





## Caregiver Coaching

- Formalized by Rush and Sheldon
  - Joint Planning
  - Observation
  - Action/Practice
  - Reflection
  - Feedback
- Aligns with NJ Standards: Family-centered, Collaborative, Natural Routines
- Learning embedded in everyday routines
- Caregivers supported and empowered as primary agents of change

• **Capacity building:**  
Caregivers should feel more competent and confident over time (not just compliant with the plan)

© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Benefits of Caregiver Coaching

- Boosts Dosage: More chances to learn—many more!
- Builds Self-Efficacy: Parents see themselves as partners and better able to support their child
- Strengthens Relationships: More positive interactions and affection (Steiner 2011)
- Improves Outcomes: vocabulary and verbal output (Feijan Ramirez 2020)

© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Real-World Gap

- Caregiver burnout and cognitive/emotional load
- Pressure for direct therapy
- Decreased understanding of EI approach and SLP's role
- Limited training on adult learning theory

© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Caregiver Coaching Pitfalls

(Even when we use a coaching mode)

- Same strategy over and over
- Too many strategies at once
- Disjointed progression
- Implied vs. explicit
- Vague vs. specific

© 2019 TASH

## The Foundation: Meet Caregivers Where They Are

- Single idea or multiple ideas
- Concrete or abstract
- Education or Implementation
- Celebrating wins or Identifying target areas
- Play-based or Routine-based

© 2019 TASH

## Making Parent Coaching Work



- **Target** skills at the right level (emerging, not absent)
- **Select** a manageable number of strategies to focus on
- **Anchor** those strategies to existing daily routines
- **Reflect** on their implementation and adjust accordingly

© 2019 TASH

## The Skills First Method

A structured coaching tool for facilitating parent implementation of evidence-based strategies



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Step One: Choose a Skill

- Foundational language skills
- Suggested to pick 1-2 skills at a time
- A cusp skill = emerging, not absent
- Relevant to family goals and overall progress

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Foundational Skill Examples



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Step Two: Choose a Strategy

- Choose 1-3 high-impact strategies
- Specifically selected to target the skill
- Activate coaching!
  - Action/Practice
  - Reflection
  - Feedback

© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Strategy Examples



© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Step Three: Plug into Activities

- Everyday routines and activities, including play
- What your child and family are already doing
- Moments of calm and ease
- Caregivers only have to focus on a few daily activities

© 2018

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---







## The Anatomy of a Skills-First Session

1. Review last week's plan
  - a. How did it go? (open ended)
  - b. How often were you able to use the strategy?
  - c. Was anything challenging or confusing about the strategy?
  - d. How did your child react? (interest, attention, communication)
  - e. Continue, modify, or discontinue
2. Identify a skill (Joint planning)
3. Introduce a strategy (Joint planning)
4. Coaching session around strategy (Observation, Practice, Reflection, Feedback)
5. Collaborate on this week's plan (Joint planning)

© 2014

## Tips for Coaching Using the SFM

- Frame your session
- Easy wins first
- Practice together
- Start small
- Celebrate all wins (caregiver and child)

© 2014

## Is "Skills-First" Strengths-Based?

- It should be!
  - a. Skills are the target
  - b. Strengths are the entry point for skills, strategies, and activities



© 2014

## SFM Scripts: Skill Selection

- I notice Nathan is starting to copy me when I bang on the drum. That's a great step toward communication! Do you notice him copying you sometimes too?
- You said Riley often gets upset at snack time. What do you think is causing her to feel frustrated?
- It's great that Liara understands a lot of what you're saying during the day! I'm noticing she seems to understand me better when I use gestures. Sometimes less-familiar instructions can be harder to follow.
- What are some ways you noticed Frankie interacting with you this week?

© 2014

## SFM Scripts: Strategy Selection

- Providing choices can give Oscar an easier way to take a turn in the interaction.
- Let's try adding a word to what Harper says so that she can see how we put words together. I'll show you what I mean while we play with this doll, and then you can give it a try.
- One way to emphasize the words and sounds you use is to say it with a sing-songy voice. Is that something you would be comfortable trying?
- Nice! Rish took your hand and you said "let's go, Mama". You did a great job saying what he meant by that gesture.
- I know this is something you are already doing, but let's make it even more intentional this week.

© 2014

## SFM Scripts: Activity Selection

- Don't worry about setting aside special "speech" time with Amaya. She'll learn best through the things you already do together every day!
- What are some of your favorite activities to do with Zacharia?
- If we choose washing hands as our activity, how many chances do you think you'd have to practice the strategy?
- Is Sonya usually relaxed when you do her hair?
- When would you like to focus on rotating out loud?
- Should we put a post-it note near the bath so you remember to use the strategy?

© 2014

**More support between sessions:  
Can AI play a role?**

- AI as a new normal
- Curated information
- Valuable insights
- Access and equity
- Guardrails are a must:
  - De-identified information (creating an alias)
  - Clinician-guided input and -reviewed output

© 2024

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**AI Assistants from Let's Talk Toddler  
in development**

**ELLA: the Early Language Learning Assistant**

- Identify target skills and strategies
- Build Skills First Method plans
- Answer questions about language development

**FAYE: the Feeding Assistant for Young Eaters**

- Suggest food chaining plans
- Brainstorm sensory play ideas
- Answer questions about feeding development

© 2024

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Our Clients and Their Caregivers  
Deserve:**

- ✧ Clarity over confusion
- ✧ Support over overwhelm
  - ✧ Confidence over self-doubt
  - ✧ Empowerment over stress
  - ✧ Predictability over uncertainty

© 2024

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

