

Web-Based Radio Show

Redefining Goals for our Children:


Redefining the goals for our children beginning first with children with Special Needs and learning difficulties and other challenges and then with children without challenges

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Hello everyone! I want to welcome you to our new Web Radio Show. This is Stanley Greenspan and I'll be hosting a weekly show. This is supported by the Floortime Foundation which is a new organization as many of you know. It is my pleasure each week to come into your homes or your offices and talk about a topic related to children with special needs. Also we will be talking about a related subject having to do with children without special needs who are growing and developing without unusual challenges. We will also take questions from each and every one of you who can either call it in or type it in each week. Today we are going to be delayed in taking your questions. Fortunately many of you typed in questions earlier in the week and we have them and we'll be answering them, but our telephone lines are not yet fully working so you won't be able to call in your questions directly. Beginning next week you'll be able to call them in and you'll be able to hear yourself talking live on the Web Radio Show and we'll be having some nice conversations back and forth with each other. So that will wait until next week. But this time we have a number of your questions and hopefully we'll get to all of them before the end of the show.

As I mentioned, each show will have a topic that we'll focus on, then we'll follow up with your questions. Today's topic is to redefine the goals for our children beginning first with children with special needs and learning difficulties and other challenges and then with children without challenges. One of the biggest problems that we have is not having the proper goals for our children and this begins with our national goals and then comes down to our local school and educational goals, but often comes down to each and every family's goals for their own children. On the one hand, we should be having more ambitious goals for our children, all children. But on the other hand we also have to reformulate these goals. New research and new understanding of how the mind and



brain grow have enabled us to reformulate the way we think about our goals for our children. Typically we have been thinking about goals in terms of having children being able to sit and listen or to be able to master their ABC's or master their math lessons or be able to learn to speak. And these are certainly worthwhile goals. Certainly every mommy and daddy and every clinician and every educator wants these for all the children that are their own or that they have the honor of working with. But are these the best ways to think about our goals? We have recently begun to formulate a new way of characterizing goals. And this new way allows us within one goal to capture the child's emotional, social, cognitive or intellectual, and academic milestones all at the same time. So we need to focus on this new way of thinking about our goals. We call these goals Functional Developmental Capacities. Now I'm going to review them for you very, very quickly and our own goal will be to make sure that these new functional developmental capacities become incorporated into federal goals, into local community educational goals, and into each and every family's goals for their own children. I'll hope you'll agree with me that focusing on the goals that I'll be discussing with you momentarily will help us promote healthy development in our infants, children, and even in our adolescents and young adults.


Now what are these goals and how do we combine educational and intellectual and social and emotional goals all in one set of goals? Well let's take a look at these. The first goal is to help children become capable of what we call "shared attention" and to be calm and regulated. We know that children, in order to learn and in order to be able to interact socially need to be able to be focused and calm and take in information. Many approaches try to facilitate this kind of a goal with compliance – having a child sit and look. But sitting and looking doesn't mean you're paying attention. It doesn't mean you are taking in information and it doesn't mean you're learning. So we have to have a way of globalizing and facilitating what we call shared attention in a way that the child is actively taking in information from their environment. That means through what they see, through what they hear, through what they smell, through what they touch, to the way they move. So we want to challenge using all his or her senses in an active way to take in information, to comprehend that information and to use that comprehension to be calm and regulated, and most importantly to want to take in more information. So that's our first goal for shared attention. It's a big goal and not easy to mobilize. Later on we're going to talk about how to promote these goals and we're going to do that through many, many of our shows because, as you'll see, if we can promote each of these goals we can promote healthy development.



So for each goal what is interesting, and the first one is a very good example, we are able to look at why we need the foundation for healthy development in children with special needs and as you'll see later, children without special needs. But we're also going to see how the mastery of each of these goals also offsets or helps the child overcome symptoms or problems or challenges that are pretty typical. So for example, one of the biggest challenges we have with children who have special needs is often that they are very distractible or they do not tune into their worlds and instead they tune into their own bodies and they seem to self stimulate or perseverate or look inward rather than outward. So when we master the first goal of shared attention and calm regulation, we're also at the same time overcoming some of the most crippling symptoms that our children have to face.


Now in this approach to goals what we'll see is that for each goal we build a foundation for healthy development but at the same time we overcome some of the typical symptoms that children with special needs including autistic spectrum disorders and other special needs conditions often have to face and try to master. So the goal serves two purposes. It builds a strong foundation and it helps overcome some of the typical or expectable symptoms that children have to face.

Now our second goal after shared attention is to engage in the world, particularly caregivers which can include educators and others who work with the children in a trusting and warm and intimate way. What this means is not just simply looking and many of our goals are to help the children look and increase the amount of seconds they look at another person but again looking doesn't mean engaging and looking doesn't mean trusting and looking doesn't mean a sense of intimacy and warmth and compassion. And looking doesn't necessarily lead to empathy or understanding of other people. So when we talk about engaging, we mean engaging from the heart. We mean the desire to be part of a relationship and we mean relating to other children and other adults. I shouldn't say other adults – relating to adults as a child. And this can begin with infancy, this can begin with a 12 month old. It actually begins much before that in typical development but with a child who has some challenges it may not begin until 12 months or 18 months or 2 years or 3 years or 5 years of age. But whenever it begins, we have to mobilize it in a way that the child wants to engage with others, enjoys engagement, and finds it exciting and pleasurable and therefore will sustain it. Now many people get frustrated because children will be hard to engage. And if they get frustrated because it's hard for them to engage, the




adults tend to force it and want to condition a child to look or insist a child look, or I see parents mistakenly, because they've been told to do this, unfortunately, take a child and hold his head so he has to look at them or keep touching his face so they "cue him to look". But this doesn't promote the desire to want to look. For example, if you put the child's toy on mommy's head, often he'll look to take his toy off her head. Or if you put his favorite food in mommy's hand and she holds it in front of her face he'll reach perhaps to get his favorite food. And then he'll want to look at mommy. And this begins a pattern of wanting to engage. So our second goal is to engage with warmth and love and trust. Now I should add when this happens, it not only builds strength, but it also builds mastery of certain symptoms. One of the biggest symptoms for children with special needs is to be self absorbed, is to be withdrawn, is to avoid or run away from relationships. And then we get a lot of aimless behavior and we also we can get self stimulatory and perseverative behaviors because children are not involved in relationships and interacting with others. So when we build the ability to relate and engage, we're also offsetting the symptoms that have to do with withdrawal or self absorption.

Now our third big milestone is the ability for purposeful two-way communication. Now this is also a foundation for all of learning and all social skills, just as is intending and engaging is. But two way communications means that the child can smile and then they see a smile back and then they initiate another smile on their own. It means the child can look at something, you'll hold it up and the child will reach for it or point at it. It means the child will be able to respond to a vocalization with a vocalization back. And when you vocalize again, the child again will make another sound so you get a back and forth symphony of interactive sounds. This is real two-way communication because now we have the child and somebody else engaged in a back and forth interaction with each other that has purposefulness to it where each do something to cause the other one to respond yet again. Now this is a hard milestone to achieve. Again, we can force a child into it, we can insist that they point by moving their hand for them. We can insist that they make a sound by tickling them or doing something that makes them make a sound, but this isn't willful two-way communication. So we have to create circumstances where we promote willful, purposeful two-way interaction and communication, and this becomes our third milestone.




Now how does this help? Well, when we have this foundation basically the child will begin communicating without words, like taking mommy by the hand and walking to the refrigerator or showing mommy or daddy what they want or showing the teacher what is needed at school. But the child also if she can do this, is able to make their needs known so they are not as frustrated. You won't get as much yelling and screaming and crying. You won't get as much diffused aggression because the impulsivity is really a way the child tries to get his needs met without getting into a two-way back and forth communication. He just impulsively grabs or hits or punches rather than raises his hand as though to say, "Gee, I'm mad, look at me." Or rather than pointing to something he wants and just grabbing. Or he pushes another child away rather than makes a sound to that child like "Uhuhuh please let me play with that toy too." So two-way communication becomes used instead of some of the problem behaviors you see if we can get it mobilized. It also helps the child from being repetitive or perseverative because two-way communication is not doing the same thing over and over again. It's engaging in new purposeful behaviors all the time. This becomes our third big goal – two-way communication.

Now our fourth goal is to take two-way communication and use it to problem solve. And we call the fourth goal, Problem Solving Interactions. But they are social problem solving interactions, and they involve many back and forth two-way communications which we call circles of communication. So they involve many circles of back and forth communication, all orchestrated to solving a problem. So when a child wants a toy they can take daddy by the hand, point to the toy, they can make a sound to pick me up, daddy picks up little Charlie and Charlie grabs the toy. What a great satisfaction that is for Charlie. What that's doing at the same time is it's helping Charlie be a problem solver. It's the beginning of scientific thinking, the child is using patterns that involve three or four steps to solve a problem. This is what science is all about. It's what mathematics will be about when the child learns his numbers. It's what speaking is about when the child learns to put words together in a sentence. This also involves a pattern of ideas all put together so now the child is becoming a pattern recognizer who is operating in logical patterns. Now is just reinforced or just rewarded for doing one step in a pattern they don't learn to piece three or four pieces together. They may learn to make a sound, they may learn to point but then their behavior remains fragmented and isolated. So when a child becomes a child who can master patterns, who can think and solve problems, the child automatically becomes less fragmented, automatically becomes less perseverative, automatically becomes less self absorbed and aimless,




automatically becomes less impulsive because now they can solve problems. So we have not only the mastery of this core step but it also helps the child overcome some of the typical symptoms that get in the child's way.

Now our fifth milestone, our fifth big goal for children is to use ideas. Now typically we think about this in terms of speaking. We want our children to be able to use words instead of just doing. But using ideas is more than just using a word. A child can use a word to say that's a car, that's a table, that's a chair. We know that many children with special needs and autistic spectrum disorders will use words repetitively. They'll script. They'll see pictures in a book and then they'll begin just repeating, "car, table, chair." Or we have many children who go, "one, two, three, one, two, three" or will just say their letters, "A, B, C, D, A, B, C, D" and they are repeating lessons they have been taught but they don't use it meaningfully. They don't say, "Mommy look, I can say 1, 2, 3" or "Mommy I want one apple." Instead they just repeat numbers or letters or words that they have heard and that's not really using ideas in the way we want to promote the use of ideas. When we talk about using ideas we're talking about the ability to use thoughts meaningfully to communicate. And that can be verbally or that can be through pictures or that could be through symbols so the child can show you a picture of an apple and go "ahahahah" like "I want that apple" or he can say, "apple mommy." It's much better for a child to use single words interactively with meaning than whole sentences or whole paragraphs that he or she has memorized. So memorizing words is not the same as using ideas. Our fifth big capacity is the functional use of ideas. This could be in imaginative play where the dolls are hugging or kissing which is an idea or it can be in the child requesting an apple or at school it could be with a child requesting a particular book or a particular toy with another child. So our fifth big milestone or capacity is using ideas. This tends to offset or have the child master things like echolalia. A child who can use ideas meaningfully doesn't need to simply repeat. The child may repeat briefly just to run the words by their own ears so to speak. So you may say, "Do you want to go outside?" and the child may say, "Want to go outside?" But then the child thinks and uses the idea meaningfully and says, "Yes, outside! Slide! Go Slide!" Because that child is a thinker because they are using ideas properly. So we have to promote the use of ideas which is the proper use of ideas which is the meaningful use. Now the way this works is the child invests an image like an apple or a toy car with some feeling. Like the apple gets invested with "I want to eat it." So "Eat apple." And that's what makes the idea meaningful. The investment of some emotion and the image with the word.



Now our sixth big capacity that we want to promote in schools, in our national guidelines, in every family's work with their child, is the ability to connect ideas together in a meaningful way so that the child can use ideas logically so the child can say, "Mommy go outside." And mommy says, "Why?" And the child says, "Because want play." or "Because want to run." or "Because want to climb." or "Because want to slide." Now the child is linking two ideas together. Mommy's idea of "why" with his own idea. Or in simple play the child is moving the car and says, "Does this car go?" and the adult says, "Car go where? Where?" And the child says, "To school." or "To house." or "To store." And now we have ideas being linked together. And this is the beginning of logical thought and logical thinking. Now if this happens, we not only master a capacity for thinking, the child learns to deal with reality because the world works according to principles of logic so the child can now deal realistically and anticipate consequences. They can form judgments of their own. They don't have to just be told what to do and what not to do but most importantly they become thinkers and this promotes higher levels of thinking. This enables them to eventually interpret what a story means in school, to understand what they are reading, to understand math, to be able to write a sentence or two sentences that are logically linked together as opposed to just repeating things they heard. So this enables the child to move ahead with their mastery of the world but more importantly it also helps them to move to higher levels of thinking and reflection that they'll need as adults. But it also offsets symptoms. The typical symptoms we tend to see with children with special needs is that their thinking is very fragmented. Their thinking is unrealistic or they get confused between fantasy and reality or they just repeat and don't use words or ideas meaningfully. And when you can use ideas logically like this it offsets all of these symptoms. So from echolalia to perseveration to aimless behavior to fragmented thinking is all offset by the mastery of this milestone.

So here we have our first six milestones. Now these just take us to age 4 or 5 of typical development. But here's the foundation for all the other milestones. In the future shows we're going to talk about the capacities we want to have as goals for our older children. For example children progress to what we call multi-causal thinking and then what we call grey area and triangular thinking and then what we call comparative thinking, and then what we call thinking off an internal standard where a child can say things like, "Gee, I was angrier than I should be today." Or, "Gee I like this author because he agrees with me and my view of the way families work as opposed to what Johnny across the street thinks about families." So we want to promote these higher



levels also, but we'll talk about them in future shows because we've covered enough for the first show.


Now these capacities, these goals for our children promote emotional, social, intellectual, and academic achievement all at the same time and they also offset symptoms. When we promote them we get a lot of bang for our buck and we're building healthy foundations. That's the key concept. When we focus on more isolated kinds of skills or capacities like the child might be able to sit and attend but not really have shared attention or a child might be able to comply or a child might be able to memorize his letter or memorize such-and-such math facts, we're not taking into account the real strong foundation. There's a lot of rote capacities, unfortunately, that are approached in a rote memory way where the child can't generalize those. The child can't master then in a way that is meaningful for the child to build healthy foundations.

Now having talked about these important capacities, and again I want to remind you before we move on that for today's show we're not able to take your phone calls, we will be able to by next week but you can email in your questions to webradio@floortime.org and you'll see that on your Internet site if you're tuned into this show. And by next week you'll be able to call in our 800 number and we'll be able to take your questions live. We have a number of questions about children with special needs and learning difficulties and in a little while we'll also talk about children without challenges as well. But I thought now we would turn to some of your questions that you've already kindly sent in that will amplify some of what we were talking about during our general discussion.

I also wanted to introduce you, as we go through the questions, that I'm joined today by my dear colleague of many years and a co-worker with me with The Child With Special Needs, Serena Wieder, who many of you also know from her writings and her training conferences and from the fact that she helped me start the Interdisciplinary Council for Developmental Learning Disorders and is also on the board with me and others on the new Floortime Foundation. So, Serena, welcome to our show.

SW: Thank you, I'm just delighted to be here and just thrilled with this new potential of reaching parents and families and children.

SG: And Serena will join me, hopefully, many times as my special guest on this show and we'll also have additional guests, sometimes live as Serena is with me here




and sometimes through the telephone. So we'll be interviewing experts in a variety of subjects as this show gets cooking over the course of the next years and years, I hope.

Now I want to turn to the first question. It's a very good one.

"How do we know if our son is making progress? My husband and I constantly come back to this question. When we answer the six milestones in The Child With Special Needs book under "Observing each child", he gets an "S" for "Sometimes" under each of the basic abilities." In other words in The Child With Special Needs book we outlined each of the milestones that I just described for you, each of the core basic capacities. And this family says, "he gets an "S" for "Sometimes", so how do you measure "sometimes"? Sometimes he talks, sometimes he smiles, sometimes he's regulated."

It's a very, very good question. And here's the answer to that question. If a child is starting as a "sometimes" regulated child, a "sometimes" engaged child, a "sometimes" purposeful child, a "sometimes" problem solving child, the "sometimes" child who uses ideas, and a "sometimes" child who thinks logically, we have to help that child move from "sometimes" to "most of the time". And that will be progress. So even within the "sometimes", if you have like in your mind a 10-point scale, you could say is it a "sometimes" at the 4 or 5 level moving up to a 7 level or does it get all the way to an 8 level which is "most of the time"? So you could say is it more "some of the time" and you can look at slight progress, but basically the goal is to help that child become a "most of the time" child. Now the way to deal with progress is to look for the more basic capacities first. And this is a mistake we all make. It's a big, big mistake, and I can tell you that my professional colleagues make it as much anyone makes it, so if you're a parent and you make this mistake you're in very, very good company. Trust me, some of the world's experts are making the same mistake. We often try to help a child become a "most of the time" child first in the higher level ability such as the abilities for speaking or the abilities for reading or doing math or paying attention in school or for having conversation with a peer, but the foundation pieces begin at the beginning with shared attention and engagement and two-way purposeful communication and back and forth problem solving interactions. Now we have to help the child become a "most of the time" child in those fundamental areas, beginning with attention and engagement and purposeful interaction. And so the biggest missing piece, often in promoting that progress is to work on back and forth continuous flow of interaction.




That is critical. I'm going to let Serena Wieder pick this up and maybe describe how to do that a little bit because it is a big, big question and challenge for most families.


SW: Well, we always want to begin by following the child's lead and that really is very important because once a child initiates and has an idea or wants something it's meeting him more than halfway because we can build on his intent. So in this approach we really try to encourage parents to wait and see, let the child start, let the child initiate, let him give you the cue to what might be of interest or desire to him whether he looks or points or reaches or pulls you over, at whatever level, and then we want to keep going. It's very tempting to change topics or to offer the child something else but to get the flow the most important thing is to keep it going and try to get it reciprocal. So we keep the back and forth, it could be at the level of just tickles and we can set up a situation where if the child enjoys either jumping or tickling and pulls you into that, keep it going. Don't try to offer him another type of toy. He could tickle you back or you can try to make it reciprocal. The thing to be most aware of is the longer you can keep the back and forth going or whatever the child first brings to you is the best way of expanding those capacities for attention. Whether he's playing with toys and gets his cars or dolls or other types of figures, become more aware of not changing the topic, not asking the child to do something else, but encouraging him to expand, ask what he will do next, create a problem around something he already started. One of the biggest challenges to the flow is the ability to sequence. And as you just heard Dr. Greenspan describe this at the later stages we have to be really sure we're not missing on the shared attention and the referencing and the engagement. They don't really grow without staying connected. So don't worry about what your child is doing, just join in and get the flow and if he changes topics you could cue him and say, "Oh, don't forget your car." Or "What about this?"

because the important thing is not so much "what" he is choosing to do but how you stay connected.

SG: Thank you Serena. I think the basic idea is that to help a child move from "sometimes" to "most of the time" you've got to get that foundation be "most of the time" and it starts with "most of the time engaging" and "most of the time exchanging signals" even pre-verbally through gestures – pointing, smiling, vocalizing, showing. And it's that back and forth, what I call "opening and closing circles of communication" and helping a child become a 50+ circle child versus just a 5-10 or 5-15 circle child. And here's a critical issue that Serena alluded to that I just want to amplify a little bit. The



biggest missing piece in helping become what I call “continuous flow interactive” which sets the stage for becoming “most of the time verbally” type children is for the child to take the initiative during the transition. In other words, a lot of parents and therapists take the lead to keep the child going. So they come up with a bag of tricks to keep the child interacting and attending and engaged, they keep the ball going so if the child is moving a car, then the child seems to run out of steam and the parent introduces the next trick, may take a play helicopter and say, “Oh, where is the helicopter going?” And the child may say, “Oh, going over there.” And then the child runs out of steam and the parent or educator or therapist comes up with another item from the bag of tricks and say, “Ok, now where is the train going?” And the child will say, “The train is going over there.” Each time the parent is coming up with the transition but then the child doesn’t know how to maintain the circles of communication. So after the child says, “The helicopter is going over there.” the caregiver has to say, “What’s next? What are we going to do now?” and the child may look puzzled and look at the parent and the parent may look back at the child and they may smile at each other, and the parent can say, “Well what now? (with big gestures)” And then the child may knock over the helicopter and knock it down, and the parent can say, “Oh, the helicopter is down? What happened to it? What happened to Mr. Helicopter?” And then they have to get the doctor to fix Mr. Helicopter. But all of a sudden the child for the first time has created that transition. He has opened up the new play area. He is now truly the director of the drama; the director of the interaction. And that’s the key - following the child’s lead doesn’t mean being passive. It doesn’t mean sitting there and waiting for the child do to things. It means challenging the child to take the initiative. We often have to be very active to challenge that child to take the initiative which means we might have to say, “What’s next? I don’t know what to do! Mr. Helicopter is bored!” So we can do all kinds of things to challenge the child to take the initiative. But once the child starts taking the initiative and starts moving into those empty holes of silence, we challenge the child. We’re talking all the time, but we’re not coming up with the next idea in the sequence. Then we see the child moving to a continuous flow of back and forth communication. Once the child can do this with gestures, if he’s a verbal child, he or she will do it verbally too, very quickly. But you have got to start with the foundation. So the key message is don’t come from the top down, come from the bottom up to get the continuous flow going. And if you get the continuous flow going, you’re “sometimes” child will become an “all the time” child.




Now the reason why I'm focusing so much on this question, which is a wonderful question, is it is probably the biggest challenge I see out there, particularly children who have been in all kinds of different kinds of therapies over the years. So we see children who have been in various kinds of behavioral programs and various kind of "eclectic" programs and do lots of different things but they mostly come in whether they are 3-4 year olds or 9-10 year olds, not being able to engage in a continuous flow of back and forth interaction. Many of them have academic skills, many of them have lots of verbal skills, but they can't initiate, and therefore they aren't having normal, typical healthy social conversations. And therefore their academic progress becomes very limited because they aren't really thinking. They are thinking in little bits and pieces, little isolated islands. This ability for the continuous flow will get everything cooking. It is so important, so thank you for asking that question.

Now our next question is, *"A 4 ½ year old who only speaks for needs, this little child has been getting various types of behaviorally oriented language therapies. He tends to have mastery of some conversation skills but only in a very, very limited way. His family tends to correct him when he gives the wrong response but he only speaks in 3 word utterances and then runs out of steam and only speaks when he really wants something."*


So he's a child who is not initiating a lot of communication, not communicating for a lot of pleasure and a lot of social interaction but only around "Give me apple." or "Go out." – end of conversation. And then sometimes he uses, according to the parents, the "wrong grammar" or the "wrong word sequences". Now what is the problem here? I'm going to turn this over to Serena to begin the discussion, then I'll add on.

SW: Well, you know we are going to really get from the child what we ask of the child. And here it's is easy to encourage a child because when they want something you have the desire, that affect that helps the child start having the conversation. They can tell you what they want. What we have to do is continue the conversation and ask another question to try to get the flow going. Depending on the child you can find out if they are hungry, "Oh, are you hungry?" We can find out where that apple is. We could find out if they want a little or a lot. But what is really important is to add on to that base question another question which will help the child think further and try to expand on what they are asking for. We might be building in so much structure into the conversation that we often don't always cue the child as to what they want, what they want for. So how you respond can make a big difference because you're building an



expectation for that further communication. If the child just says “I want this.” and we immediately reward or reinforce, then they learn this is what they have to say and that’s where it stops and ends. If we try to keep it moving further and engage in them the process of getting what they want or if they are verbal asking what they would do it for or even if they are reasoning to get ask them why they want that and not something else, we open the pathway to elaboration which is very important. It is very important to remember this when you get that first request. Respond with, “Oh! That’s what you want?” and then see if you can set the stage for the child to tell you more about it.


SG: Thank you Serena. Just to amplify what Serena is saying, the key is to help the child enjoy social communication. If we have a child in a program where we reward the child for speaking but it’s not natural rewards, it’s not the pleasure of speaking, it’s not the pleasure of getting a social response, it doesn’t carry itself. So if we use an M&M or use a “Good job.” which is not a natural social response. Or if we tickle the child if he likes tickling, it may help get things started. It may be ok to do that in the very beginning if you do it a little bit, but it doesn’t really carry because the child is not enjoying the social dialect and social dialog. You never advance beyond a need use of language into the shared social experiences of language where the child is really having fun speaking because they are not only getting their needs met, but they are sharing information. So there comes a point in typical development around 18 months or so where kids get the idea that communication is fun for communication’s own right. In other words, a little baby communicates to get a bottle or to get a hug or to get calmed down. As a child gets older and they get into these long chains of back and forth interaction where they are opening and closing 50 or 60 circles in a row, the communication becomes the basis for the relationship. In other words, the relationship is hugs and cuddles and “Gee, I feel good.” But eventually, just as in adults, you don’t want to just sit and hug and cuddle all day, although they love to hug and cuddle a little bit, they want to go to the theater, they want to go out and play tennis, they want to watch a great TV show, they want to read a discuss a book with their loved one. They want to do something that is exciting and stimulating and involves relationships at the same time. So the relationship becomes a vehicle for many, many expressions of personal desire, interest, and pleasure. Well, a child is the same way. Around 18 months they realize, gee, talking is a way of staying close to someone, talking is a way of feeling warm and nurtured and comforted, it doesn’t have to be simply being held and that gives me a lot of freedom. I can be across the room playing with my toy and talk to my mommy and tell her what I’m feeling and that brings me the same pleasure that



being held brought me. Now since that doesn't happen and a verbal dialog isn't associated with that fundamental pleasure then it stays very limited. So when we do floor time play and we're enjoying communication for communication, the child is feeling close and warm because they are communicating what they want to communicate from the heart and that's as good as being hugged and cuddled or for another child, it's as good as being given a chocolate bar. And that's the key.

When you do a more structured approach that's too structured, and only do that, it's ok to do a little bit of structure to teach certain fundamentals of language, and we have a language curriculum called the Affect Based Language Curriculum which combined structure with affective pleasure but when you don't do that, when you just use the structure alone and you don't combine it with the affect, when you use it in the beginning to get a cookie and then move on with the pleasure of communication then you tend to remain more limited and be more need-based communication. So basically you've got to create fun, pleasurable, follow the child's lead, floor time type interaction to extend the communication and also you can't worry about the grammar or sequencing. You worry about the communicative intent. If you understand what the child is trying to say, don't correct the child. Move on to create the back and forth. Over time I can promise you that the grammar and word choice will get better and better and better if you do that.

Now we have many other good questions about children with special needs but I also want to move on to talking about the implications of our new way of thinking about goals of children without special needs. I want to take one more question that relates to the above and we'll come back to some of these next week because we had excellent questions. Also again we will invite you to call in your calls next week as well as during the week please feel free to write in more questions so send your emails to us at our website at webradio@floortime.org and it's on the website also. We will respond to your web questions but we'll take them live next week. I'd like to apologize for the technical glitch this week where we weren't quite able to get cooking as quickly as we wanted to but if you only knew all the technical hurdles we overcame you'll be happy as we are that we're able to speak to you. I also want to thank Josh Metz who has been helping really establish the Floortime Foundation and it's technical infrastructure for our Floortime Foundation and is singularly the person responsible for bringing this web radio show to you today and for the future and we just can't thank you enough, Josh for creating this and helping set it up and helping us monitor it and get this good




information to you. Josh is with AOL and we'd like to thank AOL for having Josh volunteer to help us communicate this information to parents, clinicians, and educators around the world. So, thank you Josh.


Now the other question that I'd like to address quickly before we move into talking about kids without special challenges is a question about an older child who doesn't do pretend play, a 7 year old child, and his friends are moving beyond pretending and but has logical conversation and can talk logically and hold a back and forth conversation but whenever his peers try to play pretending with him he pulls in and gets fragmented and gets a little more self absorbed. The parents question is, "*How do we promote creativity and how do we promote or fuel further abstract thinking?*"

With an older child whose siblings or friends more importantly are doing other things you try to integrate imaginative thinking into the age-expected activity that the child may be interested in and the friends may be interested in. So the children usually at this age are into different fantasy characters, for example, from a TV show or a movie. Often they may not want to play with dolls but they'll want to pretend to be, in my day it was cowboys or Indians or Captain Marvel or Superman. Today it is a whole host of different characters but they may want to pretend to be some character from a computer game they play or from a TV show they've seen or a book or a movie. And also you can harness their imagination that way. But with slightly older children it can be making up stories. Creative writing – you can do creative writing just like you do at school. Or you can just have conversations where you can imagine what you'd like to do tomorrow. I have this little exercise called "Thinking about tomorrow." We can approach this realistically like, gee what will tomorrow be like, what will the good things and the bad things, what would you like tomorrow to be like? And then sometimes we want to get more fantasy elaboration on it, not only prepare for the reality of tomorrow, but we may ask a child, "If you had a magic potion or three magic wishes, what would tomorrow be like?" And now we are into fantasy. It can be descriptive fantasy when you play out the fantasy where the child is fantasy character or it could be dolls and things if the child wants to do that. But it doesn't have to be on the floor with dolls. And the main thing of getting imagination cooking, again it comes back to our old point from before, is getting that continuous flow of interaction going with affect and with emotion and real warmth.

Now what I want to do now is turn our attention to "typical" children and I use "typical" with a quote because there is no such thing as a typical child. Every child has




challenges; they are just different kinds of challenges, different degrees of challenges. Now we usually use the term “special needs” for children who have challenges in fundamental capacities to relate, communicate, and think. They have challenges in these capacities but many can learn to master these capacities with the proper program. We found in our work, when we use a comprehensive program that focuses on these functional capacities that I mentioned to you and focus on the kid’s individual processing capacities such as sound or sight or movement, either language, the visual spatial processing, their motor planning sequencing. Now we focus on interactive learning relationships that are spontaneous and follow the child’s lead and harness the child’s natural energy and interest, we find that a lot of children who have severe challenges in their ability to relate, communicate, and think can learn to do these wonderful capacities. In our review of cases, we found a very, very impressive number of children learned to not only relate, communicate, and think better, but at a very high level where they were fully communicative with peers, enjoying friendships, high levels of empathy and understanding of other children and adults, and also became very, very good at their academic skills – reading, math, writing, arguing and debating. So we were very impressed with what children could do, actually shocked and surprised pleurably when we employed this type of approach that focused on these kinds of capacities and work with the children’s individual processing profiles with learning relationships. Now, not all children made this type of stunning progress that in our mind surprised us and “broke the mold” of expectation. Some children made gradual progress and some children made very, very slow progress. But almost all the children have made progress and what’s important is they made progress in the fundamentals of relating and becoming more purposeful communicators. And when that happens, the symptoms, particularly the worse the symptoms, tend to diminish significantly but we get stronger foundations and more pleasure in relating and communicating and families and everybody feels better about each other. So even when progress is slow, it is progress in the critical areas. Now what does this have to do with kids who have different kinds of challenges, who don’t have the challenges of relating, communicating, and thinking, but are what we call “typical” but again, there’s no such thing as typical. So we find that all children have differences in the way they process information. Some are better with words, some are better with things they see and can figure out and solve problems in the world of space using vision. Others are better at using action and motor skills to solve problems. Some kids are better with warmth and closeness and pleasure and others with handling assertiveness and curiosity. So all children are different and all



families are different. What we found, though is that when we applied these same goals that we just described for you, the ability to attend, to engage, to be purposeful, to sequence and problem solve, to use ideas and use them creatively and use them logically. And that progresses to higher levels of reflective thinking where we use ideas not only logically but reflect on many ideas at the same time. Or where you can begin to get into grey area thinking where you can talk about three reasons for going outside, why one is most important, another is less important, and another is just a supportive reason. Or why there are five reasons for the Civil War. This is the most important, this is the second most important. Or why you agree or disagree with this author and you learn to think of an internal standard and sense of self. As you move to these higher levels, we have found that children have all sorts of strengths and weaknesses at mastering these but by having this model we can help children move to higher and higher levels of competency and if the challenges are favoring verbal over spatial or spatial over verbal, or one level type of thinking over another type of thinking, having this broad model where we look at the child's capacities, we look at the way the child processes information and we look at interactive learning relationships, we can help the child strengthen the visual if that isn't as strong as the verbal or strengthen the verbal if that's not as strong as the visual. But we do this at the same time that we're promoting high levels of relating and engaging and reflective thinking at the same time. And we apply this to academics as well when we're doing math we don't just teach math facts. We teach math thinking and reasoning but in the context of high levels of problem solving. So the same model that we're talking about for "children who have special challenges" really pertain to all children. And what it has enabled us to do is literally raise the bar in our expectations for all children. But I want to tell you, as we raise the bar and we support development for all children, we have to remember that what we're supporting are fundamental foundations. Not little isolated islands of skills.

I want to take a few questions that have come in just about this subject, about everyday challenges with everyday children who are challenged in everyday ways. One question comes in, "*What about teaching children to read before they are two using flashcards?*" Well, again here, many children have wonderful memories. And they can memorize things we show them on flashcards. They can even learn to recognize some shapes or words but is this helpful? Is this the best way to promote development in a two year old? A two year old is just learning to use ideas, just learning to be imaginative. Just learning to think. Do we want that child's energy focused on memory? Or do you want it to focus on thinking and discovering? Which is going to




lead to a future Nobel Prize Winner? I don't think it's going to be the flashcards. I think it's going to be the child who learns to integrate on his feet or learns to discover. And that's going to be through pretend play. We can teach that child to read later or if the child has great skills he can even learn to read at age two, but in the context of pretend play he has to read a sign saying "This way to Grandma's house." Serena, I don't know if you want to add on to that?

SW: Other than to really amplify, there is nothing that is more powerful in helping a child get ready for what comprehending what they will learn to read than doing the play and interaction and creating the ideas. And we know there are a number of children who learn to read and have memory-based reading but then still struggle later with the comprehension. So our first goal is to just enjoy learning and interaction and having the pleasure in this process and then to stay focused on the building blocks that were so nicely described so that the child does initiate, does explore, does discover, begin to create the ideas that will later lead to the comprehension of reading. And it's very important - more than memorizing it.

SG: Another question comes in relating to this subject. *"We hear a lot about the fact that it's wrong to try to make kids smarter, we ought to focus on just nurturing and helping them be happy. But what's wrong with making them smarter? Isn't that what they are going to need when they grow up?"*

This is a very, very good question. It gets at the heart of the matter. In our country and really in the history of education and the history of learning, we kind of set being smart in one corner and being happy and content in the other corner. It's as though these are two mutually exclusive goals. Either we educate our children and we make them rigid with flashcards or structured lessons or we make them happy and play with them and lots of giggles and lots of laughs. In fact, what our new discoveries of the growth of the mind and the brain have shown us is that the same experiences can make our kids happy and smart at the same time. And in fact, when we come back to our new way of thinking about core capacities for children, if we promote shared attention and engagement and purposeful communication and problem solving interactions and the creative use of ideas and the logical and reflective use of ideas to promote these new capacities that we're arguing for, we simultaneously help our children become happy and smart at the same time. Let me just give a few examples. With our two year old, when we're working on our fifth capacity for creative use of ideas, we're engaging the pretend play, we're following our child's lead, we're being warm and nurturing, the child



is having a good time, learning to trust, learning a part of a relationship, they'll be a great parent themselves eventually if they keep up those skills over the years, but we're also teaching that child to think, to use ideas, to solve problems with ideas. That child is eventually going to be better at math and better at reading than a child that doesn't learn to think. Because in order to interpret what you're reading you've got to be able to think. To figure out why a little bit is less than more, more is greater than a little, you've got to be a thinker. So it's only when you're feeding the dolly two cookies versus five cookies and the dolly says, "I want more", you learn the difference between more and less which is a foundation for math for quantity concepts.

So in order to learn and master the world, if you focus on these new capacities that organize the way that the mind and brain work, you're focusing really on two sides of the same coin which is smartness and happiness or contentment and security at the same time. And when you do it right, you are promoting both together. So we don't have to make these choices between intelligence or smartness and happiness. We want intelligent, happy, content, secure people. That's what we want for the future. That's what we want for our children with special needs and learning difficulties, and that's what we want for our children without special needs but who have their own unique personality profiles and challenges.

Well, this brings our first show to an end. I want to thank those of you who tuned in for this first show. Next week we'll have your questions live, you'll be able to call in as well as during the week email us at our website your questions. Also, the next show is going to be, just so you'll know for sure, February 12 at 10:30am. It will be every Thursday from 10:30am – 11:30 from here on in. We may take a week off in August but other than that we're going to be cooking all the time, hopefully for years to come. Also this show will be available 24 hours a day after it starts, so today will be available at the website at any time from here on in. We're archiving all the shows. And the same thing with next week's show. So I wish you well and I hope to speak to you live next week. Thank you very much. Bye bye.