

What is Modeling?

Modeling is a teaching technique in which a student learns by first watching a model perform a skill and then matching the model's behaviors under similar circumstances.

Modeling has several important advantages as a teaching strategy. It is a normalized learning technique, utilized by all children, and it can be especially beneficial in inclusive settings. It can also be cost-effective, allowing several children to learn from a model at the same time.

What types of skills can I teach with it?

Modeling can be used to teach communication skills, social interaction skills, play skills, and daily living skills. In the research on modeling as an instructional strategy, most of the skills taught have been fairly simple, discrete skills, such as expressive labeling, receptive labeling, answering scripted questions, and simple discrimination. However, a few researchers have taught more complex skills, such as playing a card game, buying a snack, or washing one's face.

Does it matter whether my model is a peer or an adult?

Modeling has been used successfully with both adults and peers as models. However, the ultimate goal is often for a child to imitate his peers, as this is natural learning strategy employed by typically developing children. Thus, using another child as a model may help a child with ASD develop the ability to learn naturally from his or her peers.

How do you do it?

When using modeling in its purest form, both the model and the target student are present. The teacher presents the relevant instruction or cue to the model to perform the behavior (for example, asking the model the target question or giving the model the appropriate toy) and the model demonstrates the target response. Often the teacher will reinforce the model for performing the correct behavior. Then the teacher will present the same instruction or cue to the target student.



Modeling:

An instructional strategy where a student learns by watching a model perform a target skill.

Modeling can be enhanced with both reinforcement and error correction. With reinforcement, the learner is given a reinforcer, such as praise or a tangible, for performing the target behavior. With error correction, if the learner doesn't perform the behavior, he or she is assisted in doing so.. Either the teacher or the model can do the error correction. The effectiveness of the strategy may also be enhanced, especially when teaching more complex skills, by reinforcing the learner for attending to the model when he or she is demonstrating the desired behavior.

Does it work?

The research on using modeling to teach children with ASD is mixed. Some researchers have used it successfully, whereas others have found it to be unsuccessful. It is unclear to date what the parameters for successful modeling are. It may be that higher functioning children or children with strong imitation skills are better candidates for the strategy. It also may be that modeling is more successful in more controlled environments without a lot of distracting stimuli.

See more tip sheets and research briefs at the PDA Center website:
<http://depts.washington.edu/pdacent/>

Are there any prerequisites?

We don't know the definitive answer to this question. However, it is reasonable to assume that the better a child's imitation abilities are, the more likely he or she is to benefit from modeling. If a child does not imitate, he can and should be taught this skill first. Several studies have been done demonstrating how to teach preschoolers to imitate their peers (Garfinkle & Schwartz, 2002; Venn, Wolery, Werts, Morris, & et al., 1993), and the book, *Work in Progress*, by Leaf and McEachin (1999) also outlines how to systematically teach a child with ASD to imitate.

Resources

Garfinkle, A. N., & Schwartz, I. S. (2002). Peer imitation: Increasing social interactions in children with autism and other developmental disabilities in inclusive preschool classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 22(1), 26-38.

Leaf, R., & McEachin, J. E. (1999). *A work in progress: Behavior management strategies and a curriculum for intensive behavioral treatment of autism*. New York: DRL Books.

Venn, M. L., Wolery, M., Werts, M. G., Morris, A., & et al. (1993). Embedding instruction in art activities to teach preschoolers with disabilities to imitate their peers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 8(3), 277-294.

The Professional Development in Autism Center (PDA) provides training and support for school districts, families and communities to ensure that students with ASD have access to high quality, evidence-based educational services in his or her local school district.