

Background

- Some children with an intellectual disability have a strong drive to gain access to social and sensory experiences.
- We are interested in whether we can:
 - a) Use these preferred experiences in interventions.
 - b) Teach children how to manage their strong motivation for preferred experiences.
- We are conducting two studies with children with Angelman syndrome (AS), a rare genetic disorder, who have a strong drive for social and sensory experiences.

Using reinforcement to teach behaviour

What is the problem?

- Sometimes when children with intellectual disabilities find learning new behaviours difficult or challenging.
- Often those things which children prefer can be used as effective rewards to help teach children new behaviours.
- By identifying children's preferred experiences, we can begin to develop effective behavioural interventions.

Aims of the study:

Study 1: to find out more about sensory and social preferences in children with Angelman syndrome

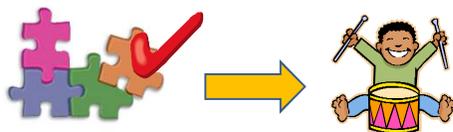
Study 2: to test the use of these preferred sensory and social stimuli to use as reinforcers to teach behaviours.

What are we going to do?

Study 1: Parents of children with AS will fill out a survey looking at sociability and sensory experiences.

Study 2:

- Children with AS will be given rewards for doing certain tasks e.g. a simple jigsaw.
- The reward children will be given will be varied (preferred vs. non-preferred items), and the effect on children's completion of the task will be observed.



Outcomes:

- We are interested in whether children will complete more tasks if they are given certain sensory and social experiences as rewards.
- This may inform future behavioural interventions.

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Teaching children when to approach for attention

What is the problem?

- Often when children have a strong drive for adult attention, they will approach adults even when attention is not available e.g. if a parent is busy doing something else.
- This can be difficult both for parents and for the child.

Aims of the study: to teach children how to discriminate between times of adult availability using a cue.

We used a bright orange jacket as a cue to signal to children when attention was not available.



What did we do?

- Four children with AS were visited at their school by a researcher
- Children were exposed to two different conditions:

Reinforcement



Attention given when the child approaches the researcher

Extinction + coat



No attention given when the child approaches. The researcher wears the coat.

What did we find?

After three days of training, all four children began to show lower rates of social approach behaviours when the researcher wore the coat.

What does this mean?

- The results suggest that all four children were beginning to understand that if the researcher wore the coat attention was not available.
- This means that using a cue in this way might be a good way to make the environment more predictable for children.