



***NARRATOR:***

This is what every parent of a child with a developmental disability would like to see – success. Whether it's learning the alphabet or enjoying social interactions with other children, these are the faces of children who love learning. They are also faces many of their parents never thought they would see after their child was diagnosed with a developmental problem.

***JOCY UPTON (PARENT):***

They are so caught up in the moment that it's all quite overwhelming. Even Julian, you know, we had preconceptions and they're all just false. He's learning leaps and bounds and we never even thought we'd get to this place.

***NARRATOR:***

But what does it take to achieve such positive results? It's not just the work of teachers and therapists in the classroom. It also takes the work of parents – parents specially trained to work with the members of their child's educational team.

***Depiction of parent skill training***

***NARRATOR:***

This is parent skill training developed at the Positive Early Learning Experience Center at the University of Colorado at Denver. It is part of the LEAP Outreach Project – a comprehensive approach to helping young children with autism spectrum and other developmental disorders. Phil Strain is the creator and director of the LEAP Program.

***PHIL STRAIN:***

The family component, as we have conceptualized it since 1981, really responds to two fundamental issues. First, is we're concerned about relieving the obvious emotional pain and anxiety that many families experience when they find that they have a child with significant special needs. So, our hope is that providing support and skill training is a way to help folks overcome those issues.

***ANDREA BROWN (PARENT):***

Sometimes, as a parent, when you're dealing with all these things that are so difficult, it's like your lifeline. You know, just to have someone there that really understands and is helping you is sometimes the most important thing.

***LISA JACKSON (PARENT):***

And what you did is you came into our lives like a miracle worker and you focused us and said, Lisa, clean up this mess and get organized.



***PHIL STRAIN:***

Secondly, our family component is designed to help address an emerging piece of knowledge about young children with autism spectrum and that is that providing services early on and providing services at a sufficient level of intensity yields very powerful outcomes.

***Depiction of children playing***

***NARRATOR:***

The primary difference between children with autism spectrum disorder and typically developing children is that children with autism have difficulty establishing social interaction with their peers that are positive and reciprocal in nature. Julian Upton, age three, has been in the program a year.

***JOCY UPTON (PARENT):***

Initially, in his eyes, there was no recognition of certain things that were happening around him. I'll never forget when all of a sudden he was looking at a toy. He was saying, if I push this button then this is going to pop up and I know for a lot of people that's just an expectation. For us, it was like oh, my goodness, he actually gets it. It's sinking in. So, he has changed in such dramatic steps.

***Depiction of parents working with their children***

***NARRATOR:***

The key to developing social interaction is to increase the number of opportunities children have to practice and learn new skills.

***PHIL STRAIN:***

Typically developing children might acquire a skill with just one or two demonstrations by their parent. On the other hand, young children with significant disabilities may require many, many learning opportunities and really leads to an approach to parent training which basically says not only do you have to do more, but you have to do it differently as well. There has to be more structure. There has to be more predictability. There has to be more feedback of a consistent nature to children.

***Depiction of parent training with parent and child***

***NARRATOR:***

LEAP's parent skills training instructs parents in three ways. First, interventionists work with parents and children in their homes. Second, the program provides written materials parents can study at their leisure. Third, there are group parent meetings where interventionists review techniques and address problems. It is also a time when parents share experiences and give each other moral support.



***KERRY GOUDY (FAMILY CONSULTANT):***

My role, as the family consultant, is to go into families' homes and work with parents providing them a base of knowledge and activities basically that will help them teach their children to learn.

***NARRATOR:***

From the very beginning, the interventionists begin introducing parents to the concepts contained in the Parent Skills Training modules.

***KERRY GOUDY (FAMILY CONSULTANT):***

The way we use the Parent Skills Training modules is we go into a parent's home and work with the parent and the child. The coaching comes from the family consultant to the parents. What the family consultant has to be aware of is that parents' learning style and what their level of knowledge is and take that information, use that to basically begin to teach the parents some skills that they don't have.

***NARRATOR:***

There are nine subject areas in the Parent Training Skills modules. The first module teaches the ABCs of behavior. Here, parents learn that every behavior has three components: the antecedent or trigger, the behavior itself and the consequence. This analysis helps parents identify how to increase skills and prevent problem behavior.

***Depiction of parent training***

***NARRATOR:***

The second skill area is teaching your child to follow directions. This module explains why children don't follow most directions and gives ways to make difficult directions easier by making them clear and specific.

***Depiction of parent and interventionist working with children***

***NARRATOR:***

Kelly Wilson has four children who benefit from these strategies.

***KELLY WILSON (PARENT):***

The way that was outlined in the book was a lot more structured than that and you gave your direction, then you waited five seconds, you asked the child to make sure that they were listening. There were about four steps. The funny part is I remember thinking, I can't do this. This is going to take too long. I want this direction followed and I want it followed now.

***Depiction of parent and interventionist working with children***

***NARRATOR:***

When she timed her way against that which is recommended in the module, her way took 25 minutes. The module way took one minute.



***KELLY WILSON (PARENT):***

The whole procedure was basically you give the command, you give the child a few seconds to process what they need to do. You ask them so you know they understood.

***Depiction of parents working with children***

***NARRATOR:***

You state the direction positively and keep the language simple, short and specific. The third and fourth modules cover the effective use of reinforcement to change a child's behavior. These modules define the various types of reinforcement. Social reinforcement or praise, a desired activity reinforcer, a favorite food reinforcer or a token reinforcer, like a gold star. The next module, number five, is planning activities to increase appropriate behavior.

***INTERVENTIONIST:***

A big piece of behaviors is prevention and a lot of times with prevention goes setting up that environment.

***NARRATOR:***

Suggested strategies include anticipating problems, planning alternative activities, controlling materials, scheduling activities, modeling and rewarding desired behavior and establishing clear rules and consequences.

***Depiction of training***

***INTERVENTIONIST:***

If we had let the three or four kids on the trampoline at the same time, if we would have let that go, I can almost guarantee you pushing would have been involved, that would have gotten worse, kids might have been falling, someone might have gotten hurt, so Judy was able to step in there and set up some environmental changes to have that turn taking, have that situation not turn into a potential problem.

***LISA JACKSON (PARENT):***

I remember you had me get the book and we broke down all the steps by subject categories because for David it's very important that it be organized. The written material, I remember, the ABCs of behavior, it was the anecdotal and the consequence of behavior and it made it very clear that if we wanted to elicit certain behavior, we had to do something.

***NARRATOR:***

Module six is responding to undesirable behaviors. It outlines strategies for responding to negative behaviors including interruption and redirection, ignoring and taking away a reinforcer. Here, a parent uses ignoring and redirection. Module seven is deciding what to teach your child. It shows parents how to break down skills into easy-to-follow small steps, to practice those steps and link them into new skills. Module number eight is teaching your child new skills. It includes techniques like breaking the skill into small steps, teaching the easiest step first, then the next and the next, giving assistance at the same time you give directions, and gradually fading your assistance as the child begins to learn.



*Depiction of parent and interventionist working with child*

**NARRATOR:**

The final module, number nine, is encouraging your child to communicate which explores why a child communicates and how a child communicates by whining, crying, reaching for an object, showing a picture of the object, vocalizing, using gestures or sign language, using one word or using a phrase or a sentence. Critical to this kind of success is for parents and interventionists to prioritize which behaviors and communication challenges they feel are most important. Crucial to this process is for parents to be familiar with all nine modules in order to be successful in working with their children.

**TED BOVEY (FAMILY CONSULTANT):**

By sitting down with the parents and looking at their day, an average day in their life, and looking at what the child is capable of doing during those activities throughout the day, we're able to help parents prioritize on what they want to work on first.

**ANDREA BROWN (PARENT):**

He was aggressive and he wasn't able to start communication with other people or start play with other children. He didn't have any interest in having that relationship with other people.

**TED BOVEY (FAMILY CONSULTANT):**

Probably the number one priority for families is around communication. Many of the children that we work with are either non-verbal or are emerging verbal so they're making some sounds, but very few of them have functional verbal language.

**ANDREA BROWN (PARENT):**

Words, he knows his name, he knows how to use words effectively and he listens better. He seems to understand what people are saying to him. He's found importance in other people.

**TED BOVEY (FAMILY CONSULTANT):**

Probably the second biggest area of concern is around behaviors.

**PARENT:**

Playing with a toy, putting something away, shoving a book in my face, wanting to read. Everything is aggressive.

**NARRATOR:**

It is this sharing of information and techniques between teachers, interventionists and parents that produces success for children with autism and other disabilities both at home and out in the world.

**KELLY WILSON (PARENT):**

It has been amazing. I had a friend who said to me two years ago, you don't take the boys out because you're embarrassed of them. And that really dug in hard because I thought, could she be right? Could I really be embarrassed of my own children? And I came to the realization that I



couldn't control them in my house. Was I nuts to take them out if I couldn't even get control in my own house? Going out was just not even an option. Everything is different now. Everything is different.

***NARRATOR:***

With skills from the program, Kelly Wilson no longer avoids taking her children into the community.

***KELLY WILSON (PARENT):***

It's helped them tremendously now that I can take them out.

***PHIL STRAIN:***

Our belief and I believe the evidence suggests as well is that when you make learning more meaningful, the outcomes are better and longer lasting.