



Case of “Y” – Treating School Refusal

Bruce M. Gale, PhD
bruce@bgaleconsulting.com

PENT Cadre Summit February 11, 2004 Rancho Cucamonga, California

This is a case of a 16-year-old developmentally delayed student who was referred for assessment and intervention services due to his refusing to return to school. He had been out for two months at the time of the referral and earlier attempts to reward his behavior or improve compliance had not been successful.

Symptoms for purposes of assessment and intervention included:

- Good basic receptive language skills
- Delayed developed expressive language
- Highly distorted articulation, making him nearly unintelligible to most people who attempted to interact with him
- Chronic refusal to comply with most requests leading to aggressive outbursts

Treatment Approach

- M.A.I.M – Meet/Assess/Intervene/Meet
- M.I.A.M.I – Meet/Intervene (best guess)/Assess/Meet/Intervene (refined)

Initial Data and Case Formulation

- During the first meeting, he acted as though I didn't exist
- His mother repeatedly asked him to do things. He responded by treating he in the same manner he responded to me.
- He appeared pretty comfortable on the couch
- He didn't bring home his Aug Comm device
- His bus ride lasted up to an hour; he often fell asleep and “was like a stone.”

1st Session (9/25/03): During home visit, said “hello” exactly once, then when he ignored me, I pulled out a laptop to show his mother some of the technology I had *hoped* to use with him, but made no additional attempts to interact. Let him avoid and observe my interaction with his mother; Kept visit short (about 45 minutes); Saying “Goodbye”: Said goodbye once and left. When his mother attempted to have him “be polite,” assured her it was fine AND LEFT QUICKLY.

(Continued on back)

2nd Visit (10/3/03): Came in and apologized to him (no reason, just gets their attention); Asked him if he'd like to play a game, "Haunted House." Accepted his head nod and made no attempt to have him speak; Played, he won; Left quickly again, asked his permission to return (risky, but necessary).

3rd Visit (10/13/03): Came and let him play Haunted House again. Did even better; Took out video camera and asked if he'd like to make a movie; Took him for a walk and videotaped him street crossing, turning it into a tutorial; Left quickly, didn't worry about "goodbye." Asked his mother to "tone down" any angry responses when he didn't comply and to only ask him to do things one time.

4th Visit (10/20/03): Arranged for his mother to drop him off at school and meet me there; We went at the end of the day; no attending class; He showed me around, began to speak more to me; Cleared in advance ability to videotape on campus (high school); Left campus, it had been prearranged that I would drive him for root beer; As we walked, managed to pass a parked city bus. Asked driver if we could go on. Videotaped him appearing to get on bus independently and sitting, then leaving when I requested it; Went for root beer, videotaped it being served, him "clinking" for a toast.

5th Visit (10/21/03): Met "Y" at end of day at bus; Had made an 18 minute slightly edited video for him to watch at school; could take home on the weekends only; Left it with his teacher at school;

6th Visit (10/23/03): Inserviced bus driver, asked her to ask him one time only, no additional prompting; Switched to a smaller camera, recorded his teacher, "Y" getting on bus, off; Brought root beer to celebrate getting off bus

Summary

- Intervention incorporated use of:
 - Differential reinforcement
 - Behavioral Momentum and Interspersed Requests
 - Reducing social reinforcement for noncompliance
 - Pivotal Response training
 - Backward chaining
 - Prompting and fading
- Use of video technology allowed him to engage in positive practice, didn't require that he speak
- Helped with behavioral rehearsal
- Provided a contingent reward for school attendance (reportedly watched the VHS video 19 times the first weekend at home. They counted?)
- Intervention has maintained to current date and family is now interested in increasing at home compliance