

Web-Based Radio Show

Discipline:

What is involves to be a disciplined person and tracing the developmental pathways to achieving this wonderful capacity, and we'll trace this for children with special needs as well as for children without special needs


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Welcome to our Web-Based Radio Show. This is Stanley Greenspan. We have a very interesting topic today. This is a topic that is of equal interest to all families – families where there are children with special needs and families where there are children without special needs. This topic has to do with how we help create individuals; children and eventually adults who are disciplined, who have that internal sense of discipline. So how do you discipline a child, or anyone for that matter, in such a way that they, themselves, will eventually become a disciplined person; that the discipline will come from inside and not from outside? After all, the goal of all discipline is to not require discipline, to be a disciplined person, a person who can follow through, control their impulses, create and organize a plan of action, stick to it.


Let's try to look a little more closely at what it involves to be a disciplined person, and then we'll trace the developmental pathways to achieving this wonderful capacity, and we'll trace this for children with special needs as well as for children without special needs.

First let's look at two adults. The first adult, who we will call "Mrs. Jones," is an individual who can stick to what she wants to do. She can create a plan and follow it, whether it is at work where she organizes computer networks for her company, or whether it is at home when she is doing her spring housecleaning. She not only can follow through on her plan, she has the luxury of an internal voice that walks her through her plan, that says, "Ok, now you have done A and B, how about C and D? Come on, you can do a little more before lunch and then you'll be able to relax and enjoy your lunch a bit more." This internal voice is a comforting, soothing voice that helps guide her, almost like a mother or father on your shoulder providing guidance, but



also praise and support and telling you the benefits of your hard work. This internal voice is now inside and is a soothing, comforting presence; a little companion that she can take with her to help her be a disciplined person. But she not only can stick to her plan and create an effective step-wise plan, she can also avoid and withstand distractions. So when her colleague at work says, “Gee, how about a coffee break. I need to tell you about what happened yesterday with my kids.” If she is in the middle of her plan, she is able to say, “I want to hear about that, but can you wait a few minutes, and how about coming to lunch with me” and finish what she planned to finish. She is not easily distracted, even by the temptation of a nice chit-chat with one of her best friends. At home, when she is helping one of her children with their homework, or as we said before, embarking on her spring housecleaning junket, she is not easily distracted by a telephone call from a good friend or by a desire to just put her feet up and relax or by any other impulse of the moment. Yet on a day when she doesn’t feel well or a day that she decides it’s a good day for some R&R, she is able to relax, put her feet up, and thoroughly enjoy it without feeling guilty or without feeling, “Gee I ought to be working.” So she can plan not only for hard work, but also plan for R&R or a little relaxation when needed. Her internal voice tells her that she has earned the day off or earned a few hours off. It is wonderful to have such a comforting internal voice that can tell us when we are doing well, it can give us a day off here and there, and it can keep us on track. Well, this is the internal discipline that we have.


Now let’s compare this with another individual, who we will call “Mr. Smith.” I don’t want any implied sexism here since I gave the positive example to a woman and the negative example to a man. I just don’t want anyone to accuse me of bias. At any rate, Mr. Smith is just the opposite. He has some good ideas. He decides he wants to finish a few reports at work but he is easily distracted by some sounds he is hearing from his colleagues in the next office. As soon as he gets back to work, then he sees some other colleagues giggling over some coffee and he is compelled to join them and find out about the joke. He described that when he was younger and sitting in a class, he often couldn’t keep his eyes from straying to the tree outside and watching the leaves shake on the tree or watching the birds fly, making it very hard for him to follow what the teacher was saying. So for him, this is not a new pattern. He also frequently speaks before he wants to and feels he can’t control what he says. It is kind of like his “urges get the best of me.” When he was younger, sometimes his impulsivity would get him in hot water and he would push and shove and have to be severely disciplined but it didn’t seem to help. He didn’t develop that internal sense of discipline that he now



feels he needs. He is a very bright man, often in his reports by his superiors they say, “Enormous potential, extraordinarily bright, but doesn’t seem to work at capacity. His work is uneven, inconsistent, often late, and not of the quality he is capable of.” His wife complains in the same way. Mr. Smith is an example of an individual who hasn’t been able to create that internal discipline; that ability to follow through, that ability to create and implement a plan of action. His internal voice, rather than helping him stay the course and be a disciplined person, is often the voice of temptation, telling him “Oh you better find out what they are laughing about or you are going to miss some important jokes.”

But it’s not only adults who show these patterns. We see them in children, often very, very young children. When a child is evidencing the patterns we have described for Mr. Smith – the distractibility, impulsivity, inability to follow through – we often want to punish that child. We feel that tough, hard, discipline; consequences for their actions will help them shape up and become more like Mrs. Jones – a disciplined person who can follow through. But often the punitive, hard-nosed, tough love approach doesn’t work when a child is distractible and impulsive and not following through. Not only doesn’t it work, often we see children regress and become more impulsive and more distractible, and have more difficulty with disciplining themselves or responding to even external sources of discipline. They may be ok when the fear of adults is right there over their shoulder, but as soon as the adult disappears, often so too, their discipline disappears.


How can we help children and adults achieve this much-needed capacity? And how do we help children with special needs, who as we have stated before in other shows, often need more practice to learn some of these important foundationst for healthy development – how do we help them master this capacity for internal discipline? As we look at the building blocks to develop this needed capacity, we’ll try to talk about how we can help both children with special needs and without special needs master this. The reason why it is harder for children with special needs is because many have differences in the way they process information; the way they take in sounds or sights, or the way they organize and implement their actions or motor patterns; the way they respond to sensation. So for example, if a child is very overly sensitive to things like sound, they are going to be more easily distractible. They will be distracted by the child talking next to them. For the child who is not as sensitive to sound, they won’t be easily distracted. The child who has trouble planning actions will have a harder time



planning a multi-step action plan that solves a problem, whereas a child who does that easily will have an easier time. So the very processing challenges that define the special needs condition often – problems with motor planning or problems with over-reactivity to sound or problems with following verbal instructions, are almost in themselves defined a harder time in creating that internal discipline; that ability to plan and follow through and not be distracted.


So let's look now at the building blocks and what are the components that are needed to become a disciplined person? It is pretty straight forward but it is not as simple as we would like it to be. It is not as simple as simply "using the rod" in the old days or becoming more firm or more punitive or a more consequence-oriented parent or educator. It's really much more complicated than that, but not that complicated. So let's look at it.

It starts with one of the first capacities a baby needs to master: the ability to focus on the external world, and the ability to focus and attend to the world through multiple modalities – through sight, through sound, through touch, through smell – and to organize movement in conjunction with taking in information from all the senses at the same time. Now why is this so important for discipline? Well, we talked about one of the components of discipline being the ability to focus and follow through. Well, here this ability to focus and have a goal begins with the ability to look at mommy's face or turn toward her sound. The ability to plan an action begins with the ability to say, "Mommy is over there to my right" and turn your head to your right; or to find her over to the left side and turn your head to the left. So the ability to combine an action with your senses; with what you are taking in through your sensors, is the first step in being focused, and the first step in planning appropriate actions. In fact, the more a child or a baby can focus through all their senses together, the more they get their whole mental team working as a team, almost by definition the more disciplined they are, because if you are focusing on, let's say, the teacher, but you are hearing the noise from outside and distracted by the noise from outside, you are not getting your sight and your sound working together. On the other hand, if you are listening to the teacher and looking at her and then carrying out actions that she is asking you to do, like take notes, by combining these three things together, you'll be less likely to be distracted by the noise outside; by the hum-hum-hum of the lawnmower or by the bumblebees buzzing around the flowers. But if as a little child you never got your senses working together, you never got your mental team working as an orchestrated unit, what's going to happen?



You are going to be more easily looking one way and listening another way. You are more easily distracted. So working on helping a child take in information through all their senses – sight and sound – and then organizing movement, so we can do that as a baby and we can do that at any age. For example, let's say you are playing with a four year old who is easily distractible. He's looking at you, but let's say he's turning to the sound elsewhere. What you have to do is increase the energy in your voice. "Look at the AIRPLANE, look where it's GOING!" As you increase the energy in your voice, you'll see that same four year old begins attending to you. He's now not only looking at you, but he's listening to your sounds because you increased the energy in your voice; you pulled him in and you're giving him practice in combining sight and sound with the action of reaching for that airplane that you're playing with him. That's helping him learn something that other children may have learned as a baby but now you're going to practice a little more as he is older. So there is nothing more important than providing vibrant interactions with an older child where you are combining multiple senses – sight and sound – with movement, all guided, and this is the key, all guided by compelling emotion because it is the compelling emotion in your voice and the compelling emotion in the child's pleasure from listening to you because he going to get to catch that airplane that's going to motivate him and help him organize sight and sound and movement together, which is the beginning of being focused.


Now also we talked a lot about engagement, the importance of being part of a relationship. Now why is that so important for discipline? Well, because this internal discipline involves focused, purposeful interactions and it's our emotions or our affects that organize this for us. They help us organize sight and sound together because the only reason we organize it together is because we want to look and listen to the same person and we want to, therefore, turn to that person or reach for that person. That is all orchestrated by a pleasure in that person. So the relationship organizes how we focus. But then it also organizes our being purposeful. So if we reach for the person's nose to tweak it, we get them to say "boom-boom" or have them make another funny sound. Or as a four year old, if we reach for the airplane the person is moving, that's all motivated by positive emotion, so we have to have a relationship to organize purposeful activity. You can't get as purposeful with a toy as you can with another person, because another person is ever so much more complex and compelling emotionally than a toy can be. Even a multi-step toy can't be as compelling as an interesting mommy or daddy.



This leads us to the next step in organized, internal discipline: the ability for problem solving, for creating a plan of action to solve a problem. Well our toddler is learning to do this for the first time when there is a toy up high on a shelf and daddy says, “Can I help you? Can I help you?” and offers his hand, the toddler takes daddy by the hand and together they walk and then eventually the toddler gestures towards the toy with his shoulder or maybe with pointing or maybe with just an arm gesture, or maybe just with some changes in body posturing, some vocalizations, and gets daddy to pick him up, and together they get the toy. Well, this can occur with an eight year old who is getting daddy to help him open the door that is stuck or a twelve year old who is figuring out the best way to get to a friend’s house and has to figure out whether mommy or daddy is going to drive him or who is going to help him dial the phone if he can’t dial the phone on his own. Whatever it is, problem solving is enhanced by shared social problem solving where the adult or the other person is a partner and where many steps are involved in solving the problem. So typically this would occur in a toddler, but if it wasn’t occurring because of special needs, different processing problems, or motor planning is hard, for example, then we want extra practice later on. We want to create obstacle courses. We want to create more steps, not less steps to getting the door open or getting the window open or getting this or that toy, or getting to the supermarket or getting the favorite food or hamburger or ice cream the child wants. All these can be used to create multi-step action plans that are the beginning of nice problem solving.


Now if these three first steps are made, you have a focused, purposeful, problem-solving child who can organize all their senses and their actions on the problem to be solved with having the beginnings of a disciplined child leading to a disciplined adult.

But we haven’t yet talked about the internal voice. How do we get that soothing, internal voice so that external structure and challenges aren’t necessary to keep a child disciplined? Well, then we get to the level where the child is learning to use imagination; learning to create ideas; learning to create symbols. This ordinarily occurs in the second and third year of life. So in typical development with no challenges, you’ll see a child pretending and that’s the beginning of exercising ideas – the dolls are hugging or kissing. We’ll see him beginning to describe what he is doing or what he wants, “I want the apple.” “Give me the juice.” He may even say, “I’m going to get the juice” or “My dolly is going to drink some water.” He begins to describe his actions. As the child begins to describe his actions or just describes what he is seeing, or describes



his likes and dislikes, “Mommy, I like the juice, I don’t like the apple,” that child is now building the steps or the foundations for that internal voice. The child who can say, “I like the apple” can say to himself, “You are a good boy” or “Go to the door so you can go outside and play.” He can begin telling himself what to do, not just describing to you what he wants to do. It’s that same capacity that leads to that internal voice. So we have to help our children use symbols, use words, and use ideas – and not just to meet needs. In other words, initially ideas are used, “I want the juice.” It’s no different than the child grabbing the juice. Or “I want a hug” or “It’s my toy.” That’s the impulsive use of ideas. It’s just the idea is accompanying the action but is really no different from the action itself. It’s a beginning step in using ideas. It’s fine to have happen and it’s one of the first things we see as children are using ideas, but then we need to help them go a step further where the child can say things not just like, “Give me the juice” but “I want the juice.” “I want the juice” is different from “Give me the juice” because “I want the juice” is expressing a desire. It doesn’t have the immediacy of “I’ve got to have it now or I’m going to hit you in the nose,” it’s the “I want it” and that means the child is saying “I have a need; I have a desire; I have a want.” It’s the beginning of the child actually reflecting on their own internal emotions. The want is the emotion. It’s just like the child later saying, “I feel angry.” That’s different from the child saying, “I’m mad” and then hitting another child. The child is now saying, “I feel mad.” He is describing a feeling.


Again, these are the foundations for the child describing what they want to do. “I want to finish my homework so then I can go out and play and not have to worry about it.” Now the beginning of that occurs with the descriptive use of ideas where the child is describing a feeling or describing a desire or describing a want. That will happen naturally through pretend play and just a lot of interactive use of language. So if you have long chit-chats with your child about everything under the sun, and lots of pretend play, you’ll find the child naturally progresses from “I want it” or “I gotta have it” to “This is how I feel” or “This is what I want.” And then he can negotiate. That becomes the basis for the internal voice. So have lots of long discussions. The longer the discussion, the better. As these discussions get longer, and the child’s vocabulary improves, you ask the child, “Why do you want this or that?” Or, “How will you feel if you get it and how will you feel if you don’t get it?” The child becomes a better describer of his internal world through these types of questions. Not overdone, just a little bit, the child’s internal voice is going to improve and create a foundation for that internal voice we talked about in the disciplined adult where the voice can guide you




through a complex action pattern and reward you for a job well done and keep you on course when you are distracted. So it begins here. And for children with special needs, even when they are 8 or 9 or even 14 or 15, when they don't have that internal voice or that internal discipline, work with it through long discussions where they describe feelings and they describe wants and desires and actions. Nothing can be more important than that.

Now once that is in place, then we want to get to higher levels of reflective thinking. The foundations are in place. And as you know we have talked about this before, we have causal thinking where the child can give you the reasons – the “why” of something, then we go to multi-causal thinking where the child can give you multiple reasons for things. Then we also have not just multi-causal thinking but gray area thinking. That's where the child is not only giving you multiple reasons, but they can give you the degrees to which one reason holds and one reason doesn't hold. So, “I want to go outside because it is so nice outside and in here it is so dark and gloomy, I'll be so much happier outside, much, much more happy than I will be inside.” That's a gray area graduated statement. Then if we are turning that into a disciplined action, you can say to the child, “Well, if we let you go out now, when are you going to do your homework?” And the child can say, “Well, I'll go out and play for just ten minutes and then I'll come in and finish my homework, and you'll see I'll keep to it.” That child, because they are a gray area thinker, can be out there for ten minutes and remind themselves they need to do their homework because they see the world in gradations – it's not all-or-nothing. All-or-nothing means you play forever or you do your homework forever. But if you are a gray area thinker, you could picture that you could play for awhile and then do your homework for awhile. It allows you to plan in a more fine-tuned way. If you are an all-or-nothing thinker, you don't do that.

That leads to the next level, which is the last level we'll talk about, where the child goes beyond gray area thinking and by 12 or 13 in typical development can become a thinker off an internal standard, where they can evaluate their own behavior and their own thoughts and their own feelings. They can say things like, “Gee, I did a good job today. I finished my homework and then I had a great time going out and playing.” Then they can reward themselves. They can also say to themselves, “Gee, I did a terrible job today. I was distracted, I got behind in my homework, and now I can't go out with my friends tonight because I have to do more work.” That ability to evaluate yourself and plan accordingly is what consolidates that ability for internal



discipline. That ordinarily can be established in early adolescence and then carries through the adult years. But in many children with special needs, it's going to be a longer road to get here because each of these steps we have been talking about will take longer to acquire. So they are going to have to practice it more – do more gray area thinking and more helping the child to evaluate their own behavior. We'll have to ask more questions such as, "Well what do you think about the way today went? Were you happy with the balance between play and schoolwork?" or "Were you happy with the balance between this and that activity?" As the child learns to describe and evaluate their own behavior, they become better able to achieve this level of self-evaluation – evaluating their own feelings and behaviors. This level of self-evaluation is what pulls together this internal voice we are talking about. If this internal voice has a balance between pleasure and pride because the parents have been prideful and positive in their own guidance and their own discipline, and also has that edge of disapproval and disappointment when you haven't done a good job. That needs to be there too – it's the voice that combines both that the child can now scold themselves when they are being "bad" and reward themselves when they are being "good" and they can do it in a nice, warm, regulated way. So what we all imagine as the "perfect parent" or "perfect boss" or "perfect authority figure" who guides us, who is encouraging, but can also be firm when we need it, and that's what we also want the internal voice to be. But the internal voice will be no different than what the child is exposed to in their day-to-day negotiations. So how you help a child negotiate each of these steps from early focusing and attending to imaginative play where they begin constructing their internal voice to different levels of reflective thinking where their internal voice becomes more reflective and more subtle and more nuanced and eventually can help them judge themselves. At each of these stages you can do this with warmth and support and guidance and pride, and that firmness when you need to. Or you can be punitive or overly laudatory in a sort of phony way. If you do the first, you have an internal voice that reflects that. If you do the latter, you have an internal voice that is overly laudatory one day and then overly punitive another day. So it should be no surprise when a child's internal voice reflects the environment they have grown up in. So for a disciplined person, we need a disciplined environment that is regulating and guiding, but also one that helps the child master each of these steps we are talking about in the way we just described. Simplistic solutions of just getting tough with the child just not only don't work, but with children with special needs they are working less well than with non-special needs children, and they often lead to regressions. On the



other hand, guidance and firm discipline together, while mastering each of these steps can lead to a disciplined adult and a disciplined child, and one who feels good about being disciplined. It can even help children who tend to be sensory over-reactive or have problems with executive functioning and planning and sequencing master these critical abilities. They often just need extra practice. And the strengthening of their basic processing capacities at the same time which often may require occupational therapy or speech therapy or other types of individualized work to strengthen the processing ability, but these steps we have been describing is what is critical for all children to be disciplined internally and to respond to external discipline in a healthy way and eventually be able to take care of themselves not just in terms of the basics but also in terms of fine tuned healthy judgments. So a disciplined adult comes from the building blocks and these healthy foundations we have been describing.

Now I just want to turn it over for a few minutes to Serena Wieder, my colleague who has joined me, to see if she wants to add a comment or two, then we are going to take your phone calls.

SW: Well, I just want to again bring in the contrast between the concept of being disciplined and many of the behavioral models that I brought to try to get children to do things in a certain way. Often the missing piece which is why you don't always see long-lasting effects of stickers and just praise is that you don't get into these conversations and really work on the reflection. If something is good, have a conversation about what made it good. If something isn't, then figure out what goes wrong. But you always can go back to those basic problem-solving approaches rather than just thinking we can reward externally and hope it will happen. Working more on the basic capacities is just essential.

SG: Now we want to get our call. Sorry we had to delay our first caller for a little bit, but if they can call back we will take your call in just a second. In the meantime while we are waiting for that call to come in, I'm going to read one of the questions that came in during the week that will not be represented by a caller. That was a question from a colleague who has...oh we have our caller, so we're going to hold off, hold on one second. Hello, how are you? Dr. Greenspan here.

Caller: Oh, hi, I'm listening to you on the internet!

SG: Wonderful!

Caller: Ok, so what do I do now?

SG: Well, let me hear your question.

Caller: Am I on the radio right now?

SG: You're on the radio. You're live right now.

Caller: Ok. My daughter is three years old, she just turned three. She has tons of language, but she is not using her language appropriately. She uses language to request things and she scripts. She tells me things she wants and she tells me things that she wants me to do like, "Mommy sit down" and "Mommy sing me a song" and "Mommy sit next to me" and "Mommy read me the book." She is very, very smart and she can learn concepts and she can label everything in the world – she has a vast vocabulary. But she scripts all the time. She scripts from TV shows, she scripts from computer games, she scripts from books we have read her – everything. Also she is somewhat echolalic. But it is so vast the amount of different scripts that she has in her head – it's staggering. Now what I want to know is, if she is engaged in play she doesn't script. We try to keep her engaged as much as we possibly can.

SG: How much is that when you say "as much as you can"?

Caller: It's crazy – she's in a center-based program and then when she comes home I work with her and then she has a babysitter.

SG: You said she is in a center-based program, which is what kind of program?

Caller: It's language and she goes to OT, she goes to speech, she has classroom time.


SG: Is it a center-based program where it's with just children with special needs?

Caller: Yes.

SG: What kind of program is she in? What are the other children like?

Caller: Everybody has different things, but a lot of the children have PDD.

SG: And how related is your daughter? How interactive is she in terms of warmth and intimacy?



Caller: With me, she has an incredible connection – very, very warm. She looks in my eyes, makes tons of eye contact. With her classroom teacher she is incredibly connected. With the babysitter we have she is incredibly connected. But with children, she is not connected at all. With each adult she is developing a relationship with, she is becoming more and more connected.

SG: Can she answer “why level” questions yet?

Caller: No, absolutely not.

SG: Can she answer “where”?

Caller: “Where,” “who,” and “what.”

SG: I think the key thing is with a child – and is she more sensory over-reactive or under-reactive?

Caller: Over-reactive, but it is not a terrible problem.

SG: Right, but just a little bit. And how are her fine motor and gross motor skills?

Caller: Excellent. Superb.

SG: So she can draw and copy things.

Caller: Yes, beautifully.


SG: And she can also run and jump and skip and things like that?

Caller: Excellently, yes.

SG: Well, good. I think the key thing is with children who script a lot, the first thing is that when they script as elegantly as you are describing for your daughter, it is often an indication that the child has a wonderful, extraordinary memory.

Caller: Right, exactly.

SG: Which is a real strength. So they are gobbling up information. The key is to make that information emotionally meaningful to them because they are tending to gobble up all this wonderful information but storing it without necessarily giving it emotional meaning always. So that is why it comes out in a scripted way, or sometimes



they are echolalic. They aren't processing it through their emotions meaningfully. Think of the emotions as giving experience meaning; giving information meaning. So when you hear something, you file it in terms of its emotional meaning. You give it something personal, you don't just file it as an isolated store to be recouped. You hear something and you say it fits in with the feeling I had about this or that. Now you mentioned something important. You said that when you are engaged with her and interacting with her, she is a little more spontaneous and a little more creative. The key thing is to make sure at school and at home, there is someone interacting with her in a spontaneous and emotionally vibrant and emotionally meaningful way all her waking time. So there should be zero TV or screen time – computer time.

Caller: Right, we eliminated almost all of that.

SG: At the most, a half hour. Then you want to make sure that at home and at school you are not only interacting with her all the time, but being very creative. That way, when a script comes up, go with the script. Don't try to discourage it at that moment, but make the script creative. Let's say she brings out of the blue, Script "A" – "Well, where does that come from?" and play dumb. So she says, "It comes from..."

Caller: She can't say that.

SG: She won't tell you where it came from?

Caller: She just turned three. She actually would walk around singing, "Mary Had a Little Lamb..."

SG: So if you stop her for a second and say, "Where is that from? Is that from the book?" and you can show her two books. "Which book is that from?" Would she identify the picture that goes with it?

Caller: Maybe. You know she pulls them out of her memory from three years of experience.

SG: Yes, and you want to get her to use it purposefully and meaningfully. In other words, you don't want to permit just isolated random verbalizations, but you don't want to ignore it – you want to pay attention to what she is saying. So you can try to ask her "Where did that come from?" and show her two books. Let's say she can't do that. So then you say, "Well, I don't think it's Mary Had a Little Lamb, it's Mary Had a Little Doggy." What would she say then?

Caller: She would ignore me. She would just ignore me.


SG: What would she do? Where would she go?

Caller: If I said, "Mary Had a Little Doggy," she might look at me and then continue on with what she was doing.

SG: Right and she says, "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and then you got in her face in front of her a little bit and said, "Oh, I think it was a doggy. Are you sure it was a lamb?" What would she do with that?

Caller: I think she wouldn't know what to do with it.

SG: Then you could take out a little lamb and say, "Oh, well here's a little lamb, is this Mary's little lamb?" and then start some pretend play interacting with the lamb. The idea is to get something creative cooking and just follow your instincts. It doesn't make any difference what you do. Every time she is scripting, every time she is running around, make it interactive immediately. In other words, jump right in, whether you find a lamb that you can begin to pretend that you're Mary and she's the lamb or something like that or you're the lamb and she's Mary. It doesn't make any difference what it is, as long as you make it interactive. Once you make it interactive, it's not longer scripted. Now the other thing that's very helpful is to do lots of peer play. So with a child who is this verbal and who has this solid memory, you want to have four or more peer play dates a week so she is practicing using her language with peers also. You want peers who are very interactive, ok? So they can't be peers who are self-absorbed and who have similar challenges that she has. Now at school, too, it's helpful for her to have the therapies of school and work with the teachers, but she also needs a fair amount of time with children who are very verbal and interactive and spontaneous because someone has to be responding to her and pulling her into creative interactions all the time. It takes that sort of approach to help her gradually shift from a memory based approach to an emotionally based approach that will harness and give meaning to what she is doing. So doing lots of Floortime, lots of peer play, but the school needs to have her integrated with regular peers but with an adult creating interaction. So it won't help if she is just parallel playing or going about doing her own thing. At home when you have peers over, you create little games where they have to have fun together. They could be hiding together, chasing together, etc. Now Serena has some additional thoughts that she is going to share with you, just hold on one second.




SW: Just related to that, it is important that everyone playing with her and working with her understands that her output is better than her receptive intake. She is the kind of child who will offer you more scripts, that's a solution. She has depended on memory in order to hold the language and then say things, even though she is not responding to questions, she will say something else. You say she is not answering you? So you want to support her intake, whether you take another toy and have a lamb, doggy, or a cat, whether you use more gestures. What is very crucial for everyone to understand is that she needs the help taking in what you say to her so she can respond to it. Then you'll be able to have more success getting the little conversations going. But give her those additional cues and it could be from your tone of voice, it could be from a gesture, it could be from a toy prop, it could be from a book – just help her take in what you are doing, then she'll be more confident and will have a better chance responding to what you say rather than what she will tell you.

Caller: I don't really understand. Like, she understands what we are saying. But she doesn't understand "why" questions; she can't answer a "why" question.

SW: If you get her back-and-forth conversation, you want to be sure she understands what you are saying because if she is telling you something and not answering your question, it's a guess to me that she doesn't always understand it as readily. But with the "why" you can offer her more ways of responding to the "why" – you could go into the reasons she might want something or she might be thirsty or hungry. So even before you just base it on her output, try to give her a chance to learn the reason for what she wants to do and start giving her choices. By making sure she is registering what you are telling her, she'll have a better chance of responding back to your question. Otherwise this is the kind of child who will often just give you something else. That is how you know – she will often change topics or she will sing another song or she'll tell you another script. So she wants to communicate, she is trying very hard to.

Caller: In fact, all day long she talks; she doesn't stop talking.

SW: Well, that's the dilemma. That's the clue. That's the clue we have that she is not taking in. She can take it in where she can memorize it because then those words don't change; the songs don't change, the scripts don't change. But she is having trouble taking it in and we have to move back to more gestural communication with her, play more charades games with her, try to do play where you don't talk. See if she can



guess what you are doing. Get her to take in more through just spontaneous play or semi-structured games like kids on stage. She would love that game, which is a little charades game. But even try to answer when she wants something with a gesture so she is really looking and thinking about what you are doing, rather than just words. We have to bring her back and improve her capacities to take in so that she can do the back-and-forth.

SG: I think just to reiterate what Serena was saying, it will help you understand where she is having trouble taking in is the memory stuff like a word or a picture she can remember, but a question that is a little more conceptually more difficult like, “Why do you want to go outside?” – that’s a little harder for her and she can’t quite do it yet. She is only three, but that ordinarily comes in around age three or so. But conceptual questions are harder. So it is harder for her to understand the sequences of ideas, even though she can understand each idea in isolation. So if you give her something like a “why” and it’s hard for her to engage in a back-and-forth of 50-60 circles in a row, so you can’t have a long conversation with her, it’s also the part of the “taking in” that Serena is referring to. So we have to work on the long back-and-forth, many circles in a row, and on the emotional saliency of it. So just like Serena was saying, you use lots of gestures, you are animated, you are fun, you are giggling together. The main thing is getting into what I call a continuous flow of back-and-forth signaling using words and gestures together. And as you keep working and they work at school and lots of play dates with kids who are very verbal and interactive and you are orchestrating it, we should see continual gradual improvement in this capacity.


Caller: Yes, that’s what I think. That’s really what I want to know. Is this the start of...will she eventually, if we do everything you say, will she eventually have functional language?

SG: She should, she should. And if you are not getting it, I want you to call me back on this show in 3-4 weeks. Ok?

Caller: Three to four weeks? You think it will take only that short?

SG: You should see improvement in 3-4 weeks if you do this everyday. We’re talking about all her waking time, fun interaction, giggling, funny, gesturing.

Caller: Yes, you know she is a very fun-loving child.



SG: Yes, but the fun with her has to be back-and-forth, back-and-forth. Ok? So the caller who was just on, please call back in 3-4 weeks and let us know how it is going. We'll take our next caller, I apologize for keeping you waiting so long. In the meantime while we are waiting for the call, I'm going to ask the question that came in from – oh we have our caller. Hello?

Caller: Hello?

SG: How are you?

Caller: I'm fine.

SG: Good, let me hear your question.

Caller: Yes, my name is Christine and I'm calling from New Jersey. I'm calling because one of the difficulties that I've found with Floortime is being able to apply it because it takes so much creativity.

SG: It takes so much creativity?

Caller: That's right. When you say "follow the child's lead" I find it extremely difficult to do. I have had read your book, *The Child with Special Needs* and I haven't been able to apply it as well and part of the difficulty is finding someone in the area here who can help with coaching, but also knowing how to open circles of communication. That I find extremely difficult.

SG: Well, I think you are putting your finger on a very common challenge, which is the parent feeling that they have to be enormously creative to do Floortime and to follow the child's lead and to harness the child's emotions. The key thing, actually, is not to challenge yourself quite so much. It doesn't take quite as much creativity as you think. What it requires is something really quite different. It requires relaxing and just simply trying to have fun with your child. If you can relax and start off with having fun, and instead of trying to put pressure on yourself to be creative, watch what your child does. What are some of the things your child likes to do when you watch her for a few seconds.

Caller: Music is one thing that is big with him.

SG: What does he like to do?

Caller: He likes to listen to music, he will dance around and ask you to join him.

SG: Alright, so let's say he's dancing around. How old is your child?

Caller: He is four.

SG: Let's say he's dancing to the music, you can dance with him and then just try to have fun. In the dance you can deliberately make mistakes. In other words, instead of dancing the way he wants you to, dance in a different way so he has to show you how to dance, ok? And then as he is showing you how to dance – is he talking at all?


Caller: He is, he has quite a bit of speech with echolalia.

SG: Ok, so when he is talking a little bit, have him use some words to tell you to move your leg this way or that way or come here or go there. Or you could say, "Am I doing it good or bad?" and he could say just "Good" or "Bad." So get him to show you with his actions, and then get him to use some words. The key thing is to relax, follow what he is doing, and have fun. Now I'm going to give you to Serena to add on some further ideas.

SW: That really is the starting point of really following your child's lead. Sometimes we think it has to be a toy but mostly you just want to get into what interests your child and you could play dumb, you could have him give you the directions. I think that the expectations have to be that you may want him to do pretend play or play with toys or be symbolic.

Caller: That's the other thing. Being able to do pretend play, something that is not so easy for me to do because that is something that is one of the suggestions – to do pretend play with him.

SW: That is harder, but where does pretend play come from? It is like bridging from what I call "live action," so just do pretend play in the sense of live action. You be the actors to his drama. Pretend play is anything that you can do that is purposeful because you are not only doing what is real. If he wants you to move, does he want you to move like a clown or like an animal? Are you going to be a horsey? Try to get into the pretend play through actual action play like being gestural and trying to be something else. The easiest way to approach that is that you can have a bunch of hats around and you can use different props that will give you that visual support. So you might have a crown or be a fireman. You get into it much more through live action and



using the gestures and add to it the reason. So if you were a fireman, you are going to want to know where the hose is, and you are going to put out a fire. If he has a concept of being a king then you can say, “Oh, your Highness, what can I bring you?” But you encourage it by having these things around, giving him a chance to initiate more through some of the more natural actions that he would like to do with you. If he likes to sing then you could say, “Ladies and Gentlemen, here comes Sammy!” and turn it into a little performance and a show.

Caller: You know, when you put it that way, it sounds so easy.

SW: If he likes to jump, then you have gymnastics and he’s the acrobat. So you start adding symbolic value to the words he uses, but suddenly it turns into an idea. It’s not just an action but where you start moving from actions to “ahh, this is the idea behind it.” And then anything he does will be ok. And anything he tells you to do is ok. So you ask him, “What do I do now?”

Caller: Yes, I guess I feel that every opportunity should be used in making a comment and I feel like when I’m driving the car I should be using the time constructively and I can’t think of anything to say.

SW: Yes, well the same thing happens in the car. In the car you have a captive audience and there are little car games you can play. “What am I thinking of?” Get him to picture something and see if you can guess what he is thinking of. Pick up on something you see outside. But it is harder to have the back-and-forth unless you find something that he is really interested in.


Caller: Right, right, right.

SW: You really have to tune into his interests and then you can start the conversation.

Caller: Yes, I did have a second question which is about inclusion. Right now we feel he belongs in a regular preschool. He has been successful in this environment. What kind of support is good? We want to go by what we feel is good, but we really don’t have anybody to give us some guidance.

SW: On the inclusion?

Caller: Yes.




SW: Well, that is very hard. If you can't get support within the school, we really do like to see children with other children who can play and talk. But sometimes it is very important to not just throw him in there. You need to have someone who can mediate some of that interaction. If your school doesn't provide it, you may want to look for a consultant who can help you work with the staff to learn how to help him bridge between different children. I can assure you that if you go into an inclusion class, get down on the floor and start playing, what's going to happen? All the kids will come play with you. You need to think much more in terms of how do we draw children and mediate to facilitate that interaction. Not with the whole group, but with a very small group. How do we get the teacher to say, "Ok, everybody has a buddy." How do we figure out what kids will go after him? But if you don't have that support built in, you might want to look at where that might be available. I'll be talking about this a little bit in a seminar I'll be giving at the end of June. And I will try to address this in more detail.

Caller: Exactly. And that's the one week we will be going on vacation.

SW: Ok, well then keep listening and reading and you'll learn more.


SG: Let me just mention that Serena Wieder will be doing a seminar on June 20 and 21 in the New York area for all of those who can attend, and it will be at the Hilton Tarrytown. So for all those who can attend, that would be a wonderful place to be. She will be showing a lot of wonderful videotape examples of how to do Floortime and interact, as well as going over the overall structure of a comprehensive program. Check the website of ICDL: www.icdl.com for information about Serena's seminar in New York on June 20-21. There will probably be audiotapes available so for those who miss it, you can probably get audiotapes and listen to it. But in general, the key recommendation is when beginning Floortime, if you are not feeling creative which all of us feel and we all share this and everyone has this concern; relax, don't focus on your own creativity, focus on your child's behavior and see each thing your child does, whether it is rubbing a spot on the floor, dancing, or jumping around waving his or her hands, don't see it as perseveration or something bad. See it as something creative and say, "How do I join it and make it even more creative?" The way to join it is simply to get involved in it and have fun with it. That's the first step. Then once you are having fun and you are interacting together in a back-and-forth way, then some of the suggestions Serena made about embellishing it and saying things like "Now we are dancers" or "Now we are flying to the moon," that becomes possible. Don't even worry about that second step. Just get in there and have fun. Ok? Great. Good luck to you. Thank you.



Ok, we have one question that I'll read to you. And I want to apologize, there is one caller that we didn't get to today and once we improve our system here and it can be a little easier for all of you who call in, but when you do call in, if you don't get on right away, just please call back a minute or two later, and listen to the show and you'll see when we are finishing one question and then if you are in line to call in then you can call with the next question. So sometimes it takes longer to answer a question than we anticipate. But the last question that I want to take that I'll read to you, is about a colleague who has a friend living in Denmark, who believes her child to be having patterns consistent with Asperger's Disorder and is getting the child tested. The question is, and it's really two questions, one about IQ-type testing and whether they can be accurate for children who have special needs, and two, even a child who doesn't have a "diagnoses" of Asperger's or a special needs condition, would such a child benefit from Floortime, and three, the third part of the question was "What schooling would I require to be able to teach the DIR and Floortime methods to parents? I know Maria Sindalar is promoting this method in Europe and I'm in contact with her and she suggested I contact this show and ask you any questions."

So let me address all three very, very quickly.

1. Standardized testing is not very helpful for children with special needs because the tests themselves are too structured to draw the child with special needs into their best performance. They don't show the best that the child can do. It is much better to work with the child clinically and have different specialists who will work with the child such as occupational therapists or speech pathologists, as well as Floortime intervention specialists describe the child's functioning in each of those areas. That gives you a much better and richer picture of the child's capacities. As educators, too, should be described in the child's functioning because the child's functioning, over time, and the best that they can do under ideal circumstances, gives you a sense of their potential, not how they perform on a structured test in a few hours. Most of the IQ-type tests were not standardized for children with special needs so even the data for those tests are not necessarily applicable for children with special needs and the norms are not applicable for children with special needs. They don't always get to the true intelligence of a child with special needs so we should be alert to that and cautious about over-interpreting a permanent cognitive deficit due to a standard IQ testing. It doesn't reflect the child's individual processing strengths and weaknesses as much as we can. It does it a little bit and that's the biggest weakness of the standardized tests.



2. Also, when a child does not have the diagnoses in a formal way, Floortime-type interactions are great. We recommend them for all children but they are especially needed for children in that gray area. In other words, remember these syndromes are not all-or-nothing. Children and adults exist on a continuum. So a child is one point away from having a diagnoses or two points on the other side of the diagnoses are really quite similar to each other, they are not different just because one is on one side of the line and one is on the other. It's not like a strep throat where you either have the bacteria in your throat or you don't. This is often a continuum of types of challenges, so these same types of interventions we recommend are good for all children, certainly children who have some of the challenges but may not be diagnosed with a "syndrome."

3. To teach about the DIR Method, it is necessary to take our training courses. Check our website, www.icdl.com and there will be information about our training courses. We have a summer one-week training institute that Serena runs with the senior faculty who are excellent, and we have a certificate program helping individuals master certain material both in person through these workshops as well as reading as well as case discussions and as well as case presentations, and there are different levels of certification. So check the website for information about that and we welcome qualified professionals from all over the world to be involved in this process.

So thank you again, and next week we are going to focus on creative thinking and creativity and vision. How do we help children; all children – those with special needs and those without special needs not only be disciplined as we talked about today, but also have vision and creativity; be the kind of adult that we all wish for and that we all wish we were a little more of, i.e., a little more vision and more creativity. So next week it will be vision and creativity. It is often felt that children with special needs can't master this but many can and we find that all children, even those with special needs, can master it to some degree, and the question is how much. We find that some of the children, even with special needs, master it to the nth degree and they are far more creative than even many children without special needs.

I look forward to speaking with you next week. Thank you for attending.