Using ASD Reading: Tips for Successful Implementation

Often, children with ASD, even those who do not speak, do amazingly well in reading. However, for a host of reasons (discomfort with the unknown, fear of failure, etc.), they may be guarded about dealing with this new domain. In the material that follows, we'll review some key issues in using the program and how they should be handled.

1. **Attending to teaching material:** Teachers of children with ASD are familiar with the many behavioral problems that the children can display including bursts of aggression, withdrawal, meltdowns, etc. Of particular interest in terms of teaching is whether the children regularly demonstrate such behaviors when asked to meet the demands of the curriculum**. In terms of ASD Reading, it is essential that a child regularly –for a period of 5 to 10 minutes--be willing and able to respond effectively to the demands he or she is facing**. (Their capacity for longer periods of attention and compliance will grow over the course of the program.) At the outset, 5 to 10 minutes is sufficient. This is a pre-requisite behavior for the program to be implemented. If the behavior is not present, the program should be delayed until the child does demonstrate this level of responsivity to the teaching material.

2. **Hand support:** For a host of reasons—including being supersensitive to novel information, the children may be reluctant or hesitant to meet the demands that the computer presents to them. Regardless of the source of the behavior, one of the best techniques you can use is to provide hand support for the children while they are executing the tasks. See this tutorial on how to implement hand support:
   http://goo.gl/xAnkSA
   Hand support is markedly different from the hand-over-hand activity that is commonly used with the children. With hand support, you do not move the child's hand. Instead, you support the hand and prevent the child from executing any action other than the correct one for that particular item. Generally, once the children are accustomed to the material, the hand support can be withdrawn. However, for children who have fine motor problems, it is useful to provide the support for however long the child needs it. It greatly eases the motor demands of the tasks, allowing the children to pay greater attention to the cognitive and language components that they are mastering.

3. **Avoiding requests for expressive language:** In teaching reading, there is an enormous pull to ask the children to say the words on the page ((e.g., *What does that say*?"). If the child spontaneously and appropriately decodes the words and says what they are, that is fine. But particularly for the many children who have minimal or no expressive language, demands for language are stressful and non-productive. The program has been designed for the children to learn reading and language effectively without any requirement for expressive language. So it is best to avoid any requests for the child to say the words he or she is learning.

4. **Mastering Handwriting:** Although handwriting is not required for ASD Reading, it is an excellent skill for the children to learn. Among other advantages, it allows children who do not speak to express themselves via language without having any devices—simply

some paper and pencil. If you are interested, we offer an easy to use handwriting program that supplements ASD Reading. You can find it here: https://www.asdreading.com/store/letter-land

5. **Extending the material:** It is useful and productive for the children, outside the program, to use the words and concepts they are learning. To this end, it is productive to create word cards for words the children have learned and use them in a variety of settings. For example, if a child is playing with a plane, you can put out several cards – each containing a word and ask him or her to create the sentence "*here is a plane*." You can also present sentences to the child (e.g. "*the cat is jumping*"), show several pictures (e.g., a cat sitting, a cat jumping, a dog jumping) and ask the child to select the appropriate picture. Finding additional ways to make literacy a part of the child's world is very beneficial.