Understanding & Treating Selective Mutism (SM)

Child Directed Interaction (CDI) Skills

CDI skills are used during warm up periods with the child to help them feel less anxious and more successful around new people and in new environments. However, the CDI skills are great to use at all times with children!

Skill	Reasons	Examples
Labeled Praise: A positive statement about what the child is doing in the moment. *Tell your child exactly what you like about what they're doing!*	• Increases the praised behavior • Shows approval • Increases the child's self-esteem and confidence	Great job using your voice to answer my question! I love that you looked at me while you told me that.
Reflection: A statement that repeats back to the child his or her verbalization verbatim or paraphrases what the child said. *Avoid "tip ups" that turn the reflection into a question!*	• Shows interest in the child's ideas • Demonstrates acceptance and understanding • Improves the child's speech • Increases verbal communication	Child: I'm hungry Parent: You're telling me you're hungry. Child: Where is the bathroom? Parent: You're asking me where the bathroom is... (provide answer)
Behavioral Description: A statement about the child's moment-by-moment behavior. *Pretend you are a sportscaster!*	• Allows the child to lead the play • Demonstrates enthusiasm and interest • Teaches concepts • Models appropriate speech and vocabulary	You are coloring a flower with the red crayon. You're smiling and looking at the other children. I see you shaking your head.

CDI Guidelines

★ Follow the child's lead in the play
★ Avoid asking questions and giving commands
★ Avoid (constructive) criticism or any negative appraisals of the child's behavior
★ Ignore minor misbehavior (and try to "catch" them behaving appropriately as soon as possible afterwards)
★ Describe nonverbal communication without interpreting its meaning (e.g., "I see you're pointing," rather than "I see you're pointing to the chips.")
★ Be enthusiastic and enjoy your time with the child!

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Verbal Directed Interaction (VDI) Skills

VDI skills are used to increase child speech by asking certain types of questions and applying a flexible sequence of prompts to support the child's success in responding.

Type of Question	Considerations	Examples
Forced Choice: A question in which two or more possible responses are given within the question.	• Helpful during early interactions or in difficult situations • Provides support in selecting a response, making it easier for the child to answer	Is your favorite color *pink* or *blue*? Would you rather play on *the swings*, *the slide*, or *do you not care*? Do you want to watch the movie *Frozen* or *a different movie*?
Open Ended: A question in which a possible answer is not suggested within the question. *Typically starts with "who," "what," "where," "when," "why," or "how"*	• Allows the child to be more expressive and come up with his or her own response • May be more challenging for children concerned with being "wrong" or evaluated	Who is your best friend? What did you do at school today? How many coins do you have? Why do you like cookies more than ice cream?
Yes or No: A question in which a possible or expected response is either "yes" or "no." *Try to avoid these!*	• Can be answered more easily through nonverbal means (e.g., nodding, shaking head) • Limits responses to just one word • Can be quickly changed into forced choice questions by adding the words "yes or no?" to the end of the question	Do you like seafood? → Do you like seafood, *yes or no*? Did you finish your homework? → Did you finish your homework *or are you not done yet*? Did you make this yourself? → Did you make this yourself *or did someone help you*?

VDI Guidelines

★ Always wait between 5-10 seconds for the child to answer
★ Use a reflection + a labeled praise to reinforce each and every verbal responses!
★ Avoid yes or no questions
  ★ If/when you ask a yes or no question, change it to a forced choice question right away!
★ Describe nonverbal communication without interpreting its meaning (e.g., "I see you're pointing," rather than "I see you're pointing to the chips.")
★ Repeat the same question up to 3 times
★ If the child struggles to respond verbally, return to the last situation he or she was successful
★ Always revisit questions that were initially left unanswered
★ Reflect the child's speech with your brave (i.e., regular volume) voice, even if he or she whispers, especially in group contexts
★ Continue to use CDI skills in between questions

VDI Sequence Examples

When the child answers right away:
- Adult: "Would you like to draw with crayons or markers?" (forced choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: "Markers."
- Adult: "Markers!" (reflection) "Great job telling me what you wanted to use!" (labeled praise)

When the child has difficulty choosing:
- Adult: "Do you want chocolate or vanilla ice cream?" (forced-choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: No response.
- Adult: "Chocolate or vanilla?" (forced choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: No response.
- Adult: "Do you want chocolate, yes or no?" (forced choice)
- Child: Nods head.
- Adult: "I see you nodding." (behavior description) "Is that a yes or a no?" (forced choice)
- Child: "…yes"
- Adult: "Yes, you want chocolate." (reflection) Good job telling me what you want!" (labeled praise)

When the child answers with a nonverbal response:
- Adult: "Would you like to draw with crayons or markers?" (forced choice)
- Child: Immediately points to markers.
- Adult: "I see you pointing." (behavior description) "Does that mean you want the markers or crayons?" (forced choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: "I want the markers."
- Adult: "You want the markers!" (reflection) "Super job telling me what you wanted using your words!" (labeled praise)

When the child answers with a barely audible response:
Prompts for louder or full voice should only be used if child is ready to move to that higher step.
- Adult: "Do you want to watch Cinderella or Frozen?" (forced-choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: Under breath "F..o..z.n."
- Adult: "I see you are trying to answer." (behavior description) "I couldn't hear you. Tell me again a little louder." (direct command)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: "Frozen."
- Adult: "You want to watch Frozen!" (reflection) "I love that you told me that with a loud voice!" (labeled praise)

When the child answers in a whisper:
Prompts for louder or full voice should only be used if child is ready for the challenge.
- Adult: "Do you want to eat your sandwich or your pretzels first?" (forced-choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: "Sandwich." (whisper)
- Adult: "I hear you whispering." (behavior description) "Tell me what you want with your full voice." (direct command)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: "Sandwich." (full voice)
- Adult: "You want to eat your sandwich first!" (reflection) "Great job using your full voice to tell me!" (labeled praise)

When the child doesn't respond at all:
- Adult: "Would you like cookies or crackers for snack?" (forced-choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: No response.
- Adult: "Cookies or crackers?" (forced-choice)
  Wait!   1   2   3   4   5 seconds
- Child: No response.
- Adult: "Do you want cookies for snack, yes or no?" (forced-choice)
- Child: No response.
- Adult: "It might be hard to answer in front of all of these people, let's go practice in the hallway." **OR** "That might be hard to answer right now, think about it and I will come back and ask you in a little bit." **OR** "Go practice with mom and then come back and tell me."