

MATCHING SKILLS

GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to match a variety of 2D and 3D items in different contexts.

BACKGROUND

Matching skills, like imitation skills, help your child solve problems and make connections more easily. Matching involves putting together things that are exactly the same or that are similar in some important way.

Think about times when you naturally match items such as when you sort silverware or match socks. Your child might already be matching when he does an inset puzzle or sorts his toys in different bins. Your child should learn to match both pictures and objects.

Many children with autism have relative strengths in matching because it is a concrete task that doesn't involve language.

HOW TO TEACH MATCHING

Teach your child to match during every day activities including play and basic daily tasks like dressing.

Your child should learn to match:

- Identical objects and pictures
- Nonidentical objects and pictures
- Objects to pictures and pictures to objects

Use physical prompts to help her if she needs help when you're teaching. Fade these prompts until she matches the objects or pictures on her own. Even though your child might enjoy some of these tasks, make sure to have a reinforcer available to keep her motivated.

IDENTIFY THE STEPS

The steps to teach your child to match are similar to those for teaching other skills:

- Choose targets
- Present the opportunity to match
- Provide help in the form of prompts, if needed
- Provide reinforcement

THE STEPS IN MORE DETAIL

Choosing Targets

It may be helpful to choose your child's favorite items or pictures of things she's interested in at the beginning. Gradually include everyday objects and even some symbols.

Provide Help

Gently guide her hand or point to the correct match, if she needs help. Gradually fade this prompt until she starts matching on her own.

Presenting an Opportunity to Match

Place objects or pictures out on the floor, table or other surface and hand your child an item or picture that matches one you laid out.

Provide Reinforcement

Even though many children enjoy matching tasks, have a reinforcer ready to keep her motivated! Know what motivates your child. Some may be encouraged by praise, but other children need something more tangible.



BUILD DIFFICULTY GRADUALLY

BEGIN WITH SIMPLE PICTURES AND OBJECTS

Start with identical matching of simple pictures or objects.

Begin with pictures or objects that are identical. You can easily find pictures on Google Images by searching for an object name followed with "clear background". This ensures that the images you use will be simple and clear. Once you have an assortment of pictures make 2 copies.

From these pictures, choose the targets you will start with, choosing pictures that are distinctly different from each other, looking at color, shape or other features.

Place the pictures you chose as your first targets in a pile. Choose a few of the other pictures to use as the wrong answer or distractors.

Now you have 2 piles, one with targets and one with distractors or pictures you won't be teaching your child right away. Make sure you also have the duplicates of the targets you chose so you can have your child match the pictures. Start by placing one of the targets and 1 or 2 of the distractors out in front of your child. This can be while she's playing on the floor, standing at the counter, or even at the table just before you give her her dinner. Hand her the target picture and say "Match!"

Once you hand her the picture, make sure she puts it in the right place so you can give her a reinforcer. You can point or gently guide her hand to the right place. Remember you need to fade this prompt so that she starts to match independently.

Increase the difficulty

Gradually increase the number of pictures you put out in front of your child. Don't forget to mix the pictures up so she looks at all the pictures before choosing where to put the match.

As your child begins to match these identical pictures independently, introduce nonidentical matching by finding pictures that are of the same objects but are a bit different.

Continue to gradually challenge your child to think in more abstract ways by teaching her to match objects to pictures or pictures to objects. Begin by using pictures of the actual objects then use pictures or objects that are just a little different.

Be prepared to teach her matching skills in a variety of ways and don't forget to make it fun for her!

A grayscale photograph of a woman on the left and a young girl on the right. The woman is smiling and looking towards the girl. The girl is looking down at a toy she is holding. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

TEACH DURING PLAY

Teach your child to match during play. Inset puzzles, shape sorters and small toys offer great opportunities to make learning fun for your child. Teaching through play encourages your child to match spontaneously and promotes generalization.

Images are of models for demonstration purposes and do not depict children with autism.