

## Web-Based Radio Show

### Scripting, Echolalia, Repetitive, Verbal, & Symbolic Activities

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Good morning. Welcome to our web-based radio show. This is Stanley Greenspan. We have a variety of interesting topics today. As you recall, last week we talked about different problems and different common challenges that most families experience. We focused last time on self-stimulation and perseveration. Then we had a few additional questions from callers on these two topics. Today we are going to focus in on some additional questions that have come up very, very frequently that I'll group together. They have to do with how to help children master their tendencies to script – that is to just repeat things they hear rather than use language meaningfully, to be echolalic, to be perseverative in their use of words as well as their use of behaviors – such as lining up cars, and if we have time, there are a few other topics that come up very frequently and I hope we can cover them today. If not, we'll cover them next week. These topics have to do with children who are so craving of sensation that they become active but also very avoidant. No sooner do you approach them that they run to the other side of the room, constantly craving new sensations – touching, moving, running, jumping – but always avoiding back-and-forth human interaction. Also, if time permits today, we will talk about children who become disregulated very easily – crying, tantrumming, biting, as well as running and jumping. And if we really have time, we'll talk about aggression.

Let's start with the first part of our topic, and again I want to remind the callers that you are welcome to call in live. The number is 877-907-8889. We finally have our electronics working so we can take your calls live on air, so to speak.

As I mentioned, one of the most frequent questions I get has to do with children who script or are echolalic. As you recall from last week, our approach is always to take advantage of the child's challenge and see it as a window of opportunity to build a healthier foundation for relating, thinking, and communicating. So in other words, every challenge is both a symptom or behavior to master and overcome because we want to help our children master their problematic or symptomatic behaviors, but equally

important and perhaps even more important is to say to ourselves, “How does this behavior reveal some missing piece; some missing foundation in the pathway to healthy relating, communicating and thinking?” Because that is what we want for all our children. As I have indicated before, what we are learning is that children with special needs, including autistic spectrum disorders and other related problems for the most part can learn to improve their fundamentals; their relating, thinking, and communicating. In other words, we can work towards reversing what are often considered the core deficits. Now different children will make different progress in these core deficits and in building these important foundations. But by working on these, we always accomplish two purposes at once. We build strength - we build a stronger foundation for our house, and we overcome the symptoms of the problematic behaviors at the same time and ironically, we are not focusing only on the symptoms of problematic behaviors or primarily on those, we actually get over them more effectively and often more speedily by building the healthy foundations. It’s a little bit like a person who is tripping and falling all the time – if we strengthen their leg muscles and their coordination, they won’t trip and fall. Or, we can hold their hand or provide them immediate guidance – but if we strengthen their coordination and leg muscles, they will be able to not only run and jump without falling and walk without falling, but they will be able to do a variety of other activities also.

Now when a child repeats what they read in a book, what is read to them, what they hear on a TV show, what they hear on a record, or if they just repeat what mommy or daddy says in terms of being echolalic rather than respond to what mommy or daddy says in a meaningful way, they are showing us a couple of things. On the positive side, they are showing us that they can remember what they hear. That is a very, very, very nice sign. It shows that there is some relative strengths in their memory for sounds or words. Or if they are reading for themselves, for what they are seeing. So that shows us that they have this important, valuable strength. It also reveals the missing piece. It also tells us that they are not yet able to take these memorized words and use it to think or to use it creatively or logically. In other words, they are not reasoning with these words, they are just repeating them back.

Now most of the children that I work with do have the capacity to learn to reason with these words that they are learning. So the key is to take that strength; that verbal memory and turn it into an ability for using words to think and reason and to be creative. The first step in this process is to create interactions, so the child is not simply repeating what they hear, but is interacting with the caregiver or the therapist while they are trying to just repeat or just use their memory. So we are extending their memory into interaction.

As we have talked before, this always occurs at two levels. It always occurs at the level of the basic fundamental emotional relationship. So if that is not there, the child is withdrawn or self absorbed or in his or her own world, we have to pull them into a relationship with us. We have to find pleasurable, regulating experiences that enable them to relate to us. We have talked about this in an earlier segment where we talked about engaging and how to engage a child; all the different ways of engaging children who have differences in the way their nervous systems function; who are sensory over-reactive or sensory under-reactive or have severe auditory processing and language problems or severe motor planning problems – difficulty with sequencing their actions. So we have addressed the different ways of wooing and pulling a child in. I don't want to go over that again.

Now the other component of interaction that caregivers and therapists need to be aware of is the exchange of gestures; the preverbal back-and-forth interaction. That we have also covered before when we talked about simple, purposeful, back-and-forth interactions and complex shared problem solving interactions where you get a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing. So one of the first questions to ask yourself when you see a child who is echolalic or scripting, is:

1. Is little Johnny or Susie engaging in a continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional gesturing?
2. How deeply engaged, in terms of warmth and pleasure and intimacy is little Johnny and Susie? How long can they sustain it for?

If your answers to those questions are that they can't do those yet, they are not doing a continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional gesturing and they are not sustaining that warm, intimate engagement for long periods of time, then you have to do more work on those two fundamentals. I would listen to our shows on those two subjects or read about it in *The Child with Special Needs*. Because without strengthening those foundations, we are not in a good position to help the child overcome the tendency to just use memorized scripts or be echolalic or not use language meaningfully – just use it in very stereotyped or very structured ways. So we have to strengthen those two abilities. The hardest one is the continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional signaling.

Now here is the interesting and good part of it. When we are strengthening that ability for back-and-forth emotional signaling, we can also be working on language at the same time and the creative use of language. So we don't have to forget their echolalia or forget their tendency to script or forget the fact that they are simply using language in a very stereotyped way, even if it's trying to get needs met, but they are using the same phrase or the same word and it's not very rich or very creative. So we don't have to stop working on language or even stop working even on academic skills if the child is

working on academic skills. We can do it all together. But we have to be able to think in a few dimensions at the same time. We have to be able to keep our mind on how engaged am I with little Johnny or Susie. Are we really getting the pleasure cooking? That means making the interaction fun. How much continuous flow are we getting? In other words, am I increasing my own affect; my own emotion enough to pull this child in and get a back-and-forth going? Am I being challenging enough to keep a back-and-forth going? Sometimes we have to be playfully obstructive to keep the back-and-forth interaction going. While doing that, I can also be working on the language or the words.

Let me give you an example. A child is, let's say, repeating what we are saying. So we say, "Sweetheart, do you want to go outside?" And the child says, "Sweetheart, do you want to go outside?" And we say, "Sweetheart out?" and the child says, "Sweetheart out" and she is not answering our question. She is just repeating what we are saying. So now we want to turn that into a meaningful conversation. We want to go from echolalia to real symbolic or verbal communication. But we are also mindful that little Susie doesn't have a continuous flow of affect gesturing, which I would suggest is probably going to be the case much of the time when you are getting a lot of echolalic behavior, so you need to do more work on the continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional signaling. So in this example, we will take little Susie to the door where she might see other children playing outside and she really wants to go outside and we know she wants to go outside, but she is not able to express it yet. So we'll say, "Come, let's look." We look at the children and hopefully around the pleasure of looking outside and her eagerness to go outside and we position ourselves between her and the door, we can say, "Do you want to go outside? Do you want mommy to help you?" Here we can now focus on helping her use her language meaningfully while we are interacting with her. So, for example, if she tends to repeat "Mommy go outside" when we say "Do you want mommy to help you go outside?" what we might do is, at that moment, really simplify the language and say, "Go out and play?" and open the door and let her see what "out" and "play" feels like, but then hold her hand and say, "or stay in here?" She might repeat that and say, "Go out and stay in here." Then we'll demonstrate it physically, and show her the "go out" part and the "stay here" part. Really with emphasis and affect on the "go out". After three or four times, usually the child will bite the bait, so to speak, and just say the second part of the phrase or the first part, in this case. "Go out. Go out play." If they don't do it the first day, they will do it by the second day you do this. Obviously don't frustrate them to the point of a tantrum, but let that affect build up high in them, let the desire build up high, and let them have the feeling of attaching to the particular part of the repetitive phrase – the one that will get them what they want to the activity they want to do. So it could be having an M&M or having a favorite cookie or going outside. What you do is slow down but get more affectively involved in your speech and emphasize that part of the phrase

that they are affectively and emotionally invested in. What this does is it helps them break the echolalic pattern by the strength of their own affect. In other words, what it shows you is that what is missing here is that as this child has learned to use words and memorize words, they weren't investing it with meaningful affect. They weren't learning to say, "Mommy give me a hug" because they wanted a hug. They may have just memorized that phrase without associating it with the hug with mommy. Sometimes when we use very structured learning techniques with children, we inadvertently encourage this kind of echolalic or scripting behavior because we have showed them a picture card and we have them memorize the word and it's not associated with high levels of affect. If you think of how a child ordinarily learns language, they learn love as they are giving mommy a hug. They learn the word "eat" as they are eating the apple. They learn the words "go out and play" as they are going out to play. So children ordinarily learn the words by associating it with the experience, which has a strong affective component; a lot of pleasure, delight, or joy – or annoyance if they say, "I'm angry." But the affect is what gives the word the meaning. If they learn words just in a memory-based way – either because we teach that way or because they have a strong memory but have a harder time understanding the meaning so they, themselves, favor that way of learning. We have to help them connect the affect to the word. So what we do is we create a situation where we heighten the emotion - heighten the affect – like let them feel what it is like to go outside to play, and hopefully then they can learn to use the word "play" as they are actually doing it. Again, if it doesn't happen by the first day, it will happen by the second or third day. You'll begin to see little phrases begin to emerge that are non-echolalic, that are used meaningfully. So heighten that affect.

I'll come back to some more examples, but we have a caller who has called in and let me take this question, and then we'll come back and talk more about scripting and echolalia.

SG: Hello?

Caller: Hello.

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

Caller: Hi, Dr. Greenspan.

SG: Let me hear your question.

Caller: Ok. My 10 year old, she is a patient of yours, but this question is about her brother. He is 12 years old and in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and he has been in very high level classes, two high school classes, and he does very well in school. The problem that I

have with him is that when I'm working with his sister, which is quite a bit of time, I can't get him to just stay focused on his homework and to just do his homework. He wants me right next to him.

SG: Right. So it's competition with his little sister and he seems to want you next to him, especially when you are playing with his little sister.

Caller: Yes. If I'm with her, he either wants to talk to me or join in to what we are doing.

SG: Right. So if you are not playing with her, if you are just in the kitchen cooking or something, does he want you around him as much?

Caller: If I'm in the kitchen cooking, then he can be there doing his work.

SG: Right. But does he need you at his side quite as much as when you are playing with his sister?

Caller: Right, but even then, he'll still try to keep engaging me in conversations, but he's not as bad. He doesn't goof off quite as much.

SG: Right, so it is intensified when you are playing with his sister and he's a little jealous. But he likes to have mommy's involvement all the time.

Caller: He really likes my involvement, even if I answer the phone he will stop working. I'll say, "Well why didn't you do your math problems?" and he'll say, "Well, I didn't understand it." But then he'll read it to me and he'll tell me how to do the answer.

SG: So he basically likes mommy. He loves his mommy and wants mommy involved all the time. Aren't you lucky?

Caller: (laughter) I guess I'm lucky!

SG: Now how does he do with friends?

Caller: Oh, he's great with his friends. If his friends are over, he'll go off and play with his friends.

SG: Then he's not a mommy's boy.

Caller: Right.

SG: How does he do with daddy?

Caller: Really good with daddy.

SG: If mommy and daddy are both around, who does he gravitate towards?

Caller: It depends what he wants to do. Some activities with me but other things with his father.

SG: Ok. Is he as needy with his daddy?

Caller: Yes. He's like that with his father too.

SG: Does he want his daddy's attention all the time?

Caller: I think he has more problems with me.

SG: More so with mommy? How is it different? Just describe it for a minute.

Caller: He'll just start talking to me. He'll stop doing his homework. He'll start talking to me, or if I'm playing with his sister he'll start translating what she really wants or he will start doing therapy on her and wanting to join in.

SG: But how is that different with his daddy?

Caller: I don't think it's too different with his father. It's just that I'm home with him a lot more. It's probably the same, it's just I'm home with him a lot more hours than his father.

SG: Do you have any time when you are devoted just to him for play and interaction, not homework?

Caller: Yes, yes.

SG: How much time a day is that?

Caller: It varies because he drags out his homework and then we can't do anything. I tell him, "If you take all day to do your homework, we can't go out and ride bikes and we can't play."

SG: How many times a week does he have play dates?

Caller: Probably two or three.

SG: What I would suggest is the following and to try it out and see how it works. And again, since I don't really know him well, I'm going to give you sort of general advice. Usually the best approach is for the child who is being a little bit on the needy side and maybe even mommy feels he is manipulating her to get more attention, especially when he is a little bit jealous, is to do two things. One is to do some basic

Floortime or hang-out time with him each day where you have at least a half hour with him and daddy does the same at home where he is the star. He is the center of attention, whether you are riding bikes, or talking about fun activities, or doing a nature walk, or playing games together, or whatever. He calls the shots. It's helpful to do that even before you settle down and do your homework. Daddy should do the same thing. Also, it's good to have everyday, with a verbal child, and this can be with children with special needs who become verbal or children who never had special needs, to do what I call "problem solving time." This can be during dinner or in the car. You do a little game I call the "Thinking About Tomorrow" where you talk about today and then you talk about tomorrow, the good things that will happen, but also the challenges you are going to meet. The challenge could be doing your homework, or getting jealous of your sister, or her getting more attention than you, or a kid teasing you at school, and you picture the situation ahead of time. You actually literally visualize the "tomorrow" and then you picture your feelings. You picture the feelings of the other person if another person is involved and so you actually become a poet of your feelings. Then what you do is you describe what you routinely do. Let's say you are feeling jealous of your sister, you nag mommy or you get mommy to pay attention to you. You can actually talk to a child and say, "What is the best way you have of getting my attention when you feel I'm paying too much attention to your little sister? What is the cleverest thing you have ever done?" Now a good 7<sup>th</sup> grader is going to enjoy that conversation because he knows you're onto him, but he's going to enjoy bragging about how he's outsmarted you and outfoxed you. So you make that conversation out in the open. Then you ask what other things you can do, other than slow down his homework which kind of comes back to haunt him because then he can't watch TV later at night or he can't play with his daddy as much as he wants to. So do the Floortime hangout time, do the Thinking About Tomorrow game, what I call problem solving time with him, so these things are out in the open and he will feel supported. Then set up a limited time for the homework. In other words, don't let the homework encompass the whole evening so that there will still be time to play with daddy when daddy comes home. If not, what happens is he's not getting any pure enjoyable time with mommy and daddy. Everything is being part of this power struggle around the homework. When he is doing it he gets 5 minutes of interaction and that becomes a pattern and a cycle that we don't want to sustain. So we'll be proactive. When daddy comes home, he gets a half hour with daddy whether he's done his homework or hasn't done his homework. When he comes home from school if he doesn't have a play date, he'll get a half hour with you. I always try to recommend that kids get at least four play dates a week so that their main source of companionship begins shifting from the parent to the peers. If they are only doing one or two play dates a week and mommy is the chief playmate, this pattern continues. But as we shift more to the peers, what happens is they become more important for fun. Mommy is still important

for security and warmth and problem solving, but not for going out and riding bikes together. So increase the playtime with peers. Increase your pure hangout time and Floortime, and do the same with daddy. Save an hour or an hour and a half, whatever is a reasonable homework time, and then play catch-up on the weekends. If he doesn't finish all the homework, write a note to school that you'll catch up on the weekend. Then, set up incentives for him to get the homework done where he will be able to do exciting further things with you – special games that he likes to play, it could be a special computer game or a board game. If he gets the homework done in a reasonable period of time, there will be a reward. So the agenda is on the table, he's aware that he likes to manipulate you around his sister, but then make it in his interest that he gets more time with you by getting his homework done. If he can't do it because it's hard, set up that every 15 minutes you'll come over – he should just check the problems that are hard for him and do the ones he can – and every 15 or 20 minutes you'll come over and work with him for 5 or 10 minutes so he's getting help from you, but in a predictable way. If you do all those things together, that should break the pattern.

Caller: Ok. That makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

SG: Good luck to you. Caller: Thanks, bye.

SG: Bye-bye.

Now what I want to do is return to our earlier conversation about scripting and echolalia and just very limited and stereotyped, very structured uses of language. All these kind of go together. As you recall, the example I was giving you before, was one of a child who is just repeating and who is not using language meaningfully. So as you remember, we increase the affect level. We find the activity like almost going outside or almost getting that apple or pear or almost getting that cookie, and as we increase the affect level, we use the word – and we can prompt the child and give the child some choices like “go out and play or stay here.” Usually it's good to give the good choice first and a silly choice second, so they can actually compare the two in their mind. The key thing is raising that affect level – that's the key.

Now that would usually, over time, help a child overcome the echolalic tendency because they are so motivated to find the meaningful word. So we are doing something that we may have wished we had done a little earlier in their lives, but it is never too late. It is never too late to help a child invest their words with emotion. Don't worry if a child uses phrases in an awkward way. As long as it conveys meaning rather than just repetition. So you may say, “Do you want to go out and play or stay here and sleep?” They may say, “Play out.” That's good enough, even though it isn't, “I want to go out and play” and they aren't saying “I want to do it.” Instead they are saying, “Play out”

which is kind of a clumsy phraseology, but it is conveying intent and meaning. So don't try to correct them and try to get the right nouns or pronouns or adverbs or adjectives. Just go with the meaning; go with the phrase, and say, "Ok, terrific! Let's go! Let's play out!" Adapt their phrase because it's meaningful. Then over time, through hearing you use it, once they get hooked on using language meaningfully, which is a big advance, they will then start using it eventually with correct grammar, I promise you.

Similarly, the worst thing you can do, the absolute worst, and I hope those of you who are doing this don't feel bad about it because you can correct it, but the absolute worst thing you can do is to correct your child's grammar. You don't want to be teaching him the difference between "he" and "she" or "I" and "you." Not right now. That comes later. Once a child is using language meaningfully and able to exchange back-and-forth phrases, however clumsy the construction and however inappropriate the grammar, and I know some of you are sitting there saying, "But if I let him use it wrong, they are just going to learn it the wrong way and they will just get more stubborn in their pattern and I'm digging a hole." I know you are thinking that, some people, but let me just urge you to put that thinking up on the shelf for a moment and I'll try to persuade you that your goal is a good one, but your concern is coming too early in the game. You've got to let that concern be a later concern. It's a little bit like "But my child doesn't know calculus yet," but yes, he's still learning how to add  $2+2$ , so we'll have to wait about your worry that he's not going to be a Nobel Prize winning mathematician. We have to hold off on that, and we'll address that a little later. Same thing here – that's a later concern.

The first goal is to use words meaningfully, however clumsy they are. We have to hook the child on that. If we don't, and if we are too pedantic in trying to get him to use just the right sentence or the right phrase or the right verb/noun relationship or the right adjectives or adverbs, what will happen is we will get back into this memorized structured rote way of learning. So the child may actually memorize a phrase, "Mommy, dear, you look so beautiful today" or "Daddy, dear, you look so handsome today, would you please take me outside to play?" A child might memorize that and you might feel very gratified, you may even teach the child to say to grandma, "Grandma, oh, I'm so happy to see you, can I give you a kiss" and you may get a big smile from grandma, but your child may still not be using language meaningfully. So the key is, can you get a back-and-forth exchange of both gestures – facial expressions, head nods, pointing, showing – and a back-and-forth exchange of words and phrases that are used meaningfully? That is the key. So that has to come first. So what we want to do is let that come before we worry about the grammar; before we worry about prepositions and pronouns.

So the principle is to increase the affect, help the child learn to use some sort of a verbal form meaningfully, embrace that, get a back-and-forth cooking with gestures and with these short words or phrases so the child gets hooked on the meaningful use of language. Once the child is hooked on the meaningful use of language, then we can work on the correct grammar. So for example let's say the child is confusing "I" and "you" and the child wants to say, "Mommy I want to go outside" but instead they say, "Mommy you go outside." Here, we can play that old Abbott & Costello game like who is on first and be confused ourselves. We'll say, "Ok, I'll go outside" and we go outside. "No, no mommy!" "Well, who is going outside?" and you point to him and you point to yourself. He points to himself. Then you can get behind him and say at that point prompt him and say, "I want to go outside! I!" Then he can say, "I want to go outside" so you say, "ok, let's go!" Next time he may do it again – say "you" and then you have to go through that again with him. Let him point to himself and let him learn that the "me" or the "self" is the same thing as the "I." So the way to do it is, again, to get the affect invested in the "me" and the "I," play and be kind of cute with him and fool around with it where he says, "you go" and you actually go outside, and now he's motivated to get himself outside so he's going to want to learn what the right word is so he can tell this person here, this slow thinking person, that it's me and they have it wrong. Then you can actually prompt him and give him the word. If daddy is with him he can stand behind him and whisper and say, "It's 'I' go out" and then he'll say it correctly and then he'll get it that he gets to go outside. He'll understand that "I" means "him" but having him point to himself and actually gesturally show you who is the one that wants to go outside first, then let the word be attached to the gesture which has a lot of affective meaning will get that for him. So that is how you teach him the right use of "I" versus "you."

The same thing will happen with other elements of grammar. You actually create interactions that clarify that piece of the grammar. But that is later – you don't want to get to that until you have a continuous flow of gestures and a continuous flow in terms of exchanging words. So when you can have a ten minute conversation with words, however inarticulately or inappropriately the child is using grammar, and however inappropriately the child is using the words, as long as it's not memorized script but you are having meaningful negotiation for five or ten minutes back-and-forth, then you can start focusing in on the "I's" versus the "you's" or the other technical elements. Again don't do it by just showing the child how to say it. Create an affective and emotional situation where the child needs to use the correct phraseology to convey their need or want. So if they don't want you to go outside and they want to go outside, they are eventually going to have to say "I go out."

Let's take another caller now and then we'll come back to our theme for today.

SG: Hello?

Caller: Hi, Dr. Greenspan.

SG: Yes.

Caller: Hi, how are you doing?

SG: Fine, how are you?

Caller: This is a follow-up call. I called last week with a question about my son who seemed to be entering the more perseverative behavior and he's more and more difficult to engage and we had a running dialog, or monolog really, all day long of shows and books and things. The recommendation you gave was to take a look at anything new we were introducing and scale that back. Try to get him to a point where before we were doing that kind of activity and see if that works. I'm just calling to report that you were right on the mark.

SG: Can you slow that down and repeat that again? I didn't quite get what you were saying.

Caller: Sure. I was calling to say that my son was doing more perseverative behavior, and your recommendation was to take a look at any new kind of therapies and things we introduced recently and we were doing that, we have been doing more and more auditory training, in the left ear particularly. You said to just stop doing that, give him a break, do more common sensory interactions with him and see if that helps. And that absolutely did the trick!

SG: Wow!

Caller: We also did a couple of dietary changes which we also scaled back.

SG: What were those?

Caller: We were actually re-introducing some milk into his diet, very small amounts – we weren't giving him whole glasses. He's been off milk and on soy for about 3 ½ years or so. So we stopped doing that and really within a couple of days the monologues stopped, he's much more engaged. He's really the boy we had a couple weeks ago before all this started.

SG: Well, that's wonderful to hear!

Caller: Yes, so again I wanted to thank you for your advice and let you and hopefully the audience know that these things do work and they can work pretty quickly and pretty rapidly.

SG: Well I think what you are raising is a very important point. And it's worth underlining. In talking about how you moved your youngster forward and what this teaches you about the future, that many, many children with special needs have very sensitive nervous systems which can actually be an advantage for them because it means they can be very loving and warm and sensitive to their environments. But it also means that they can be dysregulated very quickly and very easily and so too much work on the left ear, which the goals are laudatory, but will overload the child. Or reintroducing a particular new food that you have been avoiding. Typically what happens when you are avoiding a food, often for good reason because the child may be sensitive to it and show a reaction to it, the child will become even more sensitive when you reintroduce it. In a sense, you've purified the system and now the child is not used to it. So even introducing it in tiny amounts can lead a child to be extraordinarily sensitive. It's always good, as a general rule of thumb, something else you are highlighting, to only do one thing at a time. So for example if you are trying to do some work on auditory discrimination or auditory sound sensitivity with listening to certain music through filtered ear phones at home, it's wise to not be fooling around with or changing the diet or nutritional pattern at that time. Or, if you are working on trying to reintroduce a food group that you think the child may no longer be sensitive to, to just do that, because then we know exactly which one is contributing to either progress or regression, as the case may be. Whenever you do get regression, just as a general principle of what you are saying it's so important for all our listeners to remember, is always go back a step and undo the last few things you've done, increase basic, soothing, regulating activities through different kinds of sensory activities and different kinds of fundamental basic emotional interactions. So work on the basics of self-regulation, engagement, back-and-forth emotional signaling, continuous flow of emotional signaling, and interactive use of language, which is what we were talking about today. It is often quite possible, just as you are describing, to get back to the baseline very quickly. So thank you for that feedback. It's wonderful to hear about it and I'm glad it was helpful.

Caller: Well, thank you. Thank you very much.

SG: Take care, thanks and we'll talk to you again soon.

Caller: Thank you.

SG: Bye-bye.

So that was very nice feedback and it makes an important principle that I think we just articulated about always doing one thing at a time, if you see any change in the child's pattern from baseline rather than just improvement, go back a step, reintroduce the basic stabilizing experiences, which is simply taking our DIR Model and each of the functional emotional milestones and working from the bottom up – regulation, engagement, simple gesturing, continuous flow of back-and-forth signaling, and meaningful use of words. So we always go back to the basics and work back up the developmental ladder which can happen in a matter of days sometimes.

Now let's go back to our conversation of helping a child who scripts or who is echolalic, use meaningful language. So again, we gave some examples of helping the child through increasing the affect, invest the word with meaning, creating situations where they are using gestures and words together with high affect like showing you it's me that wants to go outside, and that can be used to get a back-and-forth meaningful conversation going. Once you have that cooking, and the child is in a continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional signaling and back-and-forth gesturing, and a continuous back-and-forth use of simple words or phrases, however grammatically incorrect they may be, then you are in a position to focus in on the grammar itself. Then you can play with the "I" versus the "you." But initially when a child says, "You go out" and you know they mean "Me go out," say "Fine, let's go!" Don't worry about the misuse. Please don't worry that this will become a chronic pattern. It won't be. What you have to do is take care of first things first. The first thing is meaningful use of words. The second is the back-and-forth flow of meaningful concepts, i.e., getting a conversation going. That is sort of like doing 2+2 or 4-2. The correct grammar is a little more like learning calculus. So we have to build the first steps first, or else the grammar will come in, in a memorized, scripted way, and actually you will be going back and digging the hole deeper in an ironic twist. You'll be digging a hole that you just filled in. You just helped the child climb out of the hole and now you'll be digging it again. So don't jump the gun, be patient, take it step by step, build these foundations, and the correct grammar will come.

For many children I can tell you my own experience is that it happens naturally. You don't even have to work on the grammar. The more interactive the child is, the more they get into a continuous back-and-forth exchange of gestures and words and short phrases, the more they acquire the "he" versus "she," the "I" versus "you," the correct alignment of nouns and verbs, and the better they start using adjectives and adverbs.

Just think about it. How does a child really learn these things? And this is actually our new theory of language acquisition, is that the child learns these subtleties of grammar through the way in which they relate to the world. For example, let's just take a

simple example. A child who is learning the adjective of “bigger,” so they want the bigger cookie. First they have to have the sense that there are big cookies and little cookies, and they have to have the sense of what they want. Well, that is through back-and-forth negotiation and interaction around cookies; where they have choices between little cookies and big cookies. So way before they even use the word “cookie” or “big” or “little,” they are exchanging cookies with you. If they are exchanging cookies and eating some, they are getting a sense of a verb (the eating) and the noun (the cookie). So they are eating the cookie. Now when they then learn the phrase, “Eating a cookie” it is building on experiences they already had. So they already know what eating a cookie is, now they are just learning a series of words that describes what they already know. If they have never eaten a cookie or don’t know what eating is, or don’t know what cookies are, they can memorize the word from a picture, but they still won’t have a feel and they still won’t have a meaningful acquisition of cookies. But then you want them to learn the adjective – bigger versus little cookies. Well, you have experiences of big cookies to little cookies. As they do, way before they learn bigger versus littler, they are eating bigger ones and little ones and they are making choices. So they are affectively or emotionally investing in the bigger versus the little. So that is why it often occurs naturally.

In our new book, *The First Idea*, we explain how basic grammar and basic linguistic skills and language skills emerge from these same emotional interactions that we have been talking about that builds relationships and builds social skills. So these first six stages of emotional interaction that we have focused on, from regulation to engagement to simple back-and-forth exchange of gestures to a continuous flow of emotional signaling to investing emotions with ideas to building bridges between these emotional ideas – these fundamental six stages give rise to symbols and to language and to higher levels of reflective thinking.

I was just giving a few examples of how they actually spontaneously teach a child to use grammar. So most kids will begin using the correct grammar automatically and spontaneously. We won’t have to teach it in a more in-depth way. But if we do need to work on it, because they just keep confusing the “I” versus the “you” or the “he” versus the “she,” again, we can use the same basic natural learning model, but we just create experiences where they are doing this a little bit more. In other words, where they have to make some he/she choices or some I/you choices. So we just increase the learning opportunity so they are doing it more rather than less.

Now relating to scripting and echolalia, are children who use very narrow, stereotyped language. They don’t have a very rich, broad array or range of language. We want to enliven it and enrich it so it isn’t just stereotyped. They use it appropriately, but

it's like almost using memorized phrases, but in a narrow, repetitive way. They have 8 or 10 phrases they use, like "I want cookie" or "Go out" but they aren't broadening it or enriching it. They aren't saying, "I want to go out and play" and tell you what they want to do. Here the key is, again, going back and asking yourself if we are getting a continuous flow of affect gesturing, and how rich is it? In other words, are we just getting interactions cooking by rolling a ball back-and-forth 100 times, or are we able to go from activity to activity? Are we able to exchange lots of different facial expressions and lots of different smiles and smirks and lots of different sounds? Is my child able to take me places to show me things? Are we doing this during nature walks and are we doing it during pretend play with the different dollies or toy animals, etc.? So always start by broadening the child's emotional experience and the emotional range of experiences as the foundation for broadening his language and use of words. So go on nature walks. Go to the zoo. Go out to the supermarket and have Floortime in all these places. Do lots and lots of pretending with the toys and the animals and the stuffed animals. If the child doesn't like to pretend with toys or dolls or animals, pretend with yourself and with your child. Get costumes. Try to imitate figures from a book or figures from a TV show. In other words, try to enrich the child's experiences. If the child isn't ready for that, again just enrich the child's concrete experiences with different objects in his environment and have interactions around those. So increase the back-and-forth interactions with a wider range of experiences, i.e., by experiences we mean things the child sees, hears, smells, touches. As you are doing that, if the child is somewhat verbal, try to find the words to describe these things and have little back-and-forth dialogs around what you are doing. You can coach and prompt a little bit, but again make it back-and-forth, back-and-forth, and back-and-forth.

Try as best you can, to get into the pretending. The way to get into the pretending, because that creates more creativity and more imagination which will ultimately broaden and enrich the child's language production, try to find things the child would really love to pretend to do. So what is the child's favorite passion in life? Is it eating? Is it running? Is it moving? If it's moving, maybe moving trucks around would be the start. Then you put dolls in the trucks to go for a ride. If it's eating, maybe feeding the dollies. Start with activities that you routinely do at home and let the dollies copy them and try to entice the child into some pretending that way.

In *The Child with Special Needs*, we have lots of examples of how to entice children into different kinds of pretending that you may want to consider. We talked about imagination and getting pretend play cooking in other discussions earlier in our shows. So that is the way we broaden the child's conversation. The most important thing you can do at the moment when the child is saying, "I want to go outside" or "Mommy

want cookie” but again it isn’t a very rich use of language and not very broad, is use that motivation to help the child elaborate more and more. In other words, be a little slow in getting that cookie. If the child says, “Mommy want cookie” you’re going to get the cookie, but first say, “Oh, great. What kind of cookie? Big one or a little one?” and show him with your hands or offer him different choices of cookies – the chocolate chip or the oatmeal. He may not know what those mean and you might show it to him and say, “Oh, which one do you want?” and he points and then you say, “This one is called chocolate chip and this one is oatmeal, which one? Choc? Or Oat?” He may surprise you and say, “Both!” and grab them both and run away. But that’s terrific – he’s giving you a new word that you didn’t know he knew.

So keep the conversation going. Try to make a simple one-circle conversation into a five-circle conversation. Broaden the child’s range of experiences, go to different places, be in different settings where they are taking in more sensations, more sights, and more sounds. All that enriches the child’s vocabulary. Try as hard as you can to get the child into pretending by starting with activities the child does at home or things the child is very passionate about. If you are feeling pessimistic that you just can’t do these things because you don’t have enough imagination yourself; you’re not a creative person and you’re down on yourself which I hear a lot from both colleagues and parents, take a step back and just watch little Johnny or Susie. They’ll give you the clue as to what they are passionate about – about what they are most interested in. So watch and observe.

Now we’re not going to get into sensory craving and activity and avoidance or aggression and disregulation today. We’ll do that next week. But I think we have some questions left over from last week. I’m going to read one of these.

*I have a 4 ½ year old child with sensory integration, primarily bi-lateral coordination problems. His problem has been diagnosed by a therapist as moderate to severe and his motor planning problems affect his behavioral and language skills as well. I went with him to a neurologist in New York and he ruled out autism as well as Asperger’s. He has been seeing a sensory occupational therapist and she suggested exploring Floortime therapy. I have been researching Floortime on the internet, and it seems to apply to children with autistic issues. I was wondering if Floortime therapy is beneficial to kids strictly with sensory issues as well?*

This is a wonderful question. The answer is absolutely yes! Children with “sensory issues” are usually children who have sensory challenges in one or a number of areas. The most common is the sensory over-reactive or sensory under-reactive to basic sensations like touch or sound. So the child who holds his ears with high-pitched sounds or with low motorized sounds or the child who doesn’t like sticky substances or is finicky

about the clothes they wear are two very common examples. But also, children can be under-reactive – the child who doesn't alert or brighten up quickly when you talk to him in a normal human voice, or the child who seems insensitive to pain and they fall and hurt themselves or you put your hand on their shoulder and they hardly notice. Or the child who craves a lot of sensation – who is running around and jumping and a daredevil, just to try to get more sensation into their body all the time. All of these are different sensory patterns. Also, under sensory patterns, is the child who gets confused by what they see and they can't coordinate what they see with what they do. Or the child who has problems sequencing actions. They can carry out one or two step actions like move a truck into a garage and out of a garage, but they can't really do a five step action with a truck – move the truck out of the garage, take it over to another play house, put some men in the truck, and then move it somewhere else. Or the child who can't follow directions that have more than two or three steps to them. All of these would be examples of motor planning or sequencing problems or auditory motor problems or visual motor problems. So these are all examples of sensory based or sensory motor based challenges.

Occupational therapists have coined the phrase, "Sensory Integration Challenges" to summarize many of these problems. We also use the phrase "Regulatory Challenges" or "Regulatory Sensory Processing Challenges" to characterize these sort of problems. They are very common in the general population. Children with autistic spectrum disorders almost always have these sensory processing problems, but many children without autistic spectrum disorders – children who relate very easily and may have excellent language and communication skills and be very imaginative – often also have these sensory processing challenges, which can make schoolwork hard, it can make daily routines difficult, it can make them finicky and fussy, or it can make it hard to follow directions or basic issues like getting dressed or sleeping and eating can be tough. So these are very, very common.

Here is how we use Floortime. Remember, Floortime is a shorthand for what we call the DIR Model. In the DIR Model, we focus on moving the child up to higher and higher functional emotional capacities, from attention all the way up to logical thinking and creative thinking and then gray area thinking, etc. Also, in the DIR Model, the "I" stands for "individual differences" which are just these processing differences that I just described – the sensory reactivity and the way in which a child comprehends what they see or the way they plan their actions. The "R" is creating learning "relationships" that are tailored to the child's sensory system. And they help the child move to higher levels.

So this is how you do Floortime to overcome these sensory issues. You figure out what the sensory pattern is. My child is over-sensitive to touch or sound or under-sensitive to touch or sound, let's say just to take an example. Where is my child in terms

of their functional emotional milestones? How creative are they in their imaginative play? How logical are they in their thinking? Are they a gray area thinker yet where they can tell me the degrees to which A or B is true? How good are they at continuing the back-and-forth communication with gestures? So where are they in the mastery of their functional stages? So if my child has sensory challenges, we first ask what are they. Then ask where are they in their developmental continuum in our functional stages, and now how do I create learning interactions for that particular child? So let's say I'm going to be doing Floortime and we should do it everyday, and I'd say it's good for a child who doesn't have special needs to do 2-4 Floortime sessions a day, and in those Floortime sessions we are going to take the lead from the child. It could often be pretend play with a younger child, and we are going to create an environment that is sensitive to their sensory patterns. So if they are over-reactive to sound and touch, we are going to not overwhelm them with that. But at the same time that we are playing with the dollies, and the dollies are not talking too loud, or the dollies are not shaking their hand with a sticky substance, we are going to be slowly, through the play, encouraging them to expand their sensory range. Now what happens is, the way you encourage overcoming these sensory challenges during Floortime is you get the basics of Floortime cooking where the child is interacting in a continuous flow of back-and-forth gesturing, hopefully is also doing creative pretend play if they are at that level, is being logical within that pretend play. So now we have a nice rhythm of back-and-forth interaction. We start out tailoring it to the child's sensory differences, and slowly expanding the child's mastery. So slowly but surely, the dollies might be doing some finger painting, or might be working with some sticky substances. But let the child do it at his own pace and if we are in a back-and-forth emotional signaling, which is very regulating, and if we are letting the child be creative and verbalize through the dollies how the dollies' feelings are after touching the sticky substance, or coming into a room that has a lot of noise, we are helping the child regulate through the interaction with us, taking our cue from the interaction, and we are helping the child describe his experience through the dollies and if the child is more logical or reflective, we can actually ask him how he feels when the sound goes up here or when the sound is too low? How do you feel in school. Now for the older child, we can also do problem solving Floortime where we actually talk about the experience and do the "Thinking About Tomorrow" game, anticipating what school is going to be like in terms of touch or sound or following directions, and what the child finds hard or easy and how it makes the child feel, and what they routinely do and what the alternatives are. So what I would do is read my books, *The Challenging Child* as well as *The Secure Child* – both should be available in most bookstores, which will give suggestions on how to use basic Floortime principles and DIR principles to overcome sensory challenges. So in a sense, the Floortime and DIR was made for children with sensory differences, because remember we tailor the learning interactions to the child's sensory profile, but we never

are satisfied with just doing that. We are always expanding the range of sensory experiences the child can accommodate. But when we are interacting with the child and being creative with the child and having logical discussions with the child, it is much easier for the child to expand their range of sensory experiences because we are providing a regulating relationship for the child within which they can expand and grow. So that's the key and that helps the child overcome their sensory challenges.

So this is all we have time for today. Next week we will continue with the focusing of problems and challenges. We will welcome your calls. You can call, again, live on air or email us or call us ahead of time and let us know you have a question and we will schedule a good time for you to call in during next week's show. Next week we are going to focus on children who are very, very sensory craving, active, avoidant, and always on the move; as well as disregulation and aggression, and your new questions that come in. So I will look forward to speaking with you next week when we will focus on sensory craving, activity, avoidance, aggression, and disregulation. I hope you all have a good week.