

Communication Through a Developmental Lens- A Toolkit Approach

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A Little About Me

- I wear many hats
- SLP
- Mom to two wonderful kids – one of whom is on the autism spectrum
- Practice owner
- Autism advocate



Approach

- Developmental
- Strengths based
- Individual
- Filling the holes in the Swiss Cheese
- Assume competence
- If they can do it some of the time then it is my job to figure out how to help them do it all of the time



Goals for Today

- To support your understanding of speech, language and communication
- To support you in developing strategies that will help you engage, interact and communicate better with your child
- To build your “toolkit” of strategies



The Developmental Lens

The Process and the Premise

- The process and the basis of DIR is to understand the child's individual differences (the 'I') and using those differences to determine the best way of interacting with and relating to that child (the 'R') to move them up the developmental ladder





Children of the individuals who serve

- Unique challenges
- Children may move frequently
- Family units under stress
- Separation from attachment figures
- Little information on developmental trajectory
- Those supporting the children may have little information about their clinical profile and history

Typical challenges in communication, language, and speech of children/youth

- Producing 'language' – gestures, sounds, words, sentences (production)
- Understanding 'language' – gestures, sounds, words, sentences (comprehension)
- Understanding and creating new ideas and meanings (comprehension)
- Understanding and expressing intentions (comprehension)
- Producing speech
- Engaging in fun, playful, interpersonal interactions
- Social use of language (pragmatics)



Examples of communication challenges for children

Principles of Floortime (cont'd)

Increase Emotional Range
Tailor Interactions that match
the child's individual profile

What are the Principles of Floortime?

We follow the child's lead.

We join the child's world to harness the child's natural interests.

We tune in to the child's individual processing differences.

We pay attention to our own unique individual differences as parents, caregivers and clinicians.

What are the Principles of Floortime? (cont'd)

We Want To Support Co-regulation:

Be present in the moment

Me + you

Take action in response to another person's action

We Want Continuous Flow

Strive for Reciprocity

Maintain continuity of the interaction

Use affects and gestures before words

We Want To Open The Door To Symbolic Thinking

Elaborate and deepen the plot

Insert reasoning and challenges



Circles of Communication

The basic unit of interaction and engagement

Opening (initiating) and closing (responding)

The back and forth of the interaction

Join in to make yourself part of the activity


FEDL 1 – Regulation and Shared Attention

- ➔ Why are Regulation and Shared Attention Important?
- ➔ Regulation
- ➔ The child can remain calm and focused and take in the sights and sounds of their environment
- ➔ The ability to stay regulated is critical to the development of communication



Why are Regulation and Shared Attention Important? Cont'd

Through this relationship
the child:

- Looks at parent
 - Gazes, gestures and vocalizes sounds
 - Follows the parent's focus of attention looking where parent looks
 - The ability to share attention with a play partner is a critical component of comprehension
- 

Why is regulation important?

If you are regulated:

- You don't miss the hundreds of learning opportunities that present themselves each day
- You are more “available” for interactions
- You can participate in the interaction



FEDL 2 – Mutual Engagement

Why is Mutual Engagement important?

- This stage involves ‘falling in love’ with your parent/caregiver
- Mutually enjoyable interactions that allow the deepening of relationships
- Mutual engagement is a key in the development of comprehension – the young baby may not understand the words but through affect cues can understand the meaning

Strategies for Regulation and Engagement

We need to:

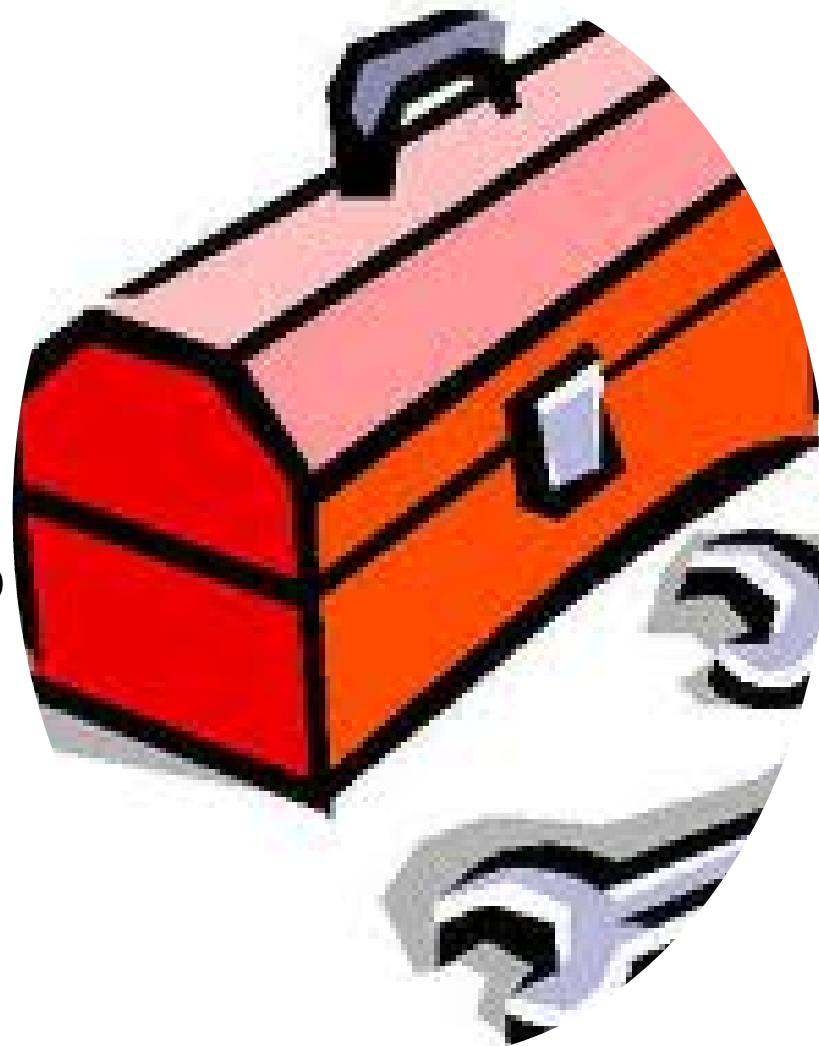
- Coach parents/caregivers to help child stay regulated in order to maintain interaction with their caregiver(s).
- Based on the child's 'I' help parent/caregiver to engage in back and forth affective exchanges
- Treat all behaviors as intentional
- Based on the 'I' help the caregiver tune in to the affect cues of the (keeping in mind that some affect cues may be unconventional) child

FEDL's 1 and 2

We ask ourselves

- What is the Individual profile of the child?
- What can we do to support regulation?
- What can we do to facilitate engagement and shared attention?
- What is getting in the way of engagement and shared attention?
- How does the child show their communicative intent?

Tips, Tools and Strategies FEDLs 1 and 2



Always ask.....

What do you do with your child that brings you both joy?

It gives us great clues about where to start...



The Power of the Moment of Anticipation!!!






Help the parent/caregiver harness the moment of anticipation



Harness the Power of Anticipation!

Use the power of anticipation with a look for excited anticipation on your face

Some examples

-  Tickle bunny
-  I am going to get you!
-  Got your nose!
-  Pull my thumb!
-  Peek a boo

Co-Regulation & Affective exchange!

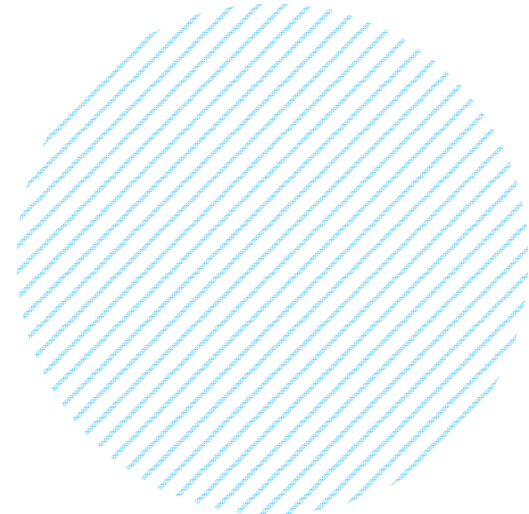
With the 'I' in mind.....

- Peek a Boo...
- Sensory Action games...
- Rhyme and Action songs!
- I'm coming to get you!
- Watch my face Watch you
- Early speech sound play
- Tickle monster!



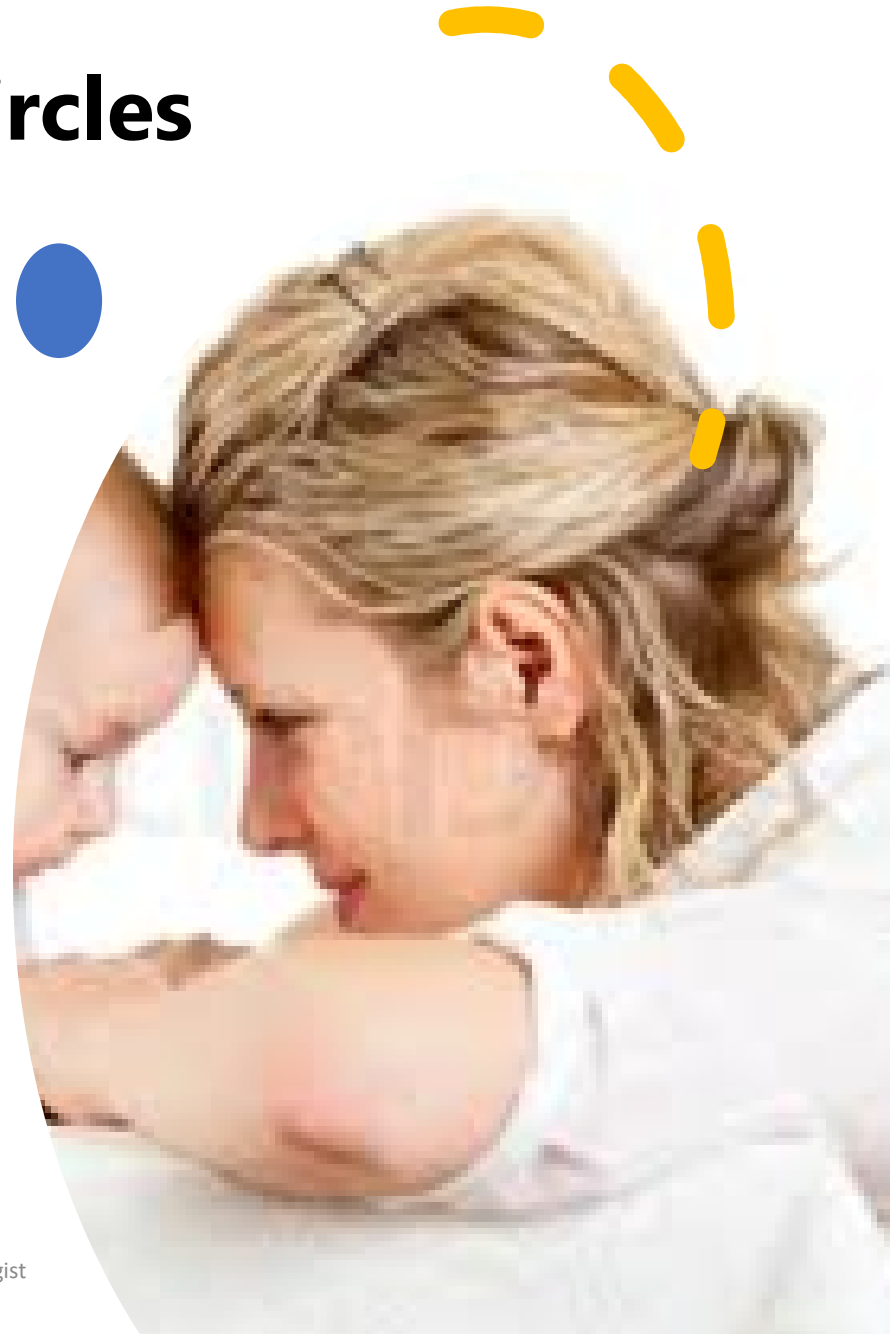
Follow your child's interests

- Some people feel that you should not reinforce your child's "obsessions" or intense interests
- These interests are often the "way in" to meaningful interactions
- During sessions where you are trying to get engagement follow your child's lead and interests
- Join in what the child is doing
- YOU be the toy!!!!



Open and Close Circles

- Treat every behavior as purposeful
- Go for the circles of communication (you open the circle – initiate and your child closes the circle – respond)
- Encourage the caregiver to observe all non verbal communications as communicative and intentional
- Support the 'affective dance'
- Help alleviate any 'mismatch' between the caregiver and child
- Help the caregiver to 'read' the child's affect cues



Go for the “Gleam” in your Child’s Eye

- ➡ Go for the “gleam” and the joy!
- ➡ Use whatever works again and again and again
- ➡ Be Playful
- ➡ Use sensory play if your child likes it
- ➡ If your child is motivated....don’t change the activity!
- ➡ Use “affect” as your barometer!

Beware.....

'Why can't you get him to talk?'

Too often we push for production when the child is not engaged, or sufficiently intentional





PART 1: DIR® FUNCTIONAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEVELS FEDL 3

Level 3: Intentional Two-way Purposeful Communication: The child can engage in “back and forth” communication with their caregiver using vocalizations, facial expressions, affect, movement, gestures, or language.

PART I: DIR® FUNCTIONAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEVELS FEDL 4

Level 4: Complex Problem

Solving/Sense of Self: The child has emerging ideas, all his or her own. The caregiver supports the child in executing the ideas and in resolving together natural and semi-structured "problems" that can occur. "Circles of Communication" are increasingly robust and sustained. The child's sense of self is strengthened.



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Questions to ask about Intentional 2- way Communication

- Does the child participate in back and forth exchanges with the caregiver?
- Does the child use repair strategies when he is not understood?
- Does the child follow his partners gaze or point?
- Does the child vocalize or use gestures to express feelings?
- Does the child follow his partners gestures?
- Does the child respond to his caregivers attempts to share attention?
- Does the child express communication intentions (protest, joy, frustration etc.)

The “Reciprocal Muscle”

- The ability to be reciprocal is at the basis of communication
- If you are not able to be reciprocal you will have a very hard time making and keeping friends, entering into conversations, developing relationships, being successful in school or work
- It is SO much more than turn taking!!!
- In typical development we are hard wired to be reciprocal. With individuals with ASD reciprocity often does not develop easily
- There are many reasons for this (sensory processing, comprehension, visual processing etc.
- It is something we need to pay attention to from the beginning

Was Nate....



Regulated?



Opening and closing circles of communication?



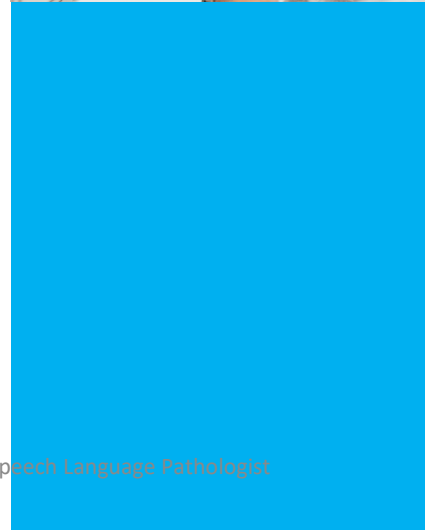
Intentional

Tool Kit Strategies for Levels 3 & 4



Treat all behaviours as intentional

- Nate was hopping so his SLP incorporated it into the play
- When he left the play you might say “run away bunny!” and then go and get him



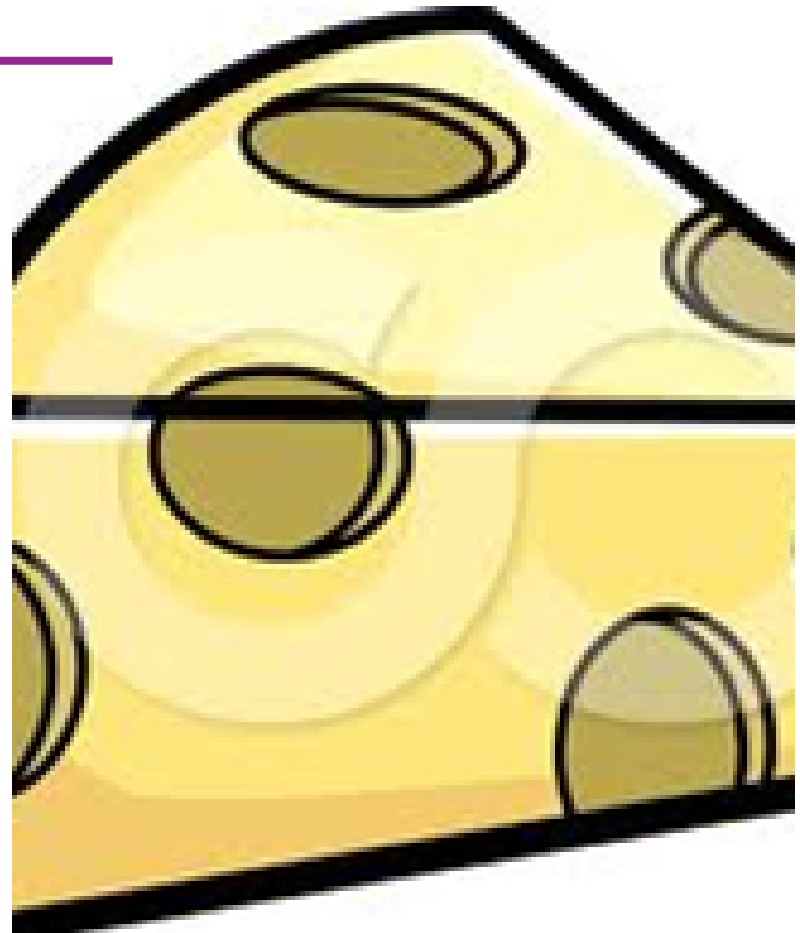
The 'I' Detective

Use your detective skills to determine the 'I' and then tailor your interactions to that I to support the 'back and forth'



Where are the 'holes' in the Swiss Cheese?

Don't forget to support regulation and engagement while focusing on the 'back and forth'. If there are holes at earlier levels it has an impact on the later levels. Quality not quantity!!



Talking starts with Gestures!

- Before a child will have a conversation with words they are able to have one without words (baby after nap example)
- Why I always focus on gestural communication
- Respond to your child's gestures (conventional and unconventional)
- 16 by 16
- Make sure YOU use gestures with sounds and with words
- A little about pointing

Gestural Communication

Pay close attention to gestural communication

- How well or how much does the child gesture?
- Do they read your gestures?
- What is their repertoire of facial expressions/gestures (i.e. sad, puzzled, happy, angry, disappointed, surprised)



No Talking Dust

- Reduce your language level....
- Sprinkle 'No Talking Dust' and focus on affective cueing and affective exchanges with sounds, noises and simple words



Observe, Wait, Listen!!

- OWL (Hanen program)
- Observe...pay attention to the affect cues and intended meaning
- Wait....Pacing is important. Try to balance the tension between waiting for a response and losing the moment
- Listen....to vocalizations, to sound, to words



Be Clueless!

- Even if you know what your child wants be clueless and wait for a gesture, a vocalization, a word approximation or a word
- Hand your child the juice jug with the lid screwed on tightly and wait with an expectant look on your face
- Give your child their favourite pudding with no spoon
- Put a favourite toy up high and out of reach



During play and interaction.....

Try not to go in to teaching mode

Your goal is interaction not teaching

Try not to ask any question that you already know the answer to!



ALWAYS.....

- Support comprehension within the context of meaningful interactions....
- A child will comprehend 'out' much faster if they are trying to get out of the therapy room vs. looking at a picture of a girl going outside.....

Upping the Ante!

- In level 3 you were working on getting your child to be intentional and to engage in purposeful two way communication
- In level 4 you want multiple circles of back and forth communication that focuses on solving a problem
- I Can't Reach It! What would have happened if mommy had just reached out, grabbed the scarf and given it to him? Instead she created multiple opportunities for back and forth circles of communication

DIR Levels Five and Six

- Level 5: Creating (Emotional) Ideas: The child begins to use symbols (language) to express and share ideas. In play at first, the child mimics daily life; begins moving to more original imaginary ideas and actions dramatizing a widening range of child's real- life issues.
- Level 6: Logical Thinking: Can connect ideas logically and give reasons behind ideas (answer "why questions"); discovers new organizing concepts by connecting symbolic ideas which in turn leads to complex, fuller, emotionally- charged plots

At Level 5 the Child Begins to.....

- Pretend
- Pretend play is important because it loosens the child's reliance on the concrete and moves to the abstract
- It helps with comprehension, cognition, and production
- It helps to understand emotion
- Pretend play usually starts with routine experiences (nurturing – feeding the baby, putting a stuffy to bed)
- We often rush to pretend play before the child is ready

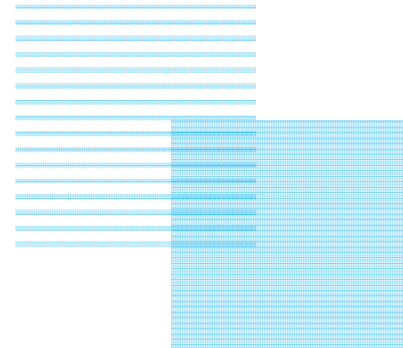
Tool Kit Strategies for Level 5



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Whole Body Play

- First the child learns to play using his/her body
- Whole body play is important!
- What do I mean by whole body play?



I am Superman!

- Have props available so that the child can pretend to be superman, a princess, a king, a cat etc.
- Jump into the drama with superman
- Pretend to be superman's rocket and put him on your back to go on an adventure



Pretend Play Toolbox

- Expand pretend play. If your child is pretending to be a car, identify where you are going to go and have a race
- Focus on words that go with the theme of play (if you are a car....fast, slow, vroom)
- Use lots of gestures and affect cues to help improve comprehension
- Look for a symbolic solution to a symbolic problem (if the car crashes get a tow truck to tow it away)

“Use Your Words”

- This is something we often say. For some children it isn't helpful and can frustrate them further
- “If I could use my words right now, I would!”
- Think of the way we feel when we are overwhelmed and dysregulated. We are not our best communicators at that time!
- Polyvagal theory

Instead of “Use Your Words”

- Try to read affect cues to prevent the meltdown
- Accept all communication as meaningful
- Acknowledge feelings “you are so mad”
- Time in instead of time out
- Review later

Level Six

- Level 6: Logical Thinking: Can connect ideas logically and give reasons behind ideas (answer “why questions”); discovers new organizing concepts by connecting symbolic ideas which in turn leads to complex, fuller, emotionally- charged plots



The Plot Thickens...

- At this level the plot thickens and the pretend play becomes more complex
- Try to focus on feelings and labelling the feelings ("his car crashed....he is sad!")
- Use lots of gestures and affect to help with comprehension
- Encourage problem solving ("she's hungry! What should we do?")
- Expand the drama into a short story



Scripting and Echolalia

- Scripting, echolalia or borrowed language is common among individuals with ASD
- Often the scripting or borrowed language may be specific to their intense interests
- Sometimes it is specific to a feeling or an affect
- It almost always indicates challenges in comprehension or language formulation
- It is meaningful!

The Monologue

- When a child/youth talks about a passion or interest and no one can get a word in edgewise
- The child/youth isn't reciprocal or including his communication partner in a dialogue. Instead it is a monologue
- The "reciprocal muscle" is important!!



Tool Kit Strategies for Scripting and the Monologue



Toolkit ideas.....

- Recognize that the borrowed language has meaning for the child/youth. "You threw off my groove!" (You might reply "I interrupted you and threw you off. I'm sorry")
- For the highly verbal child ask questions of clarification "wait! What type of dinosaur?"
- Build on the borrowed language ("Since I threw off your groove what is my punishment?"

The Monologue

- If a child/youth is talking about an interest or passion and not being reciprocal try:
 - Asking questions of clarification ("I'm confused what kind of fan motor is it?", "does that dinosaur eat meat or not?")
 - Take the opportunity to negotiate "so how many minutes are we going to talk about race cars?"

• YOU WANT RECIPROCITY!!!!



KEEP UP WITH ACT

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