

JOINT ACTION ROUTINES

CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle/High	Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech
			<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Children with autism (AU) generally lack understanding of the function of communicative behavior and the reciprocal nature of communicative events. As a result, they frequently have trouble gaining meaning from what others say and do. Children with autism are better able to participate and communicate with others when interactions are made predictable and logical. Joint Action Routines (JARs) create interactions that are predictable, logical, and repeatable.

DESCRIPTION

A joint action routine is a specific strategy to encourage communication. It refers to the natural language paradigm, which involves arranging the child's environment in a way that supports and increases opportunities to use language (Koegel & Koegel, 1995). Specifically, a joint action routine creates a routine interaction between two or more people through frequent repetition and rehearsal of target language within a function or motivating activity. The goal of joint action routines is to develop spontaneous conversation and increased social understanding.

An effective joint action routine consists of several major components, as follows:

1. *A unifying theme.* Effective routines must have themes that are motivating and meaningful. Students must understand what the activity is about and must want to be involved.

2. *Joint focus.* Joint action routines require interaction. A joint focus is needed for turn taking. In other words, it is important for participants to attend to the same event and respond accordingly.
3. *Specific roles.* Roles must be clearly defined so that students are able to learn how to speak or act differently based on the role they are given.
4. *Logical, predictable sequence.* To make the routine as predictable and repeatable as possible, a logical sequence of events and structure for turn taking is needed. Thus, students can predict what to do each step of the way.
5. *Repeatable over time.* Repetition of words or actions must be planned into routines so that a student can learn to anticipate what to say or do through repetition.
6. *Planned variation.* Planned variation of a routine gives children an opportunity to change what they say or do within the structure of a comfortable routine.

There are generally three types of joint action routines: (a) *preparation or fabrication of a specific end product*, such as snack preparation, art, cooking applesauce, building a block tower, and product assembly; (b) *story or central plot line*, including pretend play (e.g., pretending to be firefighters) and community living skills (e.g., shopping in a grocery store); and (c) *cooperative turn-taking games*, such as playing “tickle,” blowing bubbles, and cooperative team games that may occur during activities like morning circle routine, group music therapy, and recreational therapy session.

STEPS

Starting a new joint action routine involves several steps. You can see a planning form on page four.

1. Set the routine up so there is a need to interact between you and the child.
2. Break the routine into clearly defined roles.
3. Break the routine down into small steps.
4. Model all the steps of the activity to make the routine familiar to the child.
5. Model what you want the child to say or do when she requests.

6. Keep the sequence of the activity exactly the same each time until the child knows the routine well and is able to take his turns consistently and appropriately.
7. Mark each step in the routine with a word, phrase, or sentence, and use it consistently each step of the way.
8. Repeat the routine as often as possible.
9. When the child is familiar with the routine, encourage the child to initiate by interrupting the routine.
10. Interrupt the routine the same way many times until the child gets used to initiating.
11. Interrupt the routine again in a different way.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

Ms. Smith and John, a 4-year-old boy with autism, take turns blowing and popping bubbles. Ms. Smith creates a predictable sequence of opening the jar, taking out the wand, blowing, and then popping the bubbles. She uses simple words attached to each action. This exact sequence is repeated over and over again as the two of them continue to play. Over time Ms Smith creates pauses in her words and actions and allows John to fill in the blanks of the script. As the routine is repeated, John learns to become more spontaneous in his actions and words.

JOINT ACTION ROUTINE PLAN FORM

Student's Name:	Date of Plan:
Routine Name (Theme): _____	
Props Needed: _____	
Roles: _____	
Receptive/Expressive Vocabulary	
Basic Sequence	
Planned Variation	
Language/# of Opportunities	

TIPS FOR MODIFICATIONS

When planning a joint action routine, special consideration must be given to the child’s age, ability, interests, and goals. Joint action routines are not a “one size fits all” technique. The specific needs of each child should be considered carefully.

SUMMARY

Joint action routines are based on the principles of the natural language paradigm, which encourages communication skills in children with autism. Instead of emphasizing a specified desired response, they are based on the premise that communication skills are developed by providing motivating contexts. Joint action routines are appropriate for children with autism of all ages.

RESEARCH TABLE

Number of Studies	Ages (year)	Sample Size	Area(s) Addressed	Outcome
3	4-14	8	Appropriate responses, play, cognitive skills	+

STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE

1. Holman, K. C. (2004). *Sociocommunicative and play skills in young children with autism spectrum disorders*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.
Six children with autism between the ages of 4 and 6 participated in a study employing a joint action routines model to teach play and cognitive skills. Students' skills increased in both areas following implementation of the intervention.
2. Sekito, H. (1998). Acquisition of appropriate responses to questions by a youth with autism: Language intervention using a joint action routine. *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 36*, 29-37.
A 12-year-old boy with autism participated in the study. The student was taught appropriate responses in the context of a joint action routine involving shopping and making toast. Results showed positive outcomes.
3. Sekito, H. (1994). Language guidance of an autistic child with echolalia by applying a joint action routine: Learning responsive communication in a shopping routine. *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 31*, 95-102.
A 14-year-old boy with autism was taught to communicate responsively in daily activities using a joint action routine approach. After three months, he was able to respond to questions successfully.

REFERENCES

- Drew, A., Baird, G., Baron-Cohen, S., Cox, A., Slonims, V., Wheelwright, S., Swettenham, J., Berry, B., & Charman, T. (2002). A pilot randomized control trial of a parent training intervention for pre-school children with autism: Preliminary findings and methodological challenges. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 11*, 266-272.
- Holman, K. C. (2004). *Sociocommunicative and play skills in young children with autism spectrum disorders*. Unpublished dissertation. University of Maryland: College Park.
- Koegel, R. L., & Koegel, L. K. (1995). *Teaching children with autism: Strategies for initiating positive interaction and improving learning opportunities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Sekito, H. (1994). Language guidance of an autistic child with echolalia by applying a joint action routine: Learning responsive communication in a shopping routine. *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 31*, 95-102.
- Sekito, H. (1998). Acquisition of appropriate responses to questions by a youth with autism: Language intervention using a joint action routine. *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 36*, 29-37.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- The Autism Web Course. Joint Action Routines Module:
http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism_course/modules/comm/jar/index.htm
This is a user-friendly learning module that includes a sample plan and starter tips.
- Joint Action Routines and Autism: Research Autism:
http://www.researchautism.net/autism_treatments_therapies_intervention.ikml?ra=90
This research-based information gives the user the option of viewing the material in basic, intermediate, or advanced forms.

GENERAL RESOURCES

- Autism Internet Modules (AIM) www.autisminternetmodules.org. The Autism Internet Modules were developed with one aim in mind: to make comprehensive, up-to-date, and usable information on autism accessible and applicable to educators, other professionals, and families who support individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Written by experts from across the U.S., all online modules are free, and are designed to promote understanding of, respect for, and equality of persons with ASD.
- The Autism Web Course: http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism_course/about/index.htm. This web course was developed out of materials from the Interactive Collaborative Autism Network (ICAN). The Autism Programs at the University of New Mexico has updated and added information to this web course.
 - Characteristics
 - Assessment
 - Academic Interventions
 - Behavioral Interventions
 - Communication Interventions
 - Environmental Interventions
 - Social Interventions
 - Family Support Suggestions
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA) <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/fmain1.html>. The Indiana Resource Center for Autism staff's efforts are focused on providing communities, organizations, agencies, and families with the knowledge and skills to support children and adults in typical early intervention, school, community, work, and home settings.
 - IRCA Articles: <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=273>
- Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism www.txautism.net. The Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism in conjunction with the network of Texas Education Service center with a grant from the Texas Education Agency has developed a series of free online courses in autism. Please check the training page, www.txautism.net/training.html, for update lists

of courses, course numbers and registration information. Current courses include the following:

- Asperger Syndrome 101
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication and the Autism Spectrum
- Autism for the General Education Teacher
- Autism 101: Top Ten Pieces to the Puzzle
- Classroom Organization: The Power of Structure for Individuals with ASD
- Communication: The Power of Communication for Individuals with ASD
- Futures Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Navigating the Social Maze: Supports and Interventions for Individuals with ASD
- Solving the Behavior Puzzle: Making Connections for Individuals with ASD