



## **ACCOMMODATION vs. HABILITATION: Helping Children With Autism Fit Into The World**

John McEachin, Ph.D.  
ARMS Global Conference  
Brisbane Oct. 6-7, 2006



## **ACCOMMODATION vs. HABILITATION**

- Accommodation Is Changing The World To Provide Greater Access For People Who Are Differently-abled
  - Building wheelchair ramps
  - Multilingual road signs
  - Providing reading glasses to older patrons
- Habilitation Is Teaching Skills To People So They Can Have Greater Access To The World
  - Teaching a non-ambulatory person how to walk
  - Teaching a new language
  - Teaching organizational and memory skills to absnet minded Psychologist



## **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

- Consistent Routines
- Visual Supports
- Activity Schedules
- Reduced Demands
- Sitting In The Front Of The Class
- Silencing The Bells
- Velcro Shoes
- Shirts Without Tags



## **MORE ACCOMMODATIONS**

- Daily Bag Of Apples
- Riding In The Car With The Windows Down
- Checking The Tires
- The All French Fry Diet



## **STRIVING FOR BALANCE**

- Teach What You Can
- Make Accommodations As Necessary But Also Reasonable
- Children With Autism Are Capable Of Learning A Lot More Than More People Believe



## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- They Are Capable Of Skill Development And Behaviour Change
- For Most, Significant Skill Development And Behaviour Change Is Possible
- "Covery" Is Possible For Some



## PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

- The Majority Of Children With Autism Should Not Be Expected To Attain Normal Functioning
- It Is Not Be Helpful To Promote "Covery" As The Primary Objective

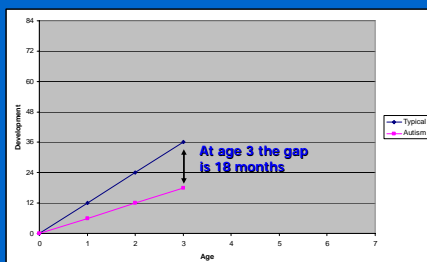


## PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

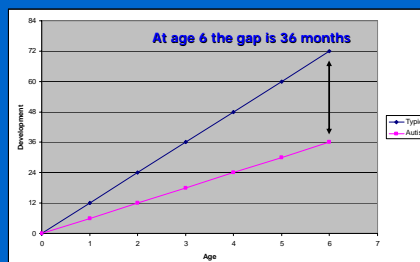
- The Goals We Adopt Need To Be Ambitious
- In Order To Achieve Ambitious Goals We Need To Push Hard On The Accelerator Pedal
- We Should Be Making Treatment Decisions Based On Scientific Research
- Urgency: Time Is Of The Essence. Left To Their Own Pace, They Will Fall Farther And Farther Behind



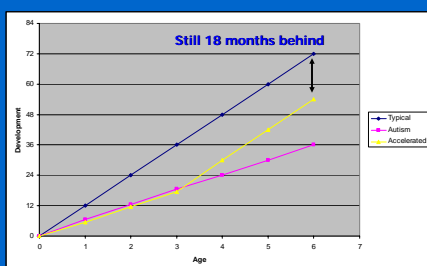
## A Developmental View



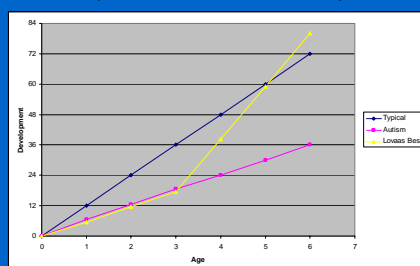
## A Developmental View



## Can We Speed Up?



## Lovaas Best Outcome (nine children)





## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- You Will Get There Faster If You Are Willing To Be Directive.
- Being Directive Does Not Necessarily Mean Stifling Creativity
  - There are basic skills that are prerequisite
  - Teaching those skills leads to better understanding
- Example: Learning How To Draw



## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- Example: Story Telling
  - Be a critic: Not every story is equally clever
- Learning Style:
  - Inductive vs. Deductive



## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- Children With Autism Need Balance In Their Lives
- “Work” Is Not A Dirty Word
- Life Has A Natural Rhythm And “Work” Is Part Of It.

work->play  
 routine->variation  
 structure->downtime  
 mental->physical  
 restful->active  
 boredom->excitement



## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- Our First Objective Should Be To Increase Competence
- Independence Is Only Meaningful After Competence Is Established
- You Can Only Do Independently What You Already Know How To Do
- Providing Specialized Treatment Is Not “Restrictive”



## **BELIEFS THAT ARE NOT HELPFUL**

- It Is **NOT** Helpful To Strive To Eliminate Distress For Children With Autism
- Encouraging, Stimulating And Teaching Children To Develop Their Potential And Refusing To Allow Them To Throw Their Life Away Does **NOT** Mean We Don't Accept People With ASD For Who They Are.



## **PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

- Setting Limits Is OK And Is Actually Our Duty As Caregivers
- Young Children Are Not Always Capable Of Making Good Decisions:
  - Eat the whole package of Tim Tams
  - Brush your teeth before you go to bed
  - Can't sleep in on a school day



## ***ESTABLISHING CONSISTENCY***

- Can I Have Another Packet Of Crisps?
  - Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no.
  - This makes it seem unpredictable to the child.
  - Establishing clear rules makes it easier for child to predict and therefore accept outcome



## ***PREMISES FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM***

- Even Older Children Need Guidance (and, if necessary, limits)
  - How late to stay out
  - Who they hang around with
  - Manner of Dress
  - Doing Homework
  - Choosing Movies and Video Games



## ***MAKING CHOICES***

- Meaningful and Wise Choice Making Requires:
  - Maturity
  - Sufficient familiarity with all the options (exposure)
  - Deriving enjoyment often requires learning about the activity and developing some level of proficiency
- Common Areas where children with autism make poor choices:
  - Sensory activities
  - What to eat
  - How to spend leisure time
  - Solitary vs. interactive
  - Tendency toward exclusivity (obsessiveness)



## ***MAKING CHOICES***

- Choosing To Be Interactive With Others Can Only Happen If One Has Had The Opportunity To Develop Competence In Social Skills **AND** Has Had Sufficient Exposure To Be Able To Make An Informed Choice
  - I've been there, checked it out thoroughly, and have decided it's not a place I care to spend time.
- Choosing To Participate In Mainstream Leisure Activities Requires The Opportunity To Develop Competence In Those Activities **AND** Has Had Sufficient Exposure To Be Able To Make An Informed Choice.



## ***TO STIM or NOT TO STIM?***

- Stim Is Not Evil!! Everyone Does It!!
- When Does It Become A Problem?
  - When it interferes with the rest of your life
  - Becomes exclusive reinforcer
  - Interferes with attention
  - Causes other people to move away



## ***NEED vs. PREFERENCE***

- How Do We Distinguish?
- Detrimental Not To Have It = **NEED**
- Really Like It = **PREFERENCE**
- General Need Vs. Specific Preference
  - Need food to stay alive
  - Prefer to eat chocolate cake



### ***GOOD THINGS HAPPEN WHEN STIM IS NOT A CHOICE***

- Positive Effects Of The Right Kind Of Sensory Input
- Broader Range Of Interests Develop
- More Varied Reinforcers Can Be Established (And Made Contingent)
- Better Concentration And Attention
- More Willingness To Engage In Shared Interests



### ***STRIVING FOR BALANCE***

- It's OK To Make The Decision That You Are Not Ready To Fight A Certain Battle
- But You Do Have To Establish Limits Eventually, And It Will Be Easier To Maintain Those Limits If They Are Established At A Younger Age And The Rules Are Consistent.



### ***STRIVING FOR BALANCE***

- Learning Can Be Fun **AND** Maximally Productive
- Therapy Should Encompass Everything **AND** Everything Should Be Therapy



### ***STRIVING FOR BALANCE***

- Children And With Autism Deserve To Be Loved And Accepted For Who They Are **AND** The Opportunity To Develop Their Potential And Discover All That The World Has To Offer.



### ***AUTISM PARTNERSHIP***

**P.O. Box 1198  
Robina, QLD 4226**

**John McEachin & Ron Leaf, Co-Directors  
Kirsten Aspin, Program Supervisor  
Phone: +61 7 5535 9182  
Fax: +61 7 5520 1681  
Email: kaautpar@aol.com**

***WWW.AUTISMPARTNERSHIP.COM***