



Therapy" Ain't Tennis Lessons

It's funny to think about how therapy has been provided much like tennis lessons in the past—a student works with a professional for an hour each week on specific skills. The hour of instruction is up to the professional, but practice between lessons is the student's responsibility. Tennis lessons alone will not make someone a better player; it's the practice between the lessons that makes a difference.

When it comes to "therapy", a child with special needs probably will not generalize the skills he or she works on with a specialist during "therapy" time to other times, other people, and places where he or she needs the skills. Specialists must plan for a child to have opportunities to practice skills outside of "therapy" time in order for the child to make efficient progress. Here are three things specialists can do to ensure that children have ample practice opportunities:

1. Use routines-based assessment to identify functional skills. Find out what the child needs to learn to be successful in their daily routines and make those skills the goals. Many times specialists focus on prerequisite skills, or things that are not directly related to what a child does every day. This definitely makes it much harder to identify times when a child can practice outside of the "therapy" time.
2. Incorporate consultation. Talk with other adults who spend time with the child (i.e., teachers and family members) before, while or after you work with the child. It is important for teachers to know what the specialists are working on with the child so they can also address those things. It is important for specialists to get feedback from the child's teachers on their suggestions. If a specialist's suggestions are not practical or are irrelevant, they are likely to be disregarded.
3. Provide services in the classroom. Studies have shown that teachers and specialists consult with one another four times more when specialists work with children versus out of class. Teachers can see what the specialist does with a child and specialists have the opportunity to assess children in context and to address situations when and where they arise. By identifying functional skills, talking with other caregivers and being in the classroom, specialists can ensure that meaningful intervention occurs between "therapy" sessions.