great. I know you want to play. What else? I know there’s another reason why you want to go outside.” “Well, because it’s nice outside and the sun is out.” “Well, why is that so important?” “Because the sun will make me healthy.” “Are there any other reasons why you want to go outside?” “Yes, because I’m tired of talking to you and it’s time to go out and play!”

Now we have a multi-causal thinker. If that goes well, get into comparative thinking and what I call triangular thinking. This is where the child can start comparing and contrasting. “Gee, it’s a nice day out today. I can understand why you want to go out today. Is today nicer than yesterday? Which day was better, do you think?” And after the child plays, “Gee, how was it today? I had a lot of fun. How did this compare to yesterday when we went to the park? Was it more fun to play in our backyard or the




park and why?” Now the child is comparing two things, contrasting, and giving you multiple reasons.


Then if that goes well, we get into gray area thinking where we get into the texture of thinking. The same basic question, “Why do you want to go outside?” “Because it’s nice outside.” “Well, gee, what makes playing outside today better than playing inside?” “Well, because there is more room to run around.” “Well, how much better is it?” “Mommy, it’s a lot better.” “Why is it a lot better?” “Because running is much more fun than just sitting in one spot.” See, when a child says it’s “much more fun” he’s comparing two things. They are running outside versus sitting. If he just said when you asked why it was much better, “Well because I like going outside” or “I like running” that wouldn’t be comparing and contrasting. Then he’s only holding one thing in mind, not holding two things in mind. As a child can hold two things in mind and compare them, that’s a more advanced level of thinking. When the child is angry with you, “Well how angry are you, sweetheart and why are you so angry today? Yesterday I did the same thing, I made you eat your cereal, and you weren’t so angry.” “Well, because today I woke up grumpy” or “Because today I really want something else, and I didn’t want something else yesterday. Yesterday I said I wanted the cereal.” Now again, the child is explaining the feeling. They can begin telling you how much angrier they are today than yesterday.

Now you don’t want to be a pest about this entirely. A little bit of a pest is ok. You want to be natural. There are millions of situations during the day where you can exercise this gray area thinking; this more subtle reflective thinking. At school, too, we need to encourage teachers to encourage this gray area thinking. When the child is writing an essay, a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grader, it’s not enough to get facts and support of their argument, but they need to be challenged to tell you how much this fact versus that fact supports their argument. This is something even college students have a hard time with. My daughter is now teaching some college courses and its part of her graduate program. She complains to me all the time that her graduate students need to be better and better reflective thinkers. Actually I’m just kidding. She tells me they are wonderful reflective thinkers but she’s sitting here watching today’s show and I’m just giving her a good time.

So we can do this in everyday life and we can do it in academic activities. Now children with special needs, just taking these first two levels of getting to multi-causal thinking and getting to gray area and comparative level thinking, children with special




needs require two kinds of additional help to master these more advanced levels. The first and most critical one is the questions you ask or the situations in which you are teaching multi-causal thinking and gray area thinking, have to be high affect, high emotional meaning situations. I'll give you an example. There's a little girl who came to see me with her mommy and daddy. Mommy's complaint was that her little girl could not do more advanced level thinking. This was a little girl with multiple learning disabilities, cognitive delays and language delays and some people thought she was under the autistic spectrum and some of the professionals who worked with her did not think she was. Her father was an accountant. I asked, "What kind of concepts can't she understand?" And they said, "Well, what her father does." Because he is a tax accountant, I said "You mean like the concept of does she understand what taxes are?" Her mother said, "No, this is exactly what she wouldn't understand." So I said, "Let's see if we can help her understand taxes in the next five minutes." Her mother said, "No way!" So I tried to create a high affect, high emotional situation. Her little brother was in the room too. This little girl was quite verbal, but the mother claimed she was quite concrete, she couldn't get to this more reflective level. So I said, "Pretend we have a pizza." We made a pizza out of a piece of paper and I asked how many pieces we should cut it into. We cut it into six pieces. It was her decision. I said, "Ok your brother is here and he wants to steal some of your pizza. I'll be the policeman. How many pieces of that pizza are you willing to give me to keep your brother from stealing the whole pizza?" And she said, "I'll give you two pieces." I said, "How many do you have left?" She counted and said, "I'll have one, two, three, four left." I said, "Ok, you've got a deal." So she gave me two pieces. I said, "What do I have to do again?" She said, "You're going to be the policeman so he can't steal the pizza." I said, "Those two pieces are called taxes. You have given me two pieces in taxes to protect you from your brother. Now is there anything else you would give me pizza for, for doing for you? I mean like to protect you from bad people from another country coming into the United States? Would you pay me to clean the streets? Would you pay me to give you water in your house so you can take a shower." She said, "I would pay one piece to keep everything clean." I said, "Ok, that's also taxes." Then I said, "Ok, if you had lots of pizza, what else would you be willing to have?" Then she listed other things such as protection from attack from people with guns and things. We talked about that as taxes. Then a few minutes later, I said, "Mommy, ask her what taxes are." So Mommy said, "Sweetheart, what are taxes?" And the little girl said, "Taxes is what I would give



to have things to help me like police or soldiers.” Mother smiled and this little girl had understood what taxes were.

Now how did we do this? We helped this little girl understand taxes because we created a high affect situation, i.e., keeping her pizza from her brother. We helped her understand the concept in everyday language in an experience that she could relate to; it was highly emotional. That was critical. Similarly I’ve helped children write an essay when teachers told me they could never master an essay; never master the sequencing, by starting off with a topic that was meaningful to them like, “Why they are better than their sibling” or “Why their parents should pay more attention to them than their sibling” or “Why their parents are being unfair to them and giving more preference to their sibling.” Every child gives me an organized essay. I have them dictate it, I take it on my tape and I have someone type it out and it’s an organized, sequential essay. The common principle in both the tax example and these essays about siblings are that the child is motivated to have high affect. When you’re arguing a point that you feel strongly about, if you have the capacity for logical thinking, your mind automatically works logically. We see many children who are failing in school but are “street smart” – they make logical arguments when they are arguing something to do with their street negotiations. But they can’t apply this to the paper in school. But they are good thinkers. And almost everyone is a good thinker up to their level of thinking capacity when it’s a high affect situation.

So we do it in two steps. We create a high affect situation first, get the concepts across, then we introduce new terminology. So for example, one of these boys who couldn’t write an essay, it was because he was trying to master new words and concepts from a book he read, and write an essay about those new words and concepts. He was so confused by the new words and concepts that he couldn’t put his mind to work to be logical because he was bewildered by just the memory part of the task. So we took out the memory part and we worked on the conceptual part. Once he had that down, then he could apply the structure of an essay and logical thinking to new material. But you can’t do both together. So with children with special needs, start with the affect, create a situation they are very familiar with, do not introduce new words and concepts that they have to sequence and memorize, and just work with the ideas. Then, add on the new words and concepts. The reason why new words and concepts are so hard is it’s not just only the memory part, it’s the sequencing part. Most of the children with special needs and most of the children with learning disabilities have what we call




“motor planning and sequencing problems.” They are sequencing ideas so they get so lost in the memorizing the steps that they forget the logic and they just start guessing and throwing out things from left field.

Now the third thing is, for children with special needs is to create multi-sensory approaches to the thinking. Don't just try to do it verbally, do it visually. Do it with action. Dramatize it. So if a child can't describe to you why they are better than their sibling and why their parents are being unfair, have them draw it with a series of drawings. Maybe they can draw out how mommy is favoring little Tommy or Johnny. If they can't draw it, have them act it out in a drama. Then help them verbalize off the drama.


So you use multiple sensors, including motor actions, including visual, as well as verbal to get the thinking out. If they can't tell you why A is better than B, have them show you with a drawing, with the actual materials itself have them demonstrate. And by doing it in a multi-sensory way, high affect without new words and concepts, you can get to these more advanced levels. It's been amazing to me how many children with special needs are moving into these levels of multi-causal thinking and gray area thinking.

Now the highest level that I'm going to talk about today that characterizes early adolescent thinking and infant, mid, and late adolescents, but many adults even without challenges don't get to this level, is what I call “thinking off an internal standard.” This is where the person is able to say things like, “Yes I'm angrier than I should be in this situation.” This is where an advanced graduate student can reflect on the material in a highly personal way and go back and forth between the facts and between the historical context or the intellectual context that they are considering and reverberate back and forth against their own personal opinions. So they can compare two authors, use their own generative power from personal experience to fine tune that comparison. “I agree with Twain but I disagree with Faulkner and here are my reasons.” And those reasons are the personal synthesis of your own personal experience against the experience of these authors. That's a high level of reflective reasoning, whether it's in literature or whether it's in anthropology, whether it's in history, it's a very high level of reasoning. To get this level of reasoning means you have to have a strong internal sense of self. You have to have an internal standard on which to reflect. So this is a combined emotional and intellectual task. The way to help children arrive at this is to first make sure they have all the prior pieces. You can't jump to this if you aren't already a gray



area thinker; if you aren't already a multi-causal thinker; or if you aren't already highly creative and already highly logical. So the biggest weakness in not achieving this level is not mastering the earlier levels.

Secondly, once you have solidly mastered the earlier levels, the way to master this level is to go after judgment and not be satisfied with simpler answers. So for example when a child is very emotional, you can ask them, "Gee, how are you feeling today?" "I'm feeling this way." "How does this compare to the way you normally feel, you typically feel? Would you say today is characteristic or not characteristic? How would you put this in context?" Now you are encouraging the person to take a step away and observe themselves, basically you're encouraging the person to evaluate their own feelings and beliefs. This type of critical thinking is very hard when it comes to your own emotions. Many adults can't do it. But the way to start it with kids is to raise the question, if they advance to everything before. On intellectual tasks, too, get their judgment about things. Have them evaluate. Have them reach a conclusion, write an essay, and then say, "Now take a step away from this and let me see you be your own devil's advocate. What kind of biases do you have in your own essay? Can you now reflect on your own biases? Can you argue the other point of view? And if you can argue the other point of view, now argue which point of view do you think is the more salient one or the more reasonable one, given your own experiences in life; given who you are as a person. And what in your own background makes you agree more with Twain than Faulkner or more with Faulkner than Melville." Now what you are doing is you are integrating the self; the person into the debate, it's always there, and you're also asking the other person to evaluate themselves and ask them to take their own bias out of it and argue this in the point of view of your brother or your sister or the person with the opposite political persuasion as you. This sort of flexible reasoning is going to encourage it as an intellectual task as well as emotional task. It's the ability to evaluate, your own thoughts and beliefs. That's a high level and we can spend years and years doing this. And as your experiences in life expand in adolescence, as you get into deeper friendships, as you get into your own sexuality, as you get into broadening social relationships, as you move on to consider the future more, as you move on to move out of your homes into work situations or college situations, your experiences broaden. Now the sense of self, this body of personal experience is broadening, so now you are reflecting on an increasing sense of personal wisdom. Therefore, your reflective reasoning is going to improve proportionally. But it has to have this ability to judge your feelings, judge your beliefs, and reflect on them from the perspective of who you are as



a person. Then as that broadens and deepens, this gets bigger and better and you get more wisdom throughout life.

This is all I want to talk about for today. We will continue talking about how to encourage these high levels of thinking. Again, for the children with special needs: extra focus on multi-processing areas, extra focus on high affect personal meaning, don't introduce new words and concepts or hard sequencing tasks until the concept is mastered.

Now let's move to our first question for today. Hello? Hello? Ok, we have our first caller waiting, I believe?

Caller: Yes.

SG: Yes, hi, Dr. Greenspan here.

Caller: Oh, hi. My name is Sylvia and I'm from Arlington, Virginia. And I have a question about my 4 year old.

SG: Well, let me hear it, and thank you for calling our show.

Caller: Oh, well thank you. My son has mild autism. He is somewhat verbal. But we have been working on many questions lately, and I wanted to get him to a higher level of answering questions. We seem to be able to answer "what" questions and "where" questions and things like that, but we never can seem to get to questions such as "why" or "what happened yesterday" or "what will happen tomorrow." We always seem to be stuck in the here and now.

SG: So the question is how to help him go from the "here and now" and the simpler "what," "where," and "who" questions to the "why" questions and the "yesterday, today and tomorrow."

Caller: Exactly.

SG: What you are talking about is really helping him get to this level where we connect ideas together in a more flexible way. It is a very big challenge for many children, and here are some keys to helping a child move to that level. One is to focus on high emotional investment situations. In other words, something that he really wants. What is something that he really, really likes or wants to do, whether it's a food or going outside, what would you say really gives him pleasure?

Caller: I guess going out into the backyard.

SG: Ok, so let's say he wants to go out into the backyard. How does he let you know that?

Caller: Well, he'll say, "I want to go out."

SG: So let's say he wants to go outside and you're at the door. And you say, "Sweetheart, why do you want to go outside?" What would he say?

Caller: He'd say, "Because I want to go outside."

SG: Ok, so you say, "But why do you want to go outside? What do you want to do there?" What would he say?

Caller: Well, I guess if I asked what he wanted to do, he would say, "I want to go on the swing."

SG: Ok, so then I would say, "Well, is that why you want to go outside to go on the swing or do you want to go outside to go to sleep?" What would he say?

Caller: Well, I guess he would say, "I want to go outside to go on the swing."

SG: So you say, "Oh, so that's why you want to go outside, terrific. Let's go." So now you are introducing the "why" concept. What is another thing he really likes to do?

Caller: He likes candy.

SG: Ok, so let's say you take some candy in your hands. You say, "What do you want, Sweetheart?" If he sees the candy in your hand, what will he say?


Caller: Well, he would say, "I want the lollipop."

SG: Ok so you say, "Sweetheart, why do you want the lollipop?" What would he say?

Caller: He would say, "Because I want the lollipop."

SG: Let's say you show him something else, like a cookie that he doesn't like as well. "Which do you want?" He would say, "The lollipop." Right? "Well, why do you want the lollipop and not the cookie?" What would he say?

Caller: I think he would just say, "Because I want the lollipop."



SG: Then you would help him with multiple choice again. You would say, “Do you want the lollipop because it tastes so good or because it tastes terrible?” What would he say?

Caller: Well, I don’t think he would understand that. I don’t think he understands “terrible.”

SG: What’s a word he might relate to?

Caller: “Because it’s yummy or yucky.”

SG: Ok, then you say, “Do you want it because it is yummy or because it is yucky?” What would he say?

Caller: I think he would probably say, “Because it is yummy.”

SG: “Ok, so that’s why you want the lollipop.”

Caller: Well, you know I tried that, and well, maybe I guess we just started and I’m not giving it enough time.

SG: You have to do this for everyday, hundreds of times a day, in hundreds of situations.

Caller: Ok.

SG: Whether it’s a lollipop or going outside or playing with a friend, do you know what I mean?


Caller: Ok.

SG: Then I guarantee you, I don’t often make guarantees, but this is a 98% guarantee, within three months he’ll have the “why” level.

Caller: Ok, so I shouldn’t expect it in a week or two weeks.

SG: Well, you might get lucky. But that’s why I’m giving you 98% certainty within three months. I’m being safe in my prediction.

Caller: Well, for instance if I were to say, “What did you do at grandma’s house?”



SG: Well, see right now what you are doing is you are expecting too much too soon. It's good to raise the questions. If you want to get into the path of "what did you do at grandma's house" or "what are you going to do tomorrow" again, do it in high affect situations. "What did you really like at grandma's yesterday?" And if he can't think of it, give him choices. Say, "Did you like it when she gave you a lollipop or did you like it when she made you go to sleep?" Ok? And he'll probably say, "Oh, I liked the lollipop." Then if he can't tell you what he liked at grandma's yesterday, recreate a situation. Say, "Let's pretend we're at grandma's. And let's do what we had fun doing yesterday at grandma's." Then he can pretend it. He can have a pretend lollipop. Then you want him to talk about tomorrow. "Tomorrow we're going to go visit grandma." He can't tell you what he wants to do, so you ask him, "What do you want to do? Do you want to go swimming or have some lollipops?" If he can't tell you, again, create the situation at grandma's through the pretending and have him pretend it out.

Caller: Ok.

SG: Ok? So give him choices again, ok? And because that takes awhile to learn too, the connecting the past, present, and future is the same capacity that helps you do "why" questions.

Caller: So do you think he can learn them at the same time?


SG: Yes, yes. You do all these things together. But you have to do it in this way. Give him choices, pretend it out, ok? And make it very interactive. Then you kind of get all these things at the same time. But it will take a number of months to make progress in these areas. These are very critical milestones, they are very big-league games. They are not like teaching a child to say a word. These are big thinking advances, so they deserve a couple of months.

Caller: Well, you know, the "what, who, and where" questions came very fast.

SG: Those are easy.

Caller: Yes, I guess that's true.

SG: And they didn't come as fast as you thought - they were percolating for a long time before he showed them. Serena may want to add a few thoughts to this. Hold on for just one second. Here's Serena.



SW: I just was going to mention that there are countless things you do every day that have reasons for them. You're doing them so automatically and the best way to play off the high affect because then the child will stick with you, will want to get what they want. But just even think about starting this very early in the game. If the child wants a drink you say, "Oh, are you thirsty, is that why? Or hungry?" When he gets out of the tub tonight, what if you don't give him the towel automatically? "Oh honey, you might feel cold, you might feel wet." What if he packed the backpack instead of you? Everything you put in the backpack is going to have a reason. So you can help the child anticipate what they will need based on these reasons of "what if" or "if then." There are many ways to approach the "why" throughout the day, and it doesn't always have to be off of high affect, it could be off of what the child expects and you usually do and never even told him why.

Caller: Well one thing we have been doing is to say, "What are you doing?" and "What do you want to do?" and then if he says "I want to go outside" then I say, "Well, what do you need to do now" and he seems to be able to answer that.

SW: Ok, but what would he need to do?

Caller: He would put on his shoes.

SW: Why?

Caller: I would think that that's kind of a higher level thinking, so the "why" questions, I thought they would come easier.

SW: But what I'm suggesting is do the things he already expects to do or expects you to do, because you will see he probably knows more than you think. But it's been so automatic that you have never stopped to talk about it. You never really stopped to go into the reasoning, like why do you take that bottle of water in your backpack? How come you're carrying a snack? Or whatever it is. If he likes to go swimming, you can be sure he'll learn why you put those ten different things in there. So you can always also build this in. As children are growing, they get used to doing things. We don't realize that we're not even talking about the reasons for them. Everything has a reason. If he helps you unpack the groceries, will he know what goes in the fridge?

Caller: Oh, I don't think so.

SW: Ok, well there's your opportunity because there is a reason.



Caller: Right, ok. That's a very good idea.

SW: Then the level of the reason, you'll build up towards. Just even getting how the world works will also help him reason. But he is doing more than you think or he may doing it and not talking about it.

Caller: Right, right.

SG: Ok, the key thing is always go after his opinion, not right or wrong answers. As long as it makes sense, it's a good answer. Never get into the right and wrong, always opinions. So as long as it's not nonsensical, it's a good answer. Always, when you are doing this back-and-forth gesturing, keep the back-and-forth flow of communication cooking. That's even more important than the quality of the answer. Again, call back in three months and tell me if my predictions came true! Ok?

Caller: Ok. Thank you so much.

SG: Good luck. Thanks, bye bye. Ok, next call please. Hello?

Caller: Hello?

SG: Hi, Dr. Greenspan here. How are you?

Caller: I'm good, how are you?


SG: Good, welcome to our show.

Caller: Thank you. My name is Gretchen. I am a graduate occupational therapy student in northeastern Pennsylvania.

SG: Well, great. You're in a wonderful field.

Caller: Yes, I know. I actually have a question regarding our research study. We began a research study on the use of the DIR Model. In northeastern Pennsylvania, we found that most parents and clinicians use the ABA Modeling treatment, especially for children with autism. We were wondering if there was a way we could give them information on using the two models together.


SG: Well, frequently what we do is when children have already been using a more behavioral model like ABA Discrete Trial training, and they come in for an evaluation, often they come in because they want to promote higher levels of reflective



thinking or they want to get more generalization of a particular behavior that the child is learning. We were talking earlier in the show about teaching these higher levels of reflective thinking skills to children. What is interesting here is none of the existing more behavioral curriculums even have programs for these higher level thinking skills, let alone are able to teach them effectively. The reason is that you can't teach judgment and thinking and reasoning by looking at specific surface behaviors. You have to work on the underlying fundamental capacities; the underlying building blocks. Any more than you could teach advanced motor skills by just working on just teaching the skills. You have to work on the foundation pieces – the coordination, the balance, right? Left/right integration, you can't just go and teach a child to kick a soccer ball out of the blue, right? It's the same thing for advanced level thinking skills. So a lot of the parents are very eager to broaden their perspective, particularly when they see that their children's progress can only go so far when they work on specific surface behaviors. So the way we tend to do it is the following. We first show the parents how some of the specific concerns they have to teach this or that behavior can be taught in a more dynamic, interactive way using our DIR Floortime approach. So for example, a parent is trying to teach a child to say the word "open" and they are showing the child a picture and he's memorizing "open" because the door is opening in the picture, we will show how the child can learn that word "open" by putting his favorite toy outside the door and having the child say "open" to get his toy. Now it's a functionally learned word that has meaning generalized immediately, because the word is connected with the emotion of wanting the toy, rather than just a picture memorized. So we show the parent that rather than having to do it in two steps where they sit at the desk and memorize the word and then apply it in the real world, they can learn it while on their feet, so to speak, in the real world.

Caller: Ok.

SG: We also show them how some of the things they want the most from their children, for the children to be able to seek them out, to be loving, to be warm, to be real engaging and take the initiative, can also be taught, but it has to be taught through spontaneous interactions where you follow the child's lead, rather than a rote, memorized script where you reward the child for looking at you, for example. And once a parent sees that, once they see the true gleam in their child's eye, once they see how spontaneous and creative their children can be, they begin embracing the fact that their children are capable of more than they thought. Basically the surface behavior



approach, while it was optimistic in it's time when it first started, it's a little pessimistic in terms of the levels at which it believes children can attain. So the way we do it is building on the parents natural goals for their children and showing them there is a more dynamic way to achieve those goals. Then within that framework, if a child still needs structured work, we create a comprehensive DIR Floortime based approach with spontaneous work, with semi-structured work, with motor-sensory and spatial work, with specific therapies like occupational therapy and speech therapy, with educational approaches, with family support, and within that comprehensive approach we always have what we call the semi-structured or structured component where we are working on specific targeted skills. Here if the child still needs very structured work, we'll use some exercises that are ABA or Discreet Trial or behavioral in nature. Alternatively, like for language issues, we may use our language based curriculum, which is the ABLC – Affect Based Language Curriculum. This has a lot of structured elements in it. There are many kinds of structured programs. But we will incorporate structured programs as needed into the overall comprehensive approach. Typically once a child can learn dynamically through interaction, the need for the structured learning decreases considerably. We try to wean the child from that into more and more dynamic and more spontaneous learning. So to answer your question, the way we do it is a gradual transition where we show the therapeutic team and the parents that the same goals can be achieved more dynamically with better generalization and higher upward mobility and then we retain some of the structured elements for awhile as part of a comprehensive program including the spontaneous elements mentioned above. Then we will wean out and reduce the need for the structure as the child makes progress.


Caller: Ok, so the DIR Model is eventually going to dominate.

SG: And the DIR Model should be thought of not as a treatment or an intervention, but as an overall model of planning, and orchestrating an entire approach within which structured elements can coexist along with the spontaneous elements. Ok?

Caller: Ok. Thank you very much for your help.

SG: Well, thank you for asking that good question. Ok, next caller please. We lost the caller? Ok, Serena, do you want to comment on this question that we just had?

SW: Well, as usual, I would agree, right? The only thing that really helps, because children are all really so different, when you impose a model there where



everyone is told to learn the same way, we can really miss the boat with a lot of children who are much more ready to learn dynamically. The question to answer is how does this child learn. That way you can start this gradual process of transitioning because children will learn in different ways. We know some children who have difficulties with motor planning and sequencing often rely on memorized sequences but don't have yet the experience to get spontaneous, yet when put into a high affect situation, you just have to ask how they get what they really want. You'll see, they'll figure out how to climb up and get that cookie or the toy. So think very carefully about how children learn and you learn things in different ways, and what you hope they will learn and then create a program for them rather than fitting them into the program.

SG: Sorry for that interruption. We just had a little bit of static on the line. What happens sometimes, and I apologize for this, if the caller hangs up and we keep the line open, we get a little static on the line, and that was the problem that we didn't close the line from our side as quickly as we should. Now we have our next caller waiting. Again, I apologize for that brief interruption. Hello?

Caller: Yes, can I talk to Dr. Greenspan?

SG: How are you?


Caller: Are you Dr. Greenspan?

SG: Yes, this is Dr. Greenspan. Thank you for calling in.

Caller: Dr. Greenspan, I have a son who is 14 years old and his grades have been dropping since he has been in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He is very smart, so what I asked the school was to do a learning disability test on him to see what is going on. They came up with this conclusion that he has ADHD, oppositional behavior, ADD, and horrible depression and that's why he cannot study. But as far as learning is concerned, apparently he is above average, to 12<sup>th</sup> grade or college level in everything. But when it comes to memory, he has problems. His grades are very low. So I was wondering, they are telling me that I need to give him medication but never medication has helped him and he is very unhappy when he takes medication. He feels like there is something abnormal about him.

SG: He has been on medication in the past?

Caller: He has been on medication.



SG: What has he been on in the past?

Caller: He has been on lithium, Zoloft, not Ritalin - there is another one that is for ADD...

SG: So he has been on a number of medications in the past.

Caller: Yes, and he doesn't like to take them.

SG: And they make him feel how, you said?

Caller: Lithium makes him very sleepy and angry. They make him feel angry.

SG: So they don't help him and they make him feel worse, actually.

Caller: Yes, yes.

SG: And the school is actually telling you what to do? They are telling you to put him on medication?

Caller: No, the school is suggesting that we should see a psychiatrist and do therapy on him so he will feel better and then he will do better at school. I don't have any major problems with him at home or they don't have any problems with him at school. The only problem with him is that his grades are very low and he doesn't have any motivation about his studies.

SG: How is he doing with friendships?


Caller: Friendships, he is not doing very well. He says he is a loner and he accepts that. He loves to party, he loves to have friends around, but the school kids, they aren't around him. He is dealing with it. I try to make plans for him everyday, or at least on weekends, I bring friends of the family over, but as far as having him have friends, no he does not have anyone.

SG: And where do you live?

Caller: I live in Maryland.

SG: Where in Maryland?

Caller: In Potomac.



SG: Oh, so you're not far from where we are doing the show. Now do you have a mental health professional working with you?

Caller: Well, I saw you a couple of times. And you suggested to see another doctor and you said he should have some alone time with his father, but I don't know for someone with ADHD and also someone who has oppositional behavior, how can I help him?

SG: You said I gave you the name of someone for him to see?

Caller: Yes, but that doctor gave up. He said he was so smart and he didn't know how to help him.

SG: So in other words, you saw somebody, but the doctor felt he couldn't be helpful.

Caller: No, he said he couldn't be helpful.

SG: So right now you aren't seeing anybody.

Caller: No, because my son is telling me that taking him to doctors isn't going to help him because he doesn't have any problems in his mind and I'm acting like he's abnormal but he's not. The only thing he does wrong is he doesn't study and because he doesn't like school. All he wants to do is play guitar.


SG: He is good with music?

Caller: No, he just started guitar. He plays guitar a lot and he learned it from the computer.

SG: Good, so he has an interest which is wonderful.

Caller: Oh, he does have a lot of interests.

SG: Here is what I would suggest. Number one, with children who are not doing well in their grades but appear to be very, very bright, it's very important to have a comprehensive assessment where we look not just at the language skills and some of the learning skills, but there are a number of other skills that are harder to assess, sometimes called nonverbal learning skills or visual spatial thinking or their motor planning and sequencing skills. These need to be assessed also. So it's always important to do that for a complete evaluation. Also, with the child who is not making



progress, and it's always important to have a re-evaluation of their mental health needs, the child may be content within their own mind and feel ok, but there may be ways in which they could enjoy life more, for example be more successful with their peers or be motivated to study and learn and actually enjoy learning. So we have to figure out all the reasons for that. And to do that requires often a comprehensive re-evaluation, even for a child who has been evaluated at one time, particularly if a treatment program that is started but so far hasn't been working to see why it wasn't working and how a new program can be developed that will work. So what I would suggest is, in cases like this, always have a complete evaluation so it looks at all the processing areas – visual spatial, motor planning and sequencing...

Caller: I have done that, Dr. Greenspan. Remember you sent me to a different doctor.

SG: Yes, what happened with that?

Caller: Well, everything seemed to be fine with visual and you did an evaluation and I have seen the best ones in the city and they came up with nothing to be honest with you.


SG: Well, let me give you a suggestion. What I suggest is that you call back my office and let me see you for a re-evaluation because I want to see what happened with the treatment program that I recommended and why the doctor who I recommended to you wasn't able to work with you successfully. Then I can find an appropriate person to work with you toward a more successful result.

Caller: You see my whole point is that I don't want to medicate him.

SG: No, no, I would agree with you. Medication alone is rarely the answer to a child who has challenges. If medication is going to be used, it needs to be part of a comprehensive program where it is used together with other things. Often it is not needed if we get a truly comprehensive program.

Caller: Well, when can I come and see you?

SG: What I want you to do is call my office and tell them that you spoke with me on the radio show, and that you have seen me before, and that the person I recommended for you saw him for awhile but it didn't quite work out and it wasn't successful, and that I want to see you for a re-evaluation so we can figure out why the



original doctor wasn't able to work successfully and we can figure out what to do now. I promise you I won't offer you a simple solution like medication alone. If medication is indicated, it'll be a part of a comprehensive program but often it is not needed, but a comprehensive program is needed. So call the office and tell them what I just told you and they'll make sure you'll get to see me soon.

Caller: Can I ask you another question?


SG: Yes.

Caller: You know, I have the other one who is about 12 years old. I have another son who is about 12 years old. He is successful, very popular, as far as academic go, he is very successful, he's very popular and he is very responsible. The only problem is that every time he has a problem with his brother and his brother hits him or bothers him, he goes and breaks the house. He kicks a wall – until he breaks something he's not going to feel better. What can I do about him?

SG: When you come in to tell me about the son that you called about, we'll also talk about your other son too. And we'll figure out a solution for both of them. So I look forward to seeing you, and I want to thank you for calling. We will try to figure out an approach that will work for the whole family.

Caller: Ok, thank you very much.

SG: Thank you for calling. Bye bye. Serena, do you want to add any further thoughts? No? Ok. This was an excellent call and it also illustrates an important point that everyone needs to be aware of. The caller mentioned that they had seen me and I had made recommendations and sent them to a colleague, but then the program didn't work. The colleague stopped working with them. We're not clear, and when I meet with the family I always try to figure out why that particular treatment program didn't work, but apparently as you heard, the child needs a re-evaluation now. It's very important that anybody who has tried an approach, regardless of who recommended it, if it doesn't work, not to simply feel discouraged, but to always seek a re-evaluation even back with the person who originally saw the child, if you have faith in that person, or a new person entirely. Also, try to figure out what type of approach will work. Most children and most families can find approaches that will work. I rarely see a situation where we can't find out the right mixture of elements in a comprehensive program. As this mother was pointing out, medication, if it is going to be a part of the program is



only one part of the comprehensive program. The key thing is to persist and follow through. I'm delighted that this mom used the access to the radio show to follow through and I'll be getting a chance to see if we can help this family get back on track. But those who are in other situations where this rings a similar note, persist. Don't simply let time go with the child who is not enjoying peers or not enjoying schoolwork and learning. The key to adolescence is for the child to progress developmentally, to enjoy peer relationships, and to begin liking and enjoying learning, even if they don't like all their subjects, and to begin enjoying their families more. If these are not happening, whether the child has special needs or learning challenges or emotional challenges or no obvious challenges at all, it is a very good idea to get an evaluation and figuring out how to be helpful. This is a critical time of life and the key is persistence until we find the right solution.

Again, thank you for joining us and next week we are going to focus on the real facts about autistic spectrum disorders. As many of you know, there are a number of different facts out there about why the rates seem to be increasing, how to make a proper diagnoses, what are the most appropriate treatment options, and what's the prognosis for this disorder. I want to next week cover all these bases briefly, each one, and try to set the record straight, and what are the true facts. How can we get away from the confusion surrounding the great interest there is these days on autism, and get to the straight scoop, so to speak. I want to share with you some of the true facts of the nature of this challenge, its diagnoses, its scope, and the true prognosis with an optimal treatment program. So we look forward to seeing you next week on "The True Facts about Autism" and after that we have a series of shows on a series of interesting topics that I'll discuss next week. Looking forward to hearing from you again next week. Those of you who have questions, please email them in, and I'll select some for on the air. Thank you.