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Imitation Effects on Joint Attention Behaviors of Children with Autism

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of adult imitation on three joint attention behaviors of nonverbal preschoolers with autism including referential looking, gaze following and gesturing to the adult. Videotapes taken from a previous study were recoded for the adult's imitation behavior and the children's joint attention behaviors (Field, Field, Sanders, & Nadel, 2001). In the original study, twenty nonverbal, 4 - 6-year-old children with autism were randomly assigned to one of two groups, an imitation or a contingent responsivity group. Both groups of children engaged in an intervention play phase during which the adult imitated the children or contingently responded to them and a subsequent spontaneous play phase. ANOVAs revealed that the imitation group children versus the contingent responsivity group children spent a greater percent time looking at the adult during the intervention phase and looking at the adult and following the adult's gaze during the spontaneous play phase. A correlation analysis on the data collapsed across the 2 groups yielded significant correlations between adult imitation during the intervention phase and referential looking and gaze following during the spontaneous play phase. Overall, these results revealed that adults imitating preschoolers with autism elicited joint attention behaviors, highlighting the value of imitation as an intervention.

KEYWORDS

Imitation; Joint Attention; Autism

Cite this paper

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