



Training Tips and Tricks

Training Without a Trainer

It is not recommended that a child perform training without a parent present to monitor performance and provide appropriate structure, even when the parent does not have to be actively involved in the training by inputting responses. Typically, a child will not be capable of monitoring how much time they've spent on a given task and will not change to a different task every 10 minutes. They can easily spend the entire hour working on one module. Further, if they know they have not already passed a module, they may try to escape out of the module before they complete it and try to start over. This should not be allowed as the point of the training is not whether the level is passed but that the person completes each attempt at a module and tries to do his best in order to get the full benefit from the training. Further, training data is stored in the server database and escaping in the middle of the module causes the training data to be deleted.

For some adults, however, there is not always someone available to facilitate the training process on those modules where a verbal response is given and the trainer inputs the response. This is required on all of the Memory modules that require a verbal response. However, there is a workaround so that these modules can be performed independently. The trainee can write their responses on a sheet of paper and then bring up the screen to input the responses and mark off whatever they wrote down. On Spatial Picture Memory, a grid can be drawn out on the paper and the verbal responses can be written in each box of the grid and then compared with the answer screen. The only modules within the program that require a verbal response and don't have a workaround are Color Arrows and Color Words.

Working with the Metronome

The metronome serves several functions. On some modules, the metronome is merely an audio indicator that a timeclock is running down. However, it is admittedly a source of distraction that the trainee must learn to tune out while paying attention to the task at hand. It can be difficult for some individuals to ignore the metronome either because it is distracting or because it creates a sense of pressure because they are working against the clock. However, it is important that the trainee master this because the world is full of distractions and there are often time pressures to completing tasks. However, if the metronome proves to be an insurmountable problem, it can either be turned off from the Program/Global Parameters drop-down at the top of the screen or the sound can be turned off on the computer.

Other tasks, however, require the individual to respond "on beat" with the metronome. On these modules, the sound should not be turned off. The purpose of the metronome in this case is to push the skill to a level of proficiency that it can be performed without hesitation. On these modules, the computer will keep track of accuracy, but it is up to the trainer's judgment whether the individual responded on beat with the metronome, which is one of the requirements for passing a level. This needs to be strictly enforced.

On training modules where the person must respond on beat, they may make an error which is corrected. This will interrupt performance briefly for the error correction. The trainee will need to restart where they left off and get themselves back on beat. A simple strategy is to count down "3, 2, 1" and then begin responding on beat again. As long as the trainee continues on beat then they can be allowed to pass that level.

Some people prefer to respond "offbeat" so that they are not talking over the metronome. This is acceptable if it is easier for the individual.

On Color Words and Color Arrows, the trainer is required to input whether the trainee's response is correct or incorrect. On these modules, it is important that the trainer input the responses as soon as they're given so that the box advances to the next training item. If the trainer does not do so, the trainee can be thrown offbeat.

Sometimes, the metronome is a problem because some individuals have a very poor sense of rhythm. If this is the case, you should log into the website and go to the References page where there are audio recordings of the metronome at various speeds. These audio recordings should be played and have the trainee clap or tap on the table along with the metronome. They should practice doing this until they are able to tap/clap on beat without error.

The Timer Bar

As with the metronome, some individuals become very anxious and stressed by the timer bar that is at the bottom of the screen on many of the modules. While it is important to learn how to perform under pressure, if this is causing too much of a problem then a strip of black construction paper can be taped over the bottom of the screen so that the timer bar is not visible.

Line Orientation

There are levels in which the "base line" is rotated which requires that the individual reorient the base line in their mind in order to properly judge the angle. Some children do not understand this concept and it may be necessary to draw this on paper and then rotate the paper to help them understand what the task requires.

"Cheating"

Children can be very creative and develop strategies for circumventing the intended performance demands of a training module. This can include anchoring their finger on the screen, tracing on the desktop with their finger, keeping a number counted out on their fingers that they need to remember in their head for later, etc. Also, a child may

hit the Escape key and end a training trial prematurely when they know they have made too many errors and will not pass the level. Doing so results in a loss of data regarding their performance. It is important that the child understand that the point of the activity is not whether they pass or fail, but that they engage in the mental activity in order to strengthen their ability. Another common "strategy" that some children will use is on Spatial Number Visualization on levels where the number line is no longer present on the screen. The purpose of removing the number line is to force the individual to have to work on mental visualization and see the number line in their head while following the instructions. However, some children will watch the numeric keys on the keyboard while following the instructions. They should not be allowed to do this. Similarly, on Spatial Visualization, they may use the calculator style numeric keypad to help them keep track of where they are in the grid even though the numbers on the numeric keypad do not match up to the numbers in the grid. In observing their performance, if you discover that they are utilizing a strategy which allows them to perform a task in a way that was not intended, you should stop them from doing this.

Maintaining Motivation

While there are some training modules that a child may enjoy performing, that is certainly not true for the majority of the training that they will be participating in. It is very common for individuals to pass some of the early levels of a module in one or two attempts because those levels are within their ability. However, they will eventually "hit the wall" on a level that exceeds their current ability. This is where the real training begins and the repetitive attempts on these levels are stimulating the brain to undergo physical changes (develop more intricate connections between neurons) that will allow the individual to eventually pass the level. When this happens, the next one or two levels may be passed relatively quickly before hitting the wall again.

Performing the same level of the task 20, 30, 40 times or more over many days can be very frustrating. It is important to recognize that one role of the trainer is to be a "cheerleader" and constantly praise the child for their efforts. Further, it is recommended that the Patient Treatment Log be maintained for every training session and that the information from the results screen be written down for each attempt. From this data, you should be able to demonstrate that they are making steady progress and getting closer to passing the level.

It is also recommended that those training tasks that are most frustrating be performed at the beginning of the session and save the modules that they seem to enjoy for the end.

If frustration becomes too great, the training can be paused in order to allow the child to take a brief break (i.e., 10 minutes). However, it is not recommended that training sessions be broken up, such as half in the morning and half in the afternoon. This method would reduce the overall intensity of general mental activity provided by the program over a one hour session.

Training Consistency

Ideally, training should be performed on a daily basis. However, in the real world, this is not always possible. If circumstances demanded that a session is missed occasionally, this will not generally compromise treatment outcome. However, if treatment intensity falls below an average of five days per week, the treatment outcomes diminish rapidly. In such cases, it is recommended that training be discontinued until circumstances change that consistent participation on a daily basis can be achieved. However, vacations or breaks in treatment due to illness will not compromise treatment outcome if treatment intensity was appropriate up to the time of the break and resumes after the break. This can be seen when individuals are learning to play a musical instrument. Vacations do not disrupt progress, only the consistency with which the individual practices.

Training Modules That Require Math Computations

There are some modules that require that the individual perform basic mathematical computations. These include Spatial Number Visualization, Divided Attention Auditory Calculation and Divided Attention Visual Calculation. If the individual is not able to accurately perform basic addition, subtraction and multiplication, then they should work on the Math Modules which are designed to develop these basic computational skills. If this is necessary and these modules were not put in your treatment plan, you should contact the person coordinating your treatment and ask that these modules be included.