TEACHING CONVERSATION-RELATED SKILLS TO PREDELINQUENT GIRLS¹

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The use of conversation-related skills by youthful offenders can influence social interactions with adults. These behaviors are also likely to be useful to adolescents after their release from a treatment program (*Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1972, 5, 343-372). Four girls, aged 13 to 15 yr, residing at Achievement Place for Girls in Lawrence, Kansas, received training on conversation-related behaviors. A multiple-baseline design across youths and across behaviors was used. Youth answer-volunteering in response to questions and three youth nonverbal components ("hand on face", "hand at rest", and "facial orientation") were measured during daily 10-min sessions with a simulated guest in the group home's living room. Answer-volunteering was scored each session as the per cent of 13 "secondary" questions that the simulated guest did not have to ask following 10 "primary" questions. The three nonverbal components were scored according to their occurrence during 10-sec intervals and the resultant scores were averaged per session for an overall appropriate nonverbal score. The girls individually earned points within the home's token economy for participating in each session and additional points were awarded after training if preselected behavioral criteria were achieved for each of the two behavior categories per girl. Some of the training sessions were led by a "teaching-parent" (specially trained houseparent) while others were led by individual girls. Point consequences were administered by both the teaching-parent and by the "peer-trainers". The average observed rate of answer-volunteering by the girls during pretraining sessions was 30% for S₁, 30% for S₂, 23% for S₃, and 68% for S₄. The average rate of answer-volunteering during posttraining sessions was: S₁ = 92%, S₂ = 89%, S₃ = 90%, and S₄ = 98%. The average nonverbal score during pretraining sessions was 82% for S₁, 53% for S₂, 60% for S₃, and 82% for S₄. The average nonverbal score during posttraining sessions was: S₁ = 98%, S₂ = 98%, S₃ = 98%, and S₄ = 100%. Videotapes of the sessions were shown in a random sequence to four adults (probation officer, social worker, etc.) who represented "significant others" for the youths' future success in the community. The adults judged posttraining tapes on the average as more appropriate 100% of the time for S₁, 100% of the time for S₂, 90% of the time for S₃, and 70% of the time for S₄. The study demonstrated that training of conversation-related skills is feasible with predelinquent girls, that the girls can help train each other, and that social validation of the training results is possible.

DESCRIPTORS: conversation-related skills, multiple baseline, point economy, gesturing behavior, verbal training, speech, halfway house, adolescents, delinquents

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