

Manding

Introduction

A “mand” originates from the word “command” and is a way of making a request. You can teach children with autism how to use language or “mands” to ask for things that they need or desire. Mands can be used to get items, ask for assistance, get information or to get attention from a caregiver.

What makes a mand unique is that it is taught by increasing the individual’s motivation for an item. You do this by either limiting access to it so that the child is more likely to “want” the item, or by setting up situations in which the child needs the item, and requesting it is the only way for them to get the item or activity. Let’s look at an example to understand how that plays out.

Kevin’s father would like to teach him to ask for water when he needs it. Kevin’s father feeds him salty snacks that make him thirsty. This increases his motivation to drink water. He sees a glass of water in his father’s hand and reaches for it. His father holds back the glass and says, “water”. Kevin repeats the word water, and his father then gives him the glass of water. Kevin’s father used **motivation** to get him to ask for water, and Kevin’s use of language is reinforced by him getting the water. Therefore, in the future he is more likely to say “water” when he wants a glass of water.

Teaching a Child to Mand

To teach a child a mand, begin by identifying a preferred item or activity that she or he desires. For our example, let’s assume that Jill loves cucumbers and you would like her to learn how to ask for them.

Once you know that she loves cucumbers, you can put them out in a bowl on a table near her. Then you can say the word “cucumbers” while you touch the bowl so that she learns the word. If she reaches for the cucumbers without using the word, move them out of her reach. Next, you can prompt her to use the word herself by repeating “cucumbers”. Jill may respond in a variety of correct ways. At first, she may only point to the cucumbers. You can reinforce this behavior by giving her the cucumbers. Next, she may respond by saying a part of the word or the full word. You should **reinforce** this as well by giving her the cucumbers. If she does not respond correctly, do not give her the cucumbers. Instead, try again in a 1-2 minutes. You can use a number of different desired items in quick succession to teach her to use a variety of mands.

The ultimate goal of teaching mands is for the child to be able to use full sentences to communicate their desires. Manding is very beneficial for children with autism because it enables them to express their desires without getting frustrated. This decreases the likelihood of challenging behaviors as they now have access to functional language. Your child’s therapist should be able to help you identify ways in which you can teach various mands to your child.