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Background: Training instructors and caregivers to carry out programs and tasks effectively is an essential component in behaviour development and management programs. Due to the large number of instructors (parents, educators, and tutors) needed to provide intensive intervention, such as discrete-trials teaching for children with autism, it is important to investigate efficient methods for training instructors. As a result of the high demand for instructors and educators to work with children with a developmental disability such as autism, and given the effectiveness of behaviour-based teaching strategies, studies have sought to examine various methods for training individuals to implement such programs. This study examines 2 methods for training parents and therapists to implement a discrete-trials teaching strategy with children with autism.

Purpose: The purpose of experiment 1 was to evaluate (a) whether the parents of children with autism could be trained to teach their children a variety of skills and (b) to determine whether 2 different training programs would be differentially successful and applicable to various child target behaviours following training. The purpose of experiment 2 was to examine the effects of several components of the training procedure in experiment 1 and assess their generalizability.

Participants and Setting: In experiment 1, participants were four mothers of children with autism, none of whom had any formal training in behaviour modification or autism. Seven children with autism also participated. In experiment 2, three adults who had requested training in behaviour modification and autism participated. Six children with autism also participated.

Method: In experiment 1, a multi-response baseline design was used to assess the acquisition and generalization skills of 2 different training programs for parents. The baseline involved a pre-determined number of sessions (range 2-8) in which the parents attempted to teach a child with autism in a one-to-one session. During these baseline sessions, if the parent was unsuccessful in teaching the child they were given a brief demonstration that was directed at teaching a specific target behaviour to the child. The demonstration was 10-15 minutes long and consisted of 5 discrete trials. Following the demonstration, the parent was asked to attempt to teach the child again. If they were successful, a new target behaviour was assigned for the parent to teach the child. Following these predetermined sessions, a different training procedure was implemented. This procedure was not directed at specific target behaviours for the children but rather, it focused on a variety of procedures used to teach children with autism. This consisted of three 30-min lectures and two 37-min videotapes. Following the training, the parents were again asked to teach the child with autism. Their performance was observed and recorded along with the child's performance to keep track of any improvements made across teaching sessions. In experiment 2, a multi-response baseline design was again used and baseline sessions occurred for a predetermine number of sessions. Prior to sessions, written instructions were given describing the task to be taught and instructors were asked to use their own judgement. No answers to questions or demonstrations were provided. Training was provided in the same manner as the second training program in experiment 1 (lectures and video tapes).

Conclusions: In experiment 1, results showed that both training procedures were effective in improving acquisition of parent skills however only the second procedure was effective in teaching a more general set of skills and target behaviors. In experiment 2, the results showed that (a) all instructors demonstrated improvement after training and (b) that the training had specific effects on the instructor's performance. Overall, the results suggest that (a) untrained individuals do require training in order to work effectively and efficiently with children with autism and (b) the training package without the presence of a master

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teacher proved to be effective to teach the instructors to teach a number of target behaviors to a number of children.