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USING THE APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE IN DEALING WITH THE SYMPTOMS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER TO DEVELOP NEW ABILITIES

Sultan Nargiz Firdovsi

PhD student

Azerbaijan University of Languages

AZERBAIJAN

The Denver model of Early Intervention is considered to be one of the existing and successfully applied practices of complex therapy. This model is based on the norms of the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis). The use of the ABA technique in dealing with the symptoms of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) provides for the possibility of changing the behavior manifested through the development of communication and other skills. So, the intervention of ABA can be aimed at developing new abilities or minimizing undesirable behavior that interferes with the development of the child and his socio-psychological adaptation. More and more evidence indicates that intervention carried out by trained parents can be an important part of a therapeutic program aimed at socio-psychological adaptation [8, p.162]. What is commonly referred to as “parent education” in this case is divided into 2 categories: parental support and parental intervention. The support of parents is aimed at obtaining the necessary minimum of knowledge and brings indirect benefits to the child. It includes the coordination of care and psychological education. The method of “therapy by the hands of parents”, in which dad and mom master the techniques of helping a child, can be used in dealing with the main symptoms of ASD or other behavioral manifestations.

Educational trainings for parents can be conducted at home and at school. The approach of parental training can be used to develop skills such as obeying instructions, social communication, as well as to achieve other goals set by the parent, for example, reducing maladaptive behavior. The Denver model is a method of helping children with ASD that is widely used in the world and has proven to be highly effective. The essence of this technique is in the strategies by which ordinary everyday activities and routine procedures are transformed into a technique of game interaction, learning and simple communication. Using the Denver model, parents help the child cope with the difficulties they are experiencing and step by step overcome new stages of mastering social skills. This progressive technique allows parents to discern the characteristics of an autistic child and learn how to promote his more effective development [3, p.15].

It is well known that the first years of life are extremely important for the subsequent development of the child. The results of studies related to brain development clearly show how plastic the child’s brain is. The environment in which the child is located has a great influence both on his development and on the behavioral patterns demonstrated by him. This creates ample opportunities for the effective implementation of the assistance program. Significant changes, which will be difficult to achieve in the subsequent period, can be achieved at this time with less effort. An important feature of early intervention programs is the active participation of parents in them, as well as the direct connection of the tasks set with the life of the child and the family [7, p.29].

The most important advantage of the Denver model in relation to children with autism is that parents are able to apply behavioral strategies at home that specialists use in the process of early intervention. This is a very important conclusion. Because parents know their children better than specialists. Parents have a strong motivation to help children. Using learning strategies, they spend more time with children than anyone else. The study shows that therapy carried out by parents leads to the progress of verbal and nonverbal abilities, their gaming, communication and social skills, which contribute to the successful adaptation of autistic children [6, p.48].

The authors of the Denver model write that as a result of parental intervention, children develop communication and gaming skills quite successfully, while at the same time mutual joy from communication increases. The authors note that “parental therapy” for children with ASD at home leads to better memorization and more likely to use the skills that they were taught by specialists. At the same time, the parents themselves also have a reduced stress level, they become happier and more optimistic, realizing their competence [1, p.75]. The strategies of the Denver model are designed in such a way that parents can use them in their usual communication with the child, whether it is in games, during bathing, meals, walks, reading, doing household chores, etc. These strategies can turn parents’ daily activities into unique learning opportunities, thereby enhancing the effect of the child’s therapy. With the start of these strategies, parents will see how effective their help is and how good the child’s response to new learning opportunities will be.

We found that in teaching children basic skills, parents are not inferior in effectiveness to specialists in applied behavior analysis, applying strategies so that every moment of interaction with the child would have a learning character. The process of teaching a child something new at home is especially important, since he may not have such an opportunity elsewhere, or lack of time in the future will not allow him to consolidate these skills. We assumed that teaching parents and other relatives of children with ASD to use the Denver model and their acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and habits would give them the opportunity to gain a wealth of experience working with autistic children. In addition, this experience will allow them to help these children in the right direction, establish adequate communication and interaction with them, and as a result they will be able to adapt better to the environment in which they live.

To test this hypothesis, we resorted to an experiment. By randomization, parents of children diagnosed with ASD were included in the experimental group. The parents who participated in the experimental group were engaged in appropriate trainings on the Denver model once a week for 12 weeks. During the training, parents were informed on the following topics, as a result of which they developed the appropriate skills and abilities: how to keep a child’s attention, how to make classes more fun, how to teach a child to stand in order, how to develop nonverbal communication in a child and teach him to better understand this type of communication from other people, how to teach a child imitation, how to implement the principles of teaching ABA in practice, how to develop his skills of joint attention and expand his learning opportunities playing together, including with toys, how to help him play independently, how to develop the child’s symbolic game skills and form an active speech in him, as well as help him learn to understand it [3, p.452].

After the training, the communication and attitude of the parents in the experimental group were compared with the parents in the control group, and it was noticed that the children of the parents who participated in the training made significant progress in their social, communicative and adaptive skills. As a result of

all these improvements in the behavior and attitudes of children, positive dynamics on the way to socio-psychological adaptation became apparent. It follows from this that our hypothesis that the involvement of family members in the Denver Early Intervention program has a positive effect on the socio-psychological adaptation of autistic children was confirmed in our experiment. The child's mental development also depends on his socio-psychological adaptation to the environment in which he lives. It is difficult to ensure development without socio-psychological adaptation. Hence, it can be concluded that the involvement of parents and other relatives in the Denver Early Intervention Program and the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and habits in families with autistic children helps loved ones to create a favorable environment for the appropriate adaptation of their children.

As is known, the adaptation of an individual to the environment occurs through the mechanisms of assimilation and accommodation. In the process of assimilation, social environmental factors enter into the cognitive structure of the personality, and in the process of accommodation, the personality implements its behavior and attitudes in accordance with social environmental factors [2, p.80]. Thus, parents undergoing the Denver Early Intervention Program, through acquired skills, create conditions for social development, so that the information necessary for the child's adaptation enters his cognitive structure, and in the created conditions, knowledge becomes behavior through reinforcement.

From a psychological point of view, socio-psychological adaptation is the acquisition of a new behavior by an individual. Being adaptable means learning new behaviors and attitudes. The main problem of children with ASD is their unwillingness to independently include social factors related to relationships and communicative features in their cognitive structures. By joining the Denver Early Intervention Program, parents can incorporate exactly what is necessary for socio-psychological adaptation into the cognitive structure of their children.

Development is closely related to the social environment. The social environment determines the development of any mental trait. Therefore, the source of influence at our disposal to ensure the development of personality is the factor of the social environment. The more "rich" the conditions of social development are, the more developed individuals living in this environment are, and the easier they can adapt to the environment in which they live [3, p.76].

This means that the Denver Early Intervention Program allows parents to become richer and more accessible in solving the problem under discussion. A rich social environment ultimately contributes to the development of a child with autism growing up in the family. As a result, by going through an early intervention program, parents can become the "will" of children with autism. This potential helps them to create a favorable environment for the adaptation of children in socio-psychological terms.

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