



# Severe Disabilities

## what to teach

COURSE  
enhancement  
MODULE

### Communication, Social Skills, and Self Determination

#### Objectives

By the end of this session participants will:

1. Identify the functions of communication and options for ACC
2. Identify the functions of problem behavior and develop a positive behavior support plan
3. Plan ways to promote self determination across the school day

#### Background Readings

Downing, J. (2004). *Teaching communication skills to students with severe disabilities*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Baltimore, Md: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

Horner, R. H., Alban, R. W., Todd, A. W., & Sprague, J. (2006). Positive behavior support for individuals with severe disabilities. In M. E. Snell & F. Brown (Eds.), *Instruction of students with severe disabilities* (pp. 206-250). Upper saddle River, N J: Pearson Education, Inc.

Koegel, R. L., & Koegel, L. K. (2006). *Pivotal response treatments for autism: Communication, social, and academic development*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Company.

Test, D. W., & Neale, M. (2004). Using the self advocacy strategy to increase middle graders' IEP participation. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 13, 135-145.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Wood, W., Fowler, C. H., Uphold, N., & Test, D. (2005). A review of self-determination interventions with individuals with severe disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 30, 121-146.

## Materials for Participants

A case study of a student whose problem behavior is related to deficits in communication and a lack of opportunities for self-determination. Participants will use the case study in planning in teams. Here is an example:

*Kevin is a 16 year old student with an autism spectrum disorder who also has severe intellectual disability. Although he can use his voice, he rarely speaks except to name a request (e.g., “cookie”) which he will scream loudly. Kevin engages in high rates of screaming. Sometimes these episodes of screaming will escalate into hitting those near to him. His teacher collected data on what happens before Kevin screams (antecedent), what he does (screams; hits), and what happens after (e.g., lesson ends; gets attention). After some days of using this ABC analysis, she presented her findings to her team. Her analysis showed that most of the time when Kevin screams, he either gets out of the lesson or gets something he wants. What communication skills does Kevin need to replace these problem behaviors? What other positive behavior supports may be needed? What other social and self determination skills could you teach Kevin? How might Kevin participate in his own planning (e.g., for his IEP)?*

Examples of communication devices (actual devices or websites of assistive technology). (e.g., [www.enablemart.com](http://www.enablemart.com))

Powerpoint on Communication, Social Skills, and Self Determination. Using the background readings, prepare a powerpoint for this session. Be sure the powerpoint has interaction. For example, have participants share examples of how their students communicate.

## Activities

NOTE: This topic could be expanded to a multiple day workshop. When used in a curricular overview as shown in this module, keep the focus on deciding WHAT to teach rather than exploring all aspects of positive behavior support.

Icebreaker: Play a brief game of charades in which participants tell what they did the prior evening but through pantomime. Ask-what might have made it easier to communicate?

PowerPoint on Communication, Social Skills, and Self Determination (be sure to incorporate discussion and other audience participation).

Communication Devices: Show examples of assistive technology that can be used for communication (either devices you provide or through a website).

Case Study Application: Have participants work in teams to plan a positive behavior support plan for Kevin. Have small groups share with the whole group and discuss any differences in the plans.