

CHAPTER 1



Introduction to the STAR Program, Second Edition

The STAR Program is a comprehensive behavioral program for students with autism. The curriculum can be used throughout the school day in a variety of environments to provide an appropriate, research-based program for students with autism and other developmental disabilities. Students are taught important skills using the research-based applied behavior analysis (ABA) strategies of discrete trial training and pivotal response training. These skills are then practiced and generalized during daily school functional routines. The program was designed to provide teachers with a comprehensive set of instructional plans along with the materials needed to implement the program as part of the student's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP). The STAR Program Student Learning Profile Assessment provides a process to identify appropriate lessons to teach and to monitor student progress. The program provides lessons that use the behavioral instructional strategies of discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and functional routines. These strategies have been found to be effective for teaching students with autism (Arick, Young, Falco, Loos, Krug, Gense, & Johnson, 2003; Crockett, Fleming, Doepke, & Stevens, 2007; Eldevik et al., 2009; Green, 2001; Koegel, 1995; Krug, Rosenblum, Almond, & Arick, 1981; Lord & McGee, 2001; Lovaas, 1981, 1987; Marcus, Schopler, & Lord, 2000; National Autism Center, 2009b; National Autism Center, 2009b; Wong et al., 2014 [2014 National Professional Development Report]).

The developmentally sequenced curriculum used in the STAR Program teaches functional and appropriate skills. The content focuses on curriculum areas that have been identified as critical needs for students with autism in a report from the National Research Council (Lord & McGee, 2001).

Changes to the Second Edition

The STAR Program was originally published in 2004. Since that time over 2,500 school districts have purchased the program. Dr. Joel Arick and his colleagues at STAR Autism Support, Inc. have provided training on implementing the STAR Program in more than 700 school districts across the United States. Over the last 10 years, university researchers across the country, funded by the National Institute of Health and the Institute of Education Sciences, have conducted studies on the STAR Program. A complete description of the evidence-based practices used in the STAR Program and the research conducted is described in Chapter 4. The revisions of this second edition of the STAR Program are a result of the knowledge gained from the authors' experiences over the last 10 years, feedback from professionals' implementation and training on the program, the newest research on the evidence-based strategies, and the STAR Program itself. In addition, a major focus of the revisions was to make the program as easy to use as possible. The revisions include the following:

- Improvements to the lessons using the discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and functional routines strategies
- Inclusion of the task analysis for each functional routine on the lesson plan folder

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- Comprehensive instructions for completing the forms in the Blackline Masters book, also available on CD-ROM
- A completely revised manual with a “Getting Started” chapter (see Chapter 2)
- A revised data form for pivotal response training (PRT Lesson Focus and Weekly Data Probe)
- A newly added Fidelity of Implementation Checklist
- Reminder posters for staff to use when implementing the strategies
- New forms and instructions for constructing a Classroom Schedule to implement the STAR Program
- New lesson targets and changes to the Student Learning Profile, based on the results of a multi-university research study

Students

The STAR Program is designed for students with autism, but many students with other developmental disabilities have benefited from the program. The curriculum provides a developmental sequence and includes skills that all students need to learn. The curriculum areas of Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Spontaneous Language, Preacademic Concepts, and Play and Social Interaction are appropriate for students in preschool through high school. The Functional Routines lessons are appropriate for students in preschool through elementary school. Functional routines for middle and high school students are addressed in a separate curriculum, the FACTER program (*Functional Assessment and Curriculum for Teaching Everyday Routines*; Arick, Nave, Hoffman, & Krug, 2004), which can be used in combination with the STAR Program. Curriculum needs of students with autism are extensively documented in the literature and summarized in the 2001 National Research Council report (Lord & McGee, 2001). The STAR Program addresses many of the critical curriculum needs identified for young students with autism (Hayward, Gale, & Eikeseth, 2009). The curriculum content of the STAR Program is developmental, includes skills all students need to learn, and aligns well with the Common Core Curriculum standards (an alignment document can be found at www.starautismsupport.com).

The program includes three distinct levels and provides instruction across a broad range of learners. Level I is appropriate for the learner who requires instruction in very-beginning attending, language, and social skills. Levels II and III expand on the skills learned in Level I, teaching more advanced concepts in language, academics, play and social areas, and functional routines. The curriculum focuses strongly on communication skills, with lessons designed to teach the skills needed to access the general education environment and curriculum.

Curriculum

The STAR Program provides lessons and materials for six curriculum areas across the three levels. Level I is appropriate for the beginning student who needs to learn how to learn; it teaches basic safety skills, attending skills, the understanding that words have meaning, requesting needs and wants, playing and social skills, and independence in simple daily routines. Level II teaches students to identify many new nouns, verbs, and people in their environment; to follow two-step commands; to request for their desires in a variety of ways; to spontaneously comment on things in their environment; and to learn simple math, reading, and writing skills. Level III expands the language skills learned in Level II and teaches more complex academic skills in reading, writing, and math that are needed to access general education. Level III teaches the student to answer expanded social questions; yes/no questions; to ask questions using prepositions, descriptors, and pronouns in sentences; and to do academic skills that include adding or subtracting one-digit

numbers, money use, time telling, reading in a simple book, and writing from memory. At Level III, students learn to be independent throughout the school day and expand on their participation in the general education classroom. The program closes the gap for students who are unable to access traditional general and special education curricula, and provides a curriculum for students to learn needed comprehension skills in order to access the general education curriculum. The program provides teachers with a detailed curriculum, based on this individualized approach. Lessons and materials teach each skill identified by the curriculum across these six content areas:

- Receptive Language
- Expressive Language
- Spontaneous Language
- Functional Routines
- Preacademic Concepts
- Play and Social Interaction

Instructional Strategies

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) methodology provides the behavioral base for teaching the STAR Program. The three ABA instructional strategies of discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and functional routines instruction are used in the program. Each of these three behavior instructional strategies are used to teach specific curriculum areas. This type of individualized-curriculum approach was suggested by Prizant and Ruben (1999) and addresses the needs of many students with autism. The instructional strategies are described in Chapter 3, and the details of how to implement them are found in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

To individualize needs for each student, complete the Student Learning Profile Assessment, which will identify the appropriate lessons for instruction. Upon implementation of the STAR Program, students will begin to understand language, communicate with others, and be more independent in their daily routines.

Benefits and Outcomes

The STAR Program is a comprehensive, integrated framework of lessons and materials that informs the teacher on why, how, and in what order to teach to provide the most effective instruction to students with autism. Why use the STAR Program? Recent and ongoing research continues to show that using discrete trial training (DT), pivotal response training (PRT), and functional routines (FR; task analysis, prompting, shaping, and reinforcement) instruction as part of a comprehensive behavioral program is an effective treatment for students with autism (Belfiore, Fritts, & Herman, 2008; National Autism Center, 2009b; Wong et al., 2014 [2014 National Professional Development Report]). The STAR Program provides detailed instruction on how to teach lessons, how to set up a structured classroom, and how to organize a student's day. It also provides the teacher with extensive materials, including a detailed instructional scope and sequence with lesson plans (see the Program Guide in the Student Learning Profile).

Benefits to the student include instruction that is targeted to meet his or her current performance level, and learning that is interesting, fun, and meaningful. Many students who are actively engaged in the STAR Program make significant progress (Arick et al., 2003; Bacon et al., 2014; Mandell, 2010, 2014). National research, as well as specific research on the STAR Program, has found positive outcomes for students with autism who are involved in the instructional strategies of discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and functional routines (National Autism Center, 2009b; Simpson, 2005; Wong et al., 2014 [2014 National

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Professional Development Report]). In addition to positive outcomes for students, there are many positive outcomes for the classroom, school, and district staff. Utilizing the STAR Program can lead to a much more effective and highly structured classroom environment. Many teachers find that the program's structure provides the individualization needed for effective student learning, which translates into an overall positive classroom climate. Both staff and students are having fun while students learn! As this teacher indicated,

I wanted to tell you that we have made so much progress with the little girl. . . . You would be so gratified to see her sitting at the lunch table, asking for "More grapes, please," then waiting while we look for some. Then actually saying, "More apples?" when we tell her the grapes are gone! She is playing side by side with others and said, "Bye, Mom" when her mom dropped her off last Thursday morning. Lots of tears on that one. (Autism Specialist)

Research Basis

The National Standards Report, completed by the National Autism Center (2009b), suggested that comprehensive behavioral programs have been shown to have the highest degree of outcome results for teaching students with autism. The STAR Program is a comprehensive behavioral instructional program designed to teach students with autism the critical communication, academic, social, and daily living skills needed to participate in the general education environment. The STAR Program uses the methods recommended in the National Standards Report and identified through many research studies (see Chapter 4). In addition, studies in which the STAR Program was implemented as part of their research have found it to be an effective program for teaching students with autism in public school and home settings (Arick et al., 2003; Bacon et al., 2014; Mandell 2010, 2014). For further research information, please see Chapter 4.

Using This Manual

This manual provides information for understanding the basis of the STAR Program and includes specific guidelines for implementing its curriculum and instructional strategies. The manual is intended to give the reader an overall perspective of the program, a big-picture view, and then specific detailed information about how to implement each component of the program.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 is an overview of whom the program was designed for, what it teaches, the techniques used, materials found in the program, and the research basis of STAR.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 explains how to get started using the STAR Program and gives a description of the scope and sequence of the curriculum through a detailed examination of the Student Learning Profile (SLP). Instructions on how to assess students who perform across various levels of the STAR Program are included. Also included are suggestions on how to select specific lessons for instruction, develop a student/staff schedule, and begin instruction. We suggest that users thoroughly read and understand Chapter 2 before reading the chapters on the individual components. Understanding how the components of the program work in combination, and the importance of the Student Learning Profile, will assist with program implementation.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the curriculum and instructional strategies. It provides a detailed description of the three instructional strategies (discrete trial training, pivotal response training, functional rou-

tines) and how they are used to teach the objectives across the six curriculum areas (Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Spontaneous Language, Functional Routines, Preacademic Concepts, and Play and Social Interactions). Chapter 3 also provides information on the types of skills taught to students in the STAR Program.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 provides an overview of autism spectrum disorders (and of the characteristics of many students with autism), information on current research on autism, and instructional strategies that are effectively used to teach students with autism. This chapter also shares the latest research related to the use of a comprehensive behavioral program and research on the STAR Program.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of basic behavioral principles, defines common behavioral terms used in this manual, and contains real-world applications of behavioral principles in a proactive approach to dealing with challenging behavior.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 describe in detail how to implement the three instructional strategies of discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and functional routines and provide a step-by-step approach to instruct the reader.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 provides specific guidelines for implementing a positive behavior plan.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 pulls together all the information and provides practical solutions for implementation in a variety of classrooms and settings. This chapter gives suggestions for developing a Classroom Schedule (see the Blackline Masters), setting up the classroom environment, and developing IEP goals and objectives.