



INFORMATION SHEET

www.missouristate.edu/access/
projectaccess@missouristate.edu
866-481-3841



Time Delay

Consider this scenario: Sandy is provided discrete trial sessions in her preschool setting. The teacher notices she has to provide quite a bit of prompting to encourage Sandy to respond. As the teacher reviewed video of the sessions, she realized she was not giving Sandy much time to respond at all and wondered if Sandy had more time, she might respond on her own. The teacher is concerned Sandy is becoming dependent on the prompts and will struggle to reach independence with the skill. The teacher decided to implement time delay.

There are two types of Time Delay, and information from the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders describes both as follows: *With progressive time delay, teachers and other practitioners gradually increase the waiting time between an instruction and any prompts that might be used to elicit a response from a learner. With constant time delay, there is no delay between the instruction and prompt when a learner is first learning a skill. However with constant time delay, a fixed amount of time is always used between the instruction and the prompt as the learner becomes more proficient at using the new skill.*

Debra Leach, in her book, Bringing ABA into Your Inclusive Classroom: A Guide to Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders says, “The time delay strategy is often not used enough when working with students with ASD.” We are quick to prompt, which can lead to prompt dependency. Leach cautions to implement the time delay in a supportive manner. Look at the child expectantly, but if no response after the time you have determined, go ahead and prompt.

One of the specialists at Project ACCESS recalls recording a language sample for a little girl. On review of the sample, it became clear the student was taking fully 6 seconds to respond. Staff members working with this student would be wise to implement time delay to avoid her becoming dependent on prompts presented too quickly.

Use of prompting may be an effective strategy, but adding time delay before prompting may prevent prompt dependence in some students.

Information obtained from:

Time Delay: Steps for Implementation published by the National Professional Development Center on ASD 10/2010.

Bringing ABA Into Your Inclusive Classroom: A Guide to Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Debra Leach, Ed.D., BCBA published by Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 2010.

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