

Chapter 18

Visit 11

Dr. Rick's 20 Transition Tricks

Jacob and Charlie come storming into the playroom and want to pick up our sword fight where we left off from the previous visit. They locate the long soft pipe insulators and wield them ominously at my face.

Jacob: "I going to get you, guy!"

Dr. Rick (grabbing a 'sword' and standing up): "Oh yeah, you think you can get me? Ha ha. I'm going to get you both. *En garde!*"

Jacob: "You not gonna get me now."

Charlie: "I hit you hard!"

They whack me. I whack them back. I sing the theme song from *Star Wars* while we sword fight for a good five minutes with me intermittently falling down and then needing a 'life shot' (a pretend syringe from my play medical kit) to bring me back to life. Finally I 'give'.

All the while I'm watching Jacob and noticing just how much he 'gets' the play, how his interactions are continuous without fragmenting, and how well he's stringing words together ("I going to get you, guy!"). Even though he's driving his parents nuts with his behaviors, I am so pleased with his progress.

Dr. Rick: "OK, OK you win you win. All done you guys. I have to talk to your mommy and daddy. All done."

Jacob (demanding): "Play again! Sword fight!"

Dad (in a deep loud voice): "Dr. Solomon said 'all done'. That's it. Find something else to do."

Jacob's head immediately goes down in shame; his face starts to cloud up.

Dr. Rick: "Dad, you missed it."

Dad: "Missed what?"

Dr. Rick: "Jacob's feeling. Look at him."

Now Jacob is starting to get upset, lip quivering, the storm coming but I say. . .

Dr. Rick: "Jacob, you want to play swords some more. You don't want to stop. You don't like daddy to tell you 'No!' swords!"

As quickly as it came, the storm clears to a sunny sky. Jacob's face relaxes and he and Charlie get hopeful.

Dr. Rick: "I tell you what. I got an idea. Let's play for one more time and then we'll stop. Just one more time, OK?"

They both nod vigorously. We play swords for another minute; I die; they revive me.

Dr. Rick: “OK you guys. Now it’s time to play. I have to talk to your mommy and daddy.”

Without complaining they dig in to the toy boxes and find my new Buzz Lightyear from Toy Story with the pop out wings who speaks both Spanish and English and they’re happy.

Dr. Rick (to dad): “You saw what just happened?”

Dad: “They weren’t listening to you.”

Dr. Rick: “True but Jacob wanted to play some more and you missed that. You just jumped to what he *should* do, not how he was feeling, what he wanted. I know you wanted them just to listen to me but I’m also making a point here. If you don’t ‘hear’ his feeling, two things happen. First, he’ll more likely get upset instead of listen; and second, he won’t learn how to *process* his feelings. It’s a missed opportunity.”

Dad: “I’m still working on the ‘mirroring’ thing. I just want him to listen and do what he’s supposed to do.”

Dr. Rick: “I know. It’s not really natural to ‘mirror’ his feelings and I know you want him to behave for me; but this is what you have to do if you want him to have less upsets.”

Mom: “I’ve been trying to do what we talked about last visit but he’s a tough one.”

Dr. Rick: “It takes time.”

Jacob’s Overwhelming World: Anxiety. At the end of the last visit Julie Grant almost couldn’t wait to come back and talk about Jacob’s *problems with transitions*. As Jacob has become more and more functional and emotionally astute he is becoming more aware. It’s as if the blinders are coming off and he can see just how big the world is. He is making every effort to keep it all under his control but it’s too much for him. He is becoming obsessive. His anxiety is skyrocketing which affects his ability to handle even small changes and challenges.

Mom: “Everything has to be ‘just so.’”

Dad: “He gets upset over nothing! Let Dr. Rick look at this list.” (Mom gives it to me.)

The Transition Problem List

I had asked Julie and Jim Grant to make me a problem list and did they ever! Here it is:

- Wakes up whining. Trouble getting ready in the morning (See *Chapter 20, Visit 12—Part 2: Jacob’s Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Mornings*). From bed to dressing (hates rough clothes), to brushing teeth (hates brushing his teeth!), to eating (often difficult, very limited diet), to leaving.
- Car rides. Hates if we go the ‘wrong’ way. Doesn’t want to stop at lights! Tantrums/gets violent in the car—pulls mom’s hair! (See *Chapter 21, Visit 13: Outings and Eating*)
- The bus ride to school is noisy. He rocks in his seat (only when he’s anxious).
- Preschool teacher says Jacob has trouble transitioning from the bus to the building and from the building to the class. Hates all the noise in the hallways.
- Started pushing other children to be first in line. (See *Chapter 24, Visit 14: Siblings With Rivalry!*)
- Holds it together at school then lets it all out at home.
- Can’t stop what he’s doing without throwing a big fit. Tantrums when he has to stop watching TV or computer.
- Restaurants and malls are getting very hard. Won’t sit. Yells. (See *Chapter 21, Visit 13: Outings and Eating*)
- Sharing with Charlie is terrible! (See *Chapter 24, Visit 14: Siblings With Rivalry!*)

- Bedtime. Comes out ‘a dozen times’. Every little thing—bath, teeth brushing, etc.—is a hassle or an argument. (See *Chapter 19, Visit 12: The Stone in Your Shoe: Sleep*)

If the child with autism wants to “keep the world the same” then *transitions*—the change from one activity to another—are going to mean trouble. And to look at this list, Jacob is having trouble with almost every kind of transition.

Dr. Rick (looking it over): “Wow. Quite a list. This is a job for *Dr. Rick’s 20 Transition Tricks!*”

Mom: “Would you be sure to record this discussion. It’s so helpful to go back and listen.”

Dr. Rick: (starting to record our discussion): “This is Dr. Rick Solomon making an audio recording for Jacob Grant on February 9th, 2015.”

Dad: “We’ve been using *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly* approach—with occasional slips—and it’s been helping some but were here to tackle the specifics.”

Dr. Rick: “Nice list, Julie.”

Mom (embarrassed): “I’m a bit OCD myself.”

Dr. Rick: “I’m not saying a thing. I love your lists. But it’s like Jacob’s whole day is stressful.”

As I read the list I realized just how hard life had become for Jacob (and mom, dad and Charlie)! Poor guy. The better he does, the more the demands. The more the demands, the more the anxiety. The more the anxiety, the more upsets leading to tantrums and aggression. I seriously thought about anti-anxiety medication (See *Chapter 22, Visit 14: Medications?*) but a solid developmental and behavioral approach might help us avoid meds and, in my view, should always be tried first.

Mom: “It’s gotten much worse over the last few months, since the Christmas break.”

Dr. Rick: “In looking this over it looks like the big five *triggers* for Jacob seem to be:

- Transitions, changing activities
- Not getting what he wants
- Stopping fun activities
- Broken expectations
- Overwhelming environments

Mom: “Speaking of ‘broken expectations’, we just came from a teacher conference.”

Dad: “We’re getting ready for our IEP end of March. By the way, I caved on the part time aide (See *Chapter 16: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergarteners*). I think you and Julie were right. Jacob might need some help in kindergarten.”

Dr. Rick: “You’re a reasonable man, Jim. Better safe than sorry.”

When the Brain Controls the Mind.

Mom: “Anyway Jacob’s preschool teacher said Jacob had a major meltdown. He wanted to use the red crayon for a coloring assignment (he’s fixated on the color red these days) but his tablemate got to it first. So he climbed under the table and wouldn’t come out. When his teacher told him to come out, he went wild and had to be removed—yelling at the teacher then screaming all the way to the principal’s office. It took him 20 minutes to calm down.”

Dad: “That was the only one that bad this year and it *just* happened. Mostly he just shuts down at school and refuses to do things. They leave him alone and he comes around, eventually. He can be so stubborn. But when he comes home he’s cranky and irritable.”

Dr. Rick: “This is very common. Jacob still can’t process his stress and anxiety very well. So all the little upsets add up. He doesn’t have the psychological tools to resolve his feelings. His brain controls his mind.”

Mom: “I never thought of it that way but that makes perfect sense. He acts out and then he feels bad. It’s like he knows what he *should* do but he can’t, so he gets cranky.”

Dr. Rick: “Right, I say he gets dysregulated.”

Dad: “Out of control is more like it.”

Dr. Rick: “*So a big part of what we’re doing with these Transition Tricks is helping Jacob develop a better control system.* We have to help him truly make sense of his world and his feelings so he doesn’t get so overwhelmed. On the one hand we’re going to find that *unit of control* so he feels secure but on the other hand we’re going to teach him how to process his feelings, problem solve, and put things in perspective so he doesn’t have to freak out over minor stresses. We’re going to help his mind control his brain.”

Mom: “He’s been spiraling out of control so much lately that I’m really worried about him.”

Medication?

Dr. Rick: “The thought of medications crossed my mind but I think we can avoid them.”

Dad: “Good because I don’t want Jacob on any meds, he’s only five years old.”

Dr. Rick: “I agree but when the child is suffering a lot, when every little thing sets them off, and they can’t help themselves, sometimes meds can be very helpful.” (See *Chapter 22, Visit 14: Medications?*).

Dr. Rick: “Let’s go over these *Transition Tricks* and see if we can help Jacob without meds. What do you want to work on most? What’s first from your list?”

Mom: “Either the morning routine or turning off the TV and coming to dinner or the violence in the car. That’s driving me nutso.”

Dad: “I want to talk about going out in public. We can’t take him to a restaurant.

Mom: “. . .or to the mall or grocery shopping.”

Dr. Rick: “We’ll get to each of these but let’s take the most common situation like *stopping a preferred activity and transitioning to a new, non-preferred activity*. This happens all the time both at school and at home. What do you say?”

Mom: “Sounds good.”

The Transition Tricks (TT)

Dr. Rick: “There are three groups of tricks:

- Five Principle Tricks
- Three Strategy Tricks and
- Twelve Technique Tricks

The *principles* will help Jacob expand his worldview so he’ll become more mature. Transitions won’t be as threatening and he’ll cope better with less whining and tantrums.”

Mom: “That would be nice.”

Dr. Rick: “You’re probably already familiar with the *strategies* but they’re important ways to prep Jacob for change. And the *techniques* are specific tricks that will help us find the *unit of control* and can be used throughout the day in specific situations. There are some very cool techniques. My long-term goal is to give Jacob a ‘message of competence’ so he handles the challenges of a changing world without a lot of unnecessary anxiety.”

Dad: “That would be a big step forward. He’s bothered a lot by little things.”

Principles

Dr. Rick: “So let me review the *five principle tricks* and *three strategic tricks* first because they form the foundation of a child’s ability to cope with change. Then we’ll use the best *Technique Tricks* to help Jacob with stopping what he wants to do, to do something he doesn’t want to do.”

Dad: “Sounds like a plan.”

Transition Tricks: Principles

1. Most important! Mirror back/reflect feelings (of anxiety, anger, upset, etc.)
2. Give m&m’s: Meaning and Motivation
3. Give perspective: Is this really something to get upset about? What is important?
4. Philosophy of ‘Can’. Can he do it?
5. Keep your sense of humor and use humor to defuse tension

TT#1: Mirror Feelings

Dr. Rick: “The first principle is an old friend of ours but it’s worth repeating. *Recognizing Jacob’s feelings and mirroring or reflecting those feelings back to him* is an art form that you can always work on. It’s the most effective trick. (See *Resources & Websites: How to Talk So Kids Will Listen*) I want Jacob to express his bad, negative feelings in a good way. Remember the ‘good negative?’”

Mom: “You mean use his words to tell us that he’s mad?”

Dr. Rick: “Yes, I’d even pound hard on the table and shout what he’s feeling as a form of mirroring. “No daddy. No dinner!!” It teaches him to reflect on his own feelings, turn his feelings into words, and problem solve in a mature way instead of lashing out.”

Dad: “Definitely not there yet.”

Dr. Rick: “So, we have to keep mirroring back his feelings using a statement (not a question). Simply *telling* Jacob how he feels will reduce his anxiety by half. The problem is that parents often miss the feeling in the first place.”

Dad: “Like I did earlier.”

Dr. Rick: “I wasn’t going to rub your nose in it but now that you mention it. . .yes. He didn’t *want* to stop sword fighting. It’s natural. Feelings are easy to miss. They fly by fast. And we want to jump in and solve the problem logically without ‘processing their feelings’.”

Dad: “It’s still a little unnatural for me.”

Dr. Rick: “It is a bit unnatural for most people but Jacob (and almost every child) responds beautifully to this ‘mirroring trick’. You have to use your judgment though. Some behaviors and feelings you ignore, like whining. Others you process.”

Mom: “How do you know which is which?”

Dr. Rick: “The biggest mistake I’ve seen is when parents have already processed feelings or stated the rules a couple of times and it’s not working. If you feel that you’re talking until you’re blue in the face, it’s time to stop talking.”

Mom: “I feel that way a lot.”

Turn Off the TV!

Dr. Rick: “So let’s say that it’s time for Jacob to stop watching TV or get off the computer and he yells at you. What are you going to do?”

Dad: “I know what I usually do. I tell him to “Turn off the TV!” again and again and after he’s ignored me totally, I get mad and turn off the TV and tell him to get his butt to the dinner table.”

Mom: “That’s when he has a total meltdown and it ruins dinner almost every night. We’ve just let him watch TV to keep the peace and he eats dinner later. But Charlie doesn’t think that’s fair. He wants to watch TV too.”

Dr. Rick: “So when he threatens to have a tantrum he gets rewarded?”

Mom: “That’s not good.”

Dr. Rick: “And dad, you broke the ‘*No sudden no’s trick*’ which I’ll talk about and Mom you can’t let Jacob get away with this. So, what are you going to say next time?”

Dad (mocking me, using his fingers to quote): “I’m going to ‘reflect his feelings’ Dr. Rick. Something like ‘Jacob I know you want to watch TV but it’s time for dinner.’”

Dr. Rick: “No ‘but’. Simply ‘You don’t want to turn off the TV. You want to keep watching your favorite show.’”

Dad: “I know *but* it is time.”

Dr. Rick: “I know what *you* want *but* this first principle is about what Jacob is feeling and nothing more. We’re going to get him to do what you want but if you don’t want him to freak out you first have to reflect his feelings.”

Dad: “OK, fine.”

Dr. Rick: “Besides, if we set up the situation right, you might not have to go through this at all.”

TT#2: Give M&M’s

Dr. Rick: “The next trick is to give him m&m’s—not the candy of course but ‘meaning’ and ‘motivation’. We must always make the world’s meanings apparent—the *why* of rules, the *why* of feelings, the *why* of behavior. *Everything must have a reason*. So you want him to eat dinner with the whole family. Why?”

Mom: “It’s the only time of the day when we’re together.”

Dr. Rick: “So, make the argument. Make the reasons explicit to Jacob. And be passionate about your love for him and for the family. This is a great chance to express your deepest feelings.”

Dad: “You think he’ll understand the idea of family time and being close?”

Dr. Rick: “Even children who don’t completely understand the words will understand the tone of voice, the love that goes with an explanation of *why* he should join the family for dinner.”

“I suggest you have this discussion with Jacob *before* he sits down to TV and say something like (and I say this very loud so Jacob hears me): ‘Jacob I know you love your TV show but (you can use ‘but’ for explanations), but after this TV show is over we are going to have dinner together. We love talking with you and your brother at the dinner table. *It’s family time*. We love, love, love you and we want to be together as a family.’”

Explanations.

Dr. Rick: “Listen to your voice when you *explain* things. *Explanations* have a ‘feel’, a certain sound. There’s the feeling of patience and/or compassion, of exhorting and/or warning, which sink deeply into the child’s psyche over time. Eventually the world comes to make sense, feelings make sense, because you took the time to explain things and make life meaningful, heartfelt, and logical.”

Dad: “But what if he understands and still doesn’t want to do it anyway?”

Dr. Rick: “Then he’ll have to learn the hard way—by suffering the consequences.”

Mom: “You mean like ‘time outs?’”

Dr. Rick: “Like ‘time outs’ or other unpleasant consequences. The TV will be turned off and he’ll go to his room and won’t eat until later. But the power tricks come later. I want to cover the gentler, kinder persuasion tricks first.”

Note: Even children with low functioning autism will learn from this Transition Tricks approach. Certain ‘tricks’ will be more effective than others depending on how much the child can understand. As we go through Jacob’s transition issues, I’ll mark the methods that will be most helpful for the children who can’t understand as well as Jacob can.

Rewards vs. Reasons.

Dr. Rick: “The other half of m&m’s is *motivation*. Sometimes the meaning is not motivating. For instance, Charlie might be motivated by pleasing you or by the idea of ‘family time’. Jacob might not.”

Dad: “Charlie seems to get it.”

Dr. Rick: “It is a measure of Jacob’s progress that meaning motivates him. Until then you might have to search for the right motivation like prizes or consequences—the *carrot and stick approach*. You could say to Jacob, if you cooperate you’ll get a prize. Children with autism, regardless of level of functioning, are highly motivated by rewards. You can almost always find a reward they will like. This is *Transition Trick #15: Bribes*, a specific technique that usually motivates.”

Dad: “I really don’t like the idea of giving prizes too much. Jacob will think he should do things for a prize when he should do things because. . .”

Dr. Rick: “. . .it’s the right thing to do? (Dad nods.) I agree, but if doing the right thing for the right reason is not motivating, then what? It’s true that *rewards are not reasons*. *Reasons* are more important in the long run but *rewards* will motivate in the short run. You get paid for work. Getting paid is a big reward.”

Dad: “But I enjoy my work too.”

Dr. Rick: “Right. You’ve got meaning *and* motivation.”

Dad: “Got it. You get him going with motivation. . .”

Dr. Rick: “. . .and add the meaning later. Actually I am ruthless in giving big rewards to get children with ASD to be motivated in the beginning. I will go ‘to infinity and beyond’ to find that *unit of control*.”

Mom: “Unit of control? You’ve mentioned that a couple times.”

Dr. Rick: “Every child has power to control a behavior if you find the right combinations of meaning and motivation. That’s the *unit of control*. It also means reducing demands until he can do it. This is related to *Trick 8: Desensitization* where you reduce the demand to the smallest step that the child is capable of doing. Whatever it takes to motivate is my motto. Whatever Jacob can imagine, I will help him to get. (To Jacob) Hey Jacob, hey Jacob.”

Jacob (looks up): “What?”

Dr. Rick: “What toys do you like? What’s your favorite toy?”

Jacob: “Thomas.”

Dr. Rick: “I tell you what? When it’s time to turn off the TV and come to dinner, if you turn off the TV and come to dinner without crying we’ll give you a *Thomas* train.”

Jacob: “*Emily*.”

Dr. Rick (to the parents): “The little stinker is negotiating! (To Jacob) You want an *Emily* for coming to dinner without crying?”

Jacob: “*Emily*.”

Dr. Rick: “OK, *Emily* it is—the little green train with the little green tender. So TV off, get *Emily*, come to dinner. No crying. Right, Jacob? Right?”

Jacob: “OK. *Emily*.” Jacob returns to his play.

Dr. Rick (to his parents): “The guy wants *Emily*.”

Mom: “You know how much those trains cost?”

Dr. Rick: “How much is it worth for him to stop tantrumming?”

Dad: “A lot, he’s been ruining dinner time for months.”

Dr. Rick: “I’d just get him a few trains, for a few days. Plus, we’ll set this up so he ‘gets’ it by making him a picture schedule (that’s another strategy coming up, *TT #6: Structure*) that includes *Emily* and once he’s motivated he’ll develop a new (and better) set of habits. And ‘a good habit in motion stays in motion’. This new habit works better and makes the child feel better which leads to improved self-esteem.”

Dad: “You’re a tricky doctor.”

Dr. Rick: “That’s why we call them Dr. Rick’s *Tricks*. Jacob doesn’t really like misbehaving. Being aggressive, angry, out of control, impulsive, and immature feels bad.”

Mom: “That is so true. He feels guilty. He comes up to me after a tantrum and asks me ‘Mommy happy?’”

Dr. Rick: “We are showing Jacob a new way to handle stress as well as strong emotions by motivating him to make good choices for the right reasons. This way he won’t feel guilty as much.”

TT#3: Give perspective

Dr. Rick: “The next thing we work on is putting things in perspective. I mean really, is going to the bus, or stopping the TV to eat, or brushing his teeth or whatever transitional activity that big of a deal?”

Mom: “You’d think it was the end of the world the way he carries on!”

Dr. Rick: “Here again, if you notice the tone in your voice when you *put things in perspective*. There is a quality of ‘Seriously? Jacob, it’s just TV. You don’t have to cry when it’s turned off. You can watch TV after dinner again.’ There’s a tone like: ‘Get your act together. Grow up. Get mature. It’s not the end of the world.’”

Mom: “I say *first* we’ll do this, *then* we’ll do that. Is that what you mean?”

Dr. Rick: “That’s a good example. You’re giving him perspective on time. And you can give him perspective by talking about his tantrums. Let’s say when Charlie wants one of his toys. You could say something like ‘Jacob, you don’t want Charlie to have your toys. OK, OK. No crying. Talk to mommy and tell me that you want Charlie to leave your toys alone. Use your words. Say ‘No Charlie. My toy.’ and mommy will listen.”

Mom: “And that will work?”

Dr. Rick: “Over time.”

Dad: “I gotta see this.”

Dr. Rick: “One of the main perspectives we are teaching is what I call *delayed gratification*. Don’t throw a tantrum. Use your words to problem solve and wait for help. It works better than having a fit. ‘When you have a fit. . .’”

Dad: “. . .you never get’.”

Dr. Rick (high fiving dad): “In a way, though, I’m talking out of both sides of my mouth here. On the one hand I’m saying pay attention and mirror Jacob’s feelings. Join his feelings. Honor his feelings. And on the other hand I’m saying don’t give those feelings too much power. Otherwise you’re going to be ‘walking on eggshells’ worrying about his reactions. Put feelings in *perspective*. It is related to having a sense of humor.”

Dad: “We could use a little sense of humor.”

(Shhh, don’t tell The Grants this but it’s also my way of telling Jim and Julie to lighten up and not get so upset about Jacob’s upsets. In other words I’m also trying to give parents perspective! As I said in *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly* (See: *Chapter 17*), if you are yelling, angry, and/or upset you are doing something wrong. When you feel neutral, almost professional, in handling your child’s upset, you’re getting closer to the right *perspective*.)

TT#4: Philosophy of Can

Dr. Rick: “I believe in Jacob. I call this the ‘philosophy of can’. Can Jacob get his act together? Can he delay gratification? Can he use his words? Can he become more mature? Can he behave better? You have to literally ask yourselves, *Can* Jacob turn off the TV without crying, come to dinner table, sit and eat with us?”

Mom: “I think so.”

Dad: “Me too.”

Dr. Rick: “Me too. So *if he can then we should expect him to*. The philosophy of ‘can’ is also transmitted in body language and in tone of voice to give a message of competence. It says, ‘I believe in you. I expect you to behave and I’m not going to settle for less.’ *Families need to be reality oriented, uphold common sense rules, and expect the child to comply*. Here again, I’m talking out of both sides of my mouth. I’m saying that once you’ve processed the feelings; once you’ve explained the reasons; once you’ve warned the child about the consequences, then enough! It’s time to get real.” (See *TT #19: Time Outs* and *#20: Just Do It!*).

‘No elbows on the table!’

Dr. Rick: “I have to tell you about a patient I’ll call Ian. Smart, high functioning guy, eight years old, in regular third grade. Very obsessive and controlling (sound familiar?). Get this: He didn’t like it when anyone put their napkin on the dining room table! If they did, he’d start whining and yelling. His mother wanted to keep the peace (just like you Julie) so she made Ian’s brother and sister take their napkins off the table. Soon it was the salt and pepper shakers. Then, no elbows on the table! Ian’s OCD, his obsessive-compulsive disorder, was turning him into the table tyrant.”

Mom: “So what happened?”

Dr. Rick: “I was flabbergasted. I couldn’t believe they were letting him get away with that. I thought he could do better (*philosophy of ‘can’*). With mom’s permission of course I made a *rule*, with *reasons* and *consequences*. I said: ‘Ian, I have bad news for you. I’m afraid you’re done being the *table tyrant*. You can do what you want with your part of the table but you can’t tell others what to do (*the rule*). It’s not fair to tell people that they can’t put things on the table (*the reason*). In fact it’s ridiculous Ian (I was giving him *perspective!*). Starting tonight your family can put whatever they want on their part of the table and if you don’t like it you can go to your room and miss dinner (*the ‘stick’*). But I have good news. If you stop being the table tyrant you can have a prize (*the ‘carrot’*). What would you like?’ He wasn’t happy but, after a pause, he said he wanted a new video game for his Nintendo DS. Mom thought that that prize would be worth the peace.”

Dad: “Did that stop him?”

Dr. Rick: “His mother called me two days later to say that after he went to his room (I should say he was dragged kicking and screaming to his room) one day without dinner, the next day there were no problems at the dinner table. He got his video game. She was amazed. It had been going on for months. I wasn’t amazed; I thought he *could* get control over his OCD (*TT#4: Philosophy of ‘Can’*) and besides it just wasn’t right, there was no reason (*TT#2: Meaning and Motivation*). It’s amazing what families will put up with.

“When it comes to the ‘philosophy of can’ I have only one warning. *You have to be accurate about your child’s ability*. If your child really *can’t* do something then over time it will only cause more frustration and further misbehavior. That’s how you’ll know. We would have to back off and find a more accurate *unit of control*.”

Dad: “That happened when Jacob was younger. I spanked him when he didn’t listen to me.”

Dr. Rick: “But he wasn’t ignoring you. He really didn’t understand, right?”

Dad: “Right. I spanked him and it didn’t help him listen. He just avoided me. I felt bad.”

Dr. Rick: “That was then and this is now. Jacob *can* turn off the TV and come to dinner.”

Mom: “Well he’s not.”

TT#5: Sense of Humor

Dr. Rick: “Last principle, *Sense of Humor*. This one’s as much for the parents as the child. It’s closely related to giving perspective. By sense of humor, I don’t mean teaching your child jokes of course. I mean taking the long view, having faith that these behavior problems will be solved, and using sense of humor to get things done or diffuse tension.

“I suggest, when Jacob won’t turn the TV off, that you throw a temper tantrum screaming “Turn off the TV, turn off the TV”. Lie on the floor and kick and turn in circles.

“Or you could say, ‘First one to the dinner table wins a prize’ or you could say ‘Don’t you turn off the TV. Don’t you sit at the dinner table.’ Reverse psychology.”

Mom: “I would never have thought of those. I’ve totally lost my sense of humor.”

Dr. Rick: “You and Jim could hold hands, dance in a circle while singing: ‘Jacob come to dinner. Jacob come to dinner.’”

Dad: “In fact, she’s worried and stressed to the max. Me, I’m getting frustrated and mad too. To tell you the truth I’m fed up with his constant whining and crying.”

Mom: “Then we feel guilty because our yelling isn’t making it any better.”

Dr. Rick: “Patience and persistence are virtues.”

Dad: “I took Jacob to the grocery store and didn’t give him the candy he saw on the shelf and you would have thought I was torturing him.”

Dr. Rick (laughing): “Really? Over a piece of candy?”

Dad: “Yep.”

Dr. Rick: “Sorry for laughing but the image of Jacob throwing a whopping temper tantrum in the grocery store over a piece of candy—now that’s funny.”

Dad: “Actually I was furious.”

Mom: “That happens to me all the time. Everyone in the store must think I’m the worst parent.”

Dr. Rick: “You know you’ve arrived when you shrug, throw Jacob over your shoulder like a sack of potatoes and take him out to the car while singing *Hi ho bi ho, it’s off to work I go.*”

Dad: “I haven’t arrived.”

Dr. Rick: “Well we’ll have to get you there. Seriously folks, most of these behavioral issues can get resolved typically within days to weeks with the right strategies.”

Mom: “We’ve been dealing with them for months and it’s wearing us out.”

Dr. Rick: “OK. I hear you. You’re not ready to laugh yet but a sense of humor that ‘this too shall pass’ also gets transmitted through body language, attitude, and tone of voice. Jacob will realize he cannot push your buttons easily and he’ll give up his ridiculous behavior sooner.”

Mom: “Once when we were visiting a farm, Jacob wanted ride a tractor he saw in the field.”

Dad: “When we explained that he couldn’t ride the tractor, he threw such a fit over something so impossible that we all found it hilarious.”

Mom: “He saw us laughing and stopped tantrumming.”

Dr. Rick: “See, that’s what I’m talking about. Sometimes it’s so bad you just have to laugh!”

Jacob and Charlie have been so good for so long. It always amazes me how well behaved children are when the adults are talking about important things. I thank them for playing so nicely together (I reward their ‘good’ behavior.). I tell them NOT to scare me with the Jack in the Boxes (I have two of

them.) and they immediately bring them over and proceed to open them up. When the clowns jump out of the box I act scared and scream and tell the clowns to go away. They love this game of scaring the adult and we play this for a while until it gets old and I'm not scared anymore. I send them out for their first sucker and we return to our discussion.

Strategies

Dr. Rick: “Before we get into more specific *Technique Tricks* let me just talk about the three most important and amazingly effective *Strategy Tricks* (Tricks 6-8):

Transition Tricks: Strategies

6. Create structure:
 - a. Use calendars (for month and week)
 - b. schedules (for day)
 - c. lists (for hour)
 - d. sequences (for minute)
7. Social stories and Fables
8. Desensitize by successive approximations & repeated exposures: use countdowns, breathing/relaxation

TT#6: Create Structure

Dr. Rick: “If kids with autism want to ‘keep the world the same’ then creating a predictable structure is crucial. This is where ‘*calendars, schedules, lists, and sequences*’ come in.”

Mom: “We’re using a calendar but not really a schedule.”

Dad: “And Jacob is a stickler for knowing what’s coming next.”

Mom: “We have a white board. He can see the big events coming for the month and week.”

Dr. Rick: “But this TV issue calls for a *schedule*, a *list* and maybe even a *sequence*. Here’s an example of a *schedule* with a *list* of activities and prizes/consequences (I draw it out):

<Insert 2.0 JPEG TT here >

- *Schedules* can be helpful at home for daily and/or hourly events.
- *Lists*—for events that happen over minutes.
- Last and most specific are *sequences*, which can be used for activities that happen second to second like brushing your teeth, e.g., get toothpaste, toothbrush and a paper cup, etc.

You can make little boxes and check off the actions listed to get prizes (See *Chapter 19, Visit 12: The Stone in Your Shoe—Sleep*).

Mom: “That’s easy enough.”

Dr. Rick: “For now this schedule and list should work. Just make sure you show him the chart *before* he sits down to watch TV.”

TT#7: Social Stories and Fables

Dr. Rick: “I know you are both familiar with Carol Gray’s *Social Stories*TM but it’s worth repeating here (See *Resources & Websites*) that social stories are fundamentally a form of self-talk and a great way to help children on the spectrum think maturely and cope with events, feelings, and stresses. Jacob is well suited for social stories. He can follow not only routines consistently but he’s got his 1-2 step spontaneous commands down.”

Note: For children who cannot follow routines or one step spontaneous commands to ‘get’ or ‘give’ things, social stories will *not* be effective.

Dad: “I can tell him to go to the kitchen and get silverware and he’ll do it.”

Dr. Rick: “You really need that level of receptive language for social stories to work well. Here’s a social story for this situation and should be accompanied by pictures (drawn or found):

- When I come home from school I love to watch TV (picture of a boy watching TV)
- And I don’t want to stop even when it’s dinnertime. (Mom with a cartoon balloon coming from her mouth saying “Jacob it’s time for dinner” but the boy is still watching).
- It makes me mad to stop TV but dinnertime is family time and I have to stop. It’s a rule. (Show a family sitting around a dinner table having fun.)
- Besides, if I don’t stop my parents will turn off the TV and I won’t be able to watch TV. I’ll have to go to my room. And no TV for the rest of the night. (Show boy in time out).
- But if I eat dinner with my family and behave myself I will get an *Emily* train and can watch TV *after* dinner. (Picture of a train.)
- Eating dinner with my family is fun (show a picture with a happy family sitting around the dinner table.)

“For the higher functioning children, I use fables a lot.”

Mom: “He loved your fable about the Bear who wouldn’t brush his teeth.”

Dr. Rick: “The ‘No Brush Bear’ whose teeth started falling out?”

Mom: “He listened to that recording over and over again.”

Mom: “We drew a picture of a bear with no teeth to go along with the story and he asked if his teeth would fall out for a long time.”

Dad: “We said if you brush your teeth they won’t fall out, they will be ‘strong and white’ and now he brushes them twice a day and says ‘*Strong and white!*’”

Dr. Rick: “If we have to, we can make up a fable about the ‘No Dinner Dog’ who wouldn’t turn off the TV to come to dinner. But I think a simple schedule, the social story, and a few other tricks will do the job.”

Mom: “I might be calling you for a fable.”

TT#8: Desensitize

Dr. Rick: “Most families already know something about *creating structure* and using *social stories* but many families are not as familiar with the idea of *desensitization* even though they use the idea naturally all the time.

“In one of my previous jobs, I used to help children with cancer through their painful medical procedures like bone marrow aspirations and lumbar punctures. I convinced them—through the use of desensitization—that they could get through these painful procedures.”

Mom: “That sounds like a hard job.”

Dr. Rick: “These kids were amazing. I used a step-by-step approach. First I introduced them to just the *idea* that they could learn self-control. That was the *unit of control*. Just thinking about it. Then we’d practice for the procedure without needles; then we’d practice with needles but not poking; and then I’d poke them with the cap on the needle to get them as close as possible to the real deal.”

Dad: “I’m starting to get this idea of *unit of control*. You set it up so the child can be successful by starting with what they *can* do and then increasing the demands slowly.”

Dr. Rick: “I couldn’t have said it better myself. And all the while with these kids who had cancer I had them use *breathing, relaxation and mental imagery* to help them control their bodies. It worked! Through repeated and increasingly realistic exposures to the scary event, these children were able to desensitize themselves to very painful procedures (See *Appendix I: Breathing, Relaxation, and Imagination*)

“What we are doing with Jacob by talking to him, explaining the reasons, making a schedule, prepping him for change—all of this is a form of desensitizing him, giving him successive exposures to the event and preparing him to handle the anxiety in a more productive way.”

Mom: “I remember when you did that for brushing his teeth. Besides the fable, we started off by just brushing one stroke. I thought it was nuts.”

Dad: “Then one tooth.”

Dr. Rick: “The *unit under his control* got bigger and bigger.”

Mom: “Then we gave him prizes for each tooth.”

Dr. Rick: “Until he was raking it in! It took a week to ‘desensitize’ him but it worked.”

Dad: “So a schedule is also a form of desensitizing?”

Dr. Rick: “Absolutely. A schedule, talking about it, counting down, whatever prepares Jacob for the transition is desensitizing.”

Mom: “Should we teach him to use breathing?”

Dr. Rick: “I recommend that you do this at bedtime so he gets into the habit. Some kids take to it and some don’t. I can give you a handout that describes the process. It’s really easy. (See *Appendix I: Progressive Relaxation for Children on the Spectrum*).

Mom: “So when he comes home from school but *before* he gets on the TV. . .”

Dr. Rick: “. . .we are going to desensitize him. (I say this loud again so Jacob hears me) You tell him: ‘Jacob, I know you love the TV and you hate to stop when it’s dinner time.’ (Pause here after ‘reflecting his feelings’). Then you state the new rule: ‘Today we are starting a new rule: Everybody eats dinner together so we can have family time (you’re giving the rule with reasons) so you will have to stop the TV at 5:30 and come to dinner with us or you will have to go to your room.’ That’s when you show him the schedule and the social story. ‘See Jacob. TV. Turn off TV. No crying! Go to dinner. Get Emily.’ All this desensitizes him and gets him ready psychologically for coming to the dinner table. If he doesn’t come to the dinner table and sit nicely you can add a negative consequence. If you like, you can add that step to his schedule.” (See *Transitions Tricks: Schedule* above)

Dad: “So if he fights us and won’t sit nicely and yells his head off, he goes to his room.”

Dr. Rick: “Right. *Transition Trick #19: Time Out* and/or *#20: Just Do It*. And he loses TV for the night.”

Mom: “But won’t that disrupt the whole evening?”

Dr. Rick: “For a few days it might but if you keep ‘giving in to keep the peace’ then he’s winning the battle and, most importantly, you are not expecting him to act maturely. You are giving him a ‘message of incompetence’—you poor little boy with autism, you can’t stop watching TV, come to the dinner and act civilized.”

Mom: “Oh my gosh. You’re right. That’s no good.”

Dad: “So I could take him to his room and keep him there while Julie and Charlie eat?”

Dr. Rick: “Or vice versa. You could take turns. Isn’t he getting used to time-outs?”

Dad: “Lately he *has* been tolerating them better. We tried your time out sequence starting with mini time outs and then increasing the time depending on how much he cooperates (See *Chapter 17: The Good, The Bad & The Ugly*) and he’s getting the idea that the more he fights the worse it is for him.”

Dr. Rick: “You guys are really giving him a strong message! But before we get to the *Time Out Trick* and *Just Do It* stage let’s go back and try to avoid conflict with some of my trickier tricks.”

Mom: “I’d like that.”

Transition Tricks: Techniques

9. No sudden No’s
10. Tussle, negotiate, argue, debate: get lots of circles!
11. Preview and Review
12. Video modeling
13. Talk about transitions at the right time
14. Use a game or competition to motivate: ‘Game Show’ mode

TT#9: ‘No sudden ‘no’s’

Dr. Rick: “Let’s start with the *No Sudden No’s* trick that I mentioned earlier.”

Dad: “I know about ‘No sudden no’s’. I shouldn’t just turn the TV off. That’s a sudden ‘No!’.”

Dr. Rick: “Correct. So when your child wants something he can’t have, let’s say candy in the grocery store, you can say, ‘Oh, you want candy (*TT#1: Mirroring*). *I’ll tell you what. I got an idea.* When we’re done I’ll get you some candy.’ That’s one way to avoid a sudden ‘No’. You can use the: *I’ll tell you what. I got an idea’, the negotiating approach.*”

Dad: “What if Jacob keeps whining and demanding.”

Dr. Rick: “Then I’ll use *TT#10: Tussling.*”

TT#10: Tussling

Dr. Rick: “Let’s take our situation. Jacob doesn’t want to stop watching TV or get off the computer. Let’s say you’ve done everything right—prepped him, showed him the schedule, offered rewards, given him warnings, etc.”

Mom: “I’ve given him five-minute and one-minute warnings but that hasn’t worked.”

Dr. Rick: “Warnings are great. Warnings use:

- *Structure* (TT#6)
- *Desensitizing* (TT#8)
- *Avoid sudden ‘no’s’* (TT#9), and
- *Talking about transitions at the right time* (TT#13)

“But, when warnings don’t work *tussling* might. *Tussling* means ‘getting into’ the tug of war.”

Dad: “Like we do with our dog and a towel. He growls; we wiggle the towel; he growls some more.”

Dr. Rick: “Exactly. That’s *tussling*. It involves having an argument that includes processing feelings, discussing reasons, warning about consequences, having a sense of humor—the kitchen sink.”

Mom: “Can you give an example?”

Dr. Rick: “It would go something like this (and as I record, I say Jacob’s name loudly to get his attention):

“So *Jacob* you don’t want to stop TV! (With a joking tone) Oh yeah? (Wait for eye contact and reaction.) Come on *Jacob*, turn it off and come to dinner.’ (This is *tussling*, getting into the argument and stretching it out. Wait for eye contact and reaction: let’s say Jacob frowns.) ‘Come on, Jacob. Dinner is fun. We talk. You’ll get a prize. (In a tempting voice) You’ll get *Emily*. (Let’s say he says firmly ‘No dinner. No Emily.’) No? I tell you what. I got an idea. When you come to dinner you’ll get Emily AND after dinner we’ll wrestle. We’ll have fun. (Let’s say he’s being completely stubborn. and starts to cry.) Oh, you’re so sad. But Jacob, if you don’t turn off the TV and come to dinner, you’re

going to go to time out. (Changing tone) Come on Jacob, come to dinner and have family time, prizes, and then more TV.'

"So you're tussling, arguing, negotiating, discussing with him like this and. . ."

Dad: "What if he comes to dinner but he's crying."

Dr. Rick: "That's a victory. As long he's not being too disruptive. He can change his mind at any time and come to dinner."

Dad: "Even when he's in time out?"

Dr. Rick: "Sure. You can make a time out that says 'Go to your room *until* you are ready to come to dinner without crying.' Time out is not a punishment; it's a consequence. As long as he's truly ready to sit and not be disruptive he can come to the dinner table any time."

Dad: "I don't know if have the patience for this."

Dr. Rick: "You don't have to. You could just turn off the TV and send him to his room with no discussion and that would work to improve his behavior. But patience pays off because he's learning to think and feel more maturely."

Mom: "But *tussling* will improve his understanding too, right?"

Dr. Rick: "Eventually. It takes a lot of exposures sometimes but I think it's worth it."

TT#11: Preview and Review

Dr. Rick: "I don't know if you noticed but I added another technique while I was demonstrating *tussling* called *Preview and Review* into the tussling process. *Preview and Review* paints a picture not only of the coming *events* but also of the coming *feelings* both positive and negative:

"OK, Jacob. Listen. If you don't turn off the TV and come to dinner, you know what's going to happen? (*Preview the negative consequences*) You're going to cry, we're going to fight, and then you're going to go to your room. No prizes, no Emily train, no dinner. Go to your room. And no TV. You will feel very sad."

"If you *do* turn off the TV (*Preview of positive consequences*), you will eat with mommy and daddy and Charlie. We will have family time. You will get a prize and you can watch TV after dinner. You will be happy. Mommy and daddy will be happy. Come on now, turn off TV and come to dinner."

"The other half of *Preview/Review* is *Review*. It's important to look back on a situation and summarize it, especially successes but also failure. 'Jacob, you did so well! You turned off TV; you came to the table and ate nicely. Now you get to watch TV. No time outs, no crying. . .'

"Both *Tussling* and *Prevein/Review* have elements of social stories, m&m's, sense of humor, giving perspective—the whole enchilada."

Dad: "But the idea behind *tussling* and *preview/review* is to make the discussion last, open lots of circles, and kind of get into the argument without really getting mad."

Dr. Rick: "Right. Get into 'discussion mode'. Have lots of back and forth interactions and keep your sense of humor. Like mom said, it's a way of desensitizing Jacob. It's a very cool Trick. So is this next one."

TT#12: Video Modeling

Dr. Rick: "A high tech version of *Preview/Review* is *TT#12: Video Modeling*. (Here I make a square with my fingers to simulate a picture frame.) You get your cell phone or one of those cheap video cameras

and you say into it: “This is the wrong way (cry and yell into the camera): ‘I want to watch TV. No dinner. No family. TV, TV, TV!! Wa-a-a-a-a-a.’” And you act out a tantrum. Jacob will find this very funny.

“Then move your face out of the picture frame. Wait a second and then move your face back into the picture and say: “This is the right way: (use a thoughtful voice) ‘I don’t *want* to turn off TV *but* it’s time for dinner. If I go to dinner I will have family time with daddy and mommy and Charlie. I will get a prize and I can watch TV later. OK daddy, OK mommy I’m going to dinner.”

Dad: “Jacob loves watching videos.”

Dr. Rick: “This way he could watch it over and over and get the message.”

Mom: “I see what you’re going for. We’re teaching Jacob to think things through. Would these techniques work with any transition?”

Dr. Rick: “Absolutely. Many of my families have tried them with lots of different transitions and they work. Really, they are very practical. Look at this next one.”

Transition Trick #13: Talking about the Transition at the Right Time

Dr. Rick: “Transition Trick #13 is about talking about the transition at the right time. There are two aspects to this. Talking too soon or not talking soon enough. This Trick is mostly for events that are far in the future like going to the doctor’s or dentist or even going to the store. You don’t want say ‘Next year we’re going to the dentist’. I have some children who would fret for a year. So just remember to discuss events in a timely fashion—usually an hour ahead of time for small events and a day ahead of time for bigger events.”

Mom: “Even fun events?”

Dr. Rick: “Even fun events. The other point here is to make sure you talk about *everything* (within reason) that is going to happen so there are no surprises.”

Dad: “So calendars, schedules, the discussion, the countdowns. . .”

Dr. Rick: “. . .are all part of Transition Trick #13. These tricks overlap.”

Transition Trick #14: Use a Game or Competition to Motivate

Dr. Rick: “TT #14 is using competition or a game to motivate Jacob.”

Dad: “So we could say: “First one to the dinner table gets a prize.”

Mom: “That would work for Charlie. He’s competitive but I’m not so sure about Jacob.”

Dr. Rick: “I might try to make Jacob jealous of Charlie by having fun with Charlie as you get ready for dinner. Make it loud and make it sound like so much fun that Jacob will get curious. You might say something like: ‘Yay. Charlie gets a prize!! Yay.’ See if you can woo Jacob into the kitchen.”

Mom: “But what prize?”

Dr. Rick: “I don’t know. Maybe stickers.”

Dad: “Charlie likes *Batman* stickers.”

Dr. Rick: “There you go. This Trick is also about making games out of any type of transition. If you are going to the store you could make it a game to see how many things you buy in each aisle and count them. ‘We bought **two** things on this aisle. How many are we going to buy on this next aisle?’”

Mom: “Jacob loves to count. That’s very ingenious. Can we give him a prize at the end of each aisle?”

Dr. Rick: “Sure, but don’t get into over-doing rewards. Our ultimate goal is to have him behave in the store because it’s the right thing to do. But counting, naming, creating mystery like ‘let’s see what we can find next from the list. . .’ can make transitions familiar and fun.

“I like to use *game show mode*. I turn my voice into an announcer’s voice and say: ‘And now contestants, let’s see if you can find the forks for the dinner table. Forks for two hundred (a la *Jeopardy*). On your

mark, get set, go go go. Find the forks and put them on the dinner table. Hurry hurry hurry. Yay!!
Get it?”

Mom: “Got it.”

Dr. Rick: “Good. OK. Let’s finish up.”

Transition Tricks Techniques

15. Offer bribes and prizes. Start very big and go smaller, then wean
16. Hold a favorite object during transitions
17. Sensory blinders (headphones & hat)
18. Threaten to put limits: “1-2-3 Magic”
19. Time out or natural consequences
20. Use of force--just do it!

TT#15: Bribes

Dr. Rick: “We’ve already talked about *Bribes* and *Prizes*. The only other thing to say here is that you want to start big and wean down.”

Dad: “How do you know when to wean?”

Dr. Rick: “The short answer is: ‘As quickly as you can.’ First you want to be effective in creating a new habit. Give him an *Emily* the first day and then maybe one other train the next day. The third day I might use the *Thomas Come to Dinner Toy Bag Trick*.”

Mom: “Toy bag?”

Dr. Rick: “Get a brown grocery bag and put some cheaper Thomas toys like a book, a craft set, some train track extras, etc. There are so many cheap things you can buy. Put them in the bag to create some mystery and suspense and let him reach into the bag and take a toy. Make sure Charlie gets prizes too.”

Dad: “This is getting more expensive all the time.”

Dr. Rick: “I call it ‘Christmas in July’. Isn’t it worth it?”

Mom: “If we can have some peace, definitely.”

Dr. Rick: “You have to be fair to Charlie.”

Dad: “So when do you wean him off?”

Dr. Rick: “Maybe by the 5th or 6th day. Use your judgment. There may come a point when he might say or act as if to say: ‘If I don’t get a prize, I’m not going to sit at the table.’ Then I’d tussle and negotiate for a couple of more prizes over another day or two with an agreement that there’s not going to be any more prizes for sitting at the table because he should sit at the table because ‘it is family time’.”

Dad: “That’s what I said in the first place!”

Dr. Rick: “True but look at all the reasoning we’re doing in the mean time.”

TT#16: Hold a Favorite Object during Transitions

Dr. Rick: “I have one more for you before we get out the stick: Transition Trick #16. Give him *Emily* to hold when the TV goes off as he’s going to the dinner table.”

Dad (incredulous): “Now you want me to give him a prize *before* he comes to the table?”

Dr. Rick: “Whatever works. He gets *Emily* only if he comes to the table without whining or crying. Otherwise he won’t get it.”

Mom: “He could get upset twice.”

Dr. Rick: “It’s a risk we could take but it could work just fine. This trick of holding a transition object also works well for transitions like going from home to the bus or from bus to school. Give him something to hold like his DS Video game or a favorite book or a favorite toy.”

Mom: “Will the school allow Jacob to take things on the bus?”

Dr. Rick: “If they’re smart they will.”

TT#17: Sensory Blinders

Dr. Rick: “Another good Trick while transitioning to different places is to teach Jacob to wear headphones. Have you ever tried that?”

Mom: “He loves music.”

Dr. Rick: “Well, get him to wear headphones to your iPod or other music device. Put a hat or hood on him. Pull his collar up. Create a micro-environment for him.”

Dad: “That might be good for stores and restaurants. The noisy big public places can really trigger him.”

Mom: “He likes to wear hats already.”

Transition Trick #18: Threats and 1-2-3 Magic

Mom: “I have one more question though about getting him to come to dinner. Let’s say we’ve tried everything, all the tricks, and he still won’t come to the table.”

Dr. Rick: “Then he’s done with the carrot and all that’s left are the sticks. *Tricks 18, 19 and 20* are the sticks: *Warning and threats, Time outs* and, when time outs are not appropriate, the *Use of force, just doing it*. Like putting him in the car or on the bus.”

Dad: “I get it. He can’t really win unless he cooperates.”

Dr. Rick: “Exactly. We give him every chance to cooperate by reasoning and motivating him because it helps his emotional maturity. But if he won’t be reasonable then that’s it. Threats work! And, Julie, don’t wait too long to do it. Don’t over-talk!”

Mom: “That is my problem. What if he comes to the dinner table but he’s whining a lot.”

Dr. Rick: “I’d use *Transition Trick # 18: Threats and/or 1-2-3 Magic*. You can use this at each step if you have to. Remember we talked about the ‘toe over the line’ in the last visit (See *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly*)? This is ‘the line’. You’ll say to Jacob ‘I’m going to count to three and you have to:

- Turn the TV off and come to dinner or else (you threaten) time out: 1-2-3
- You have to stop whining or go to your room: 1-2-3
- You have to sit in your chair and eat or go to your room: 1-2-3’

“Whatever he has to do you draw the line. And when you say ‘3’ you have to act and know what you are going to do. You have to have your parenting protocol clearly in your mind.”

Transition Tricks #19: Time Out and #20: Just Do It

Dr. Rick: “And then you follow through and just do it. If you have to you physically take him to his room—Transition Tricks #19 and #20. Jacob must have a bottom line. He must lose this battle over the rules. Why?”

Mom: “Because he can do it.”

Dr. Rick: “Right. Because we believe in him.”

Dad: “Do we have to go through all these tricks every time?”

Dr. Rick: “On the contrary. If he knows the rules; you’ve given explanations; and he’s playing you and thinks he’s the boss. Don’t over explain. You must be very clear and that’s what Tricks 18, 19 and 20 are all about—threaten, count, send him to time out or, if he forces you, physically take him to his room and make him stay there.

“If you want to be gentler with time out, *use graded time outs*:

- A *mini time* out if he can get it together and come to dinner and sit nicely at the table
- A *five-minute time* out in the chair, on the steps, or in his room
- Or a ten-minute time out if he fights you”

Mom: “What if he goes *wild* in his room and starts tearing the sheets from his bed, pulling all the clothes out of his drawers, kicking the door, pounding the wall and trying to get out of his room repeatedly?”

Dr. Rick: “Make sure his room is safe. *Time outs start when the crying stops*. Jacob must stay in his room whether you put him back in there repeatedly, hold the door handle, or put a lock on the door. When time out is done he has to clean up his room and he has likely missed dinner.”

Dad: “You’re tough.”

Dr. Rick: “I’m really fair. I’d tell Jacob ‘I don’t want to fight Jacob but you are not following the rules.’ I’m tough and clear about the rules. Otherwise it will be confusing. You can’t be wishy-washy with the rules, especially with kids on the spectrum. It’s actually reassuring. Children need to know that there is a predictable structure.

“Over time, these Transition Tricks will work 100% of the time because, Jacob always loses when he breaks the rules. He will see that it’s in his interest to cooperate. It makes sense. It’s fair. It promotes maturity. And, in the long run, it’s really better for the child and family. It makes everyone truly happier.”

Mom: “I get it Dr. Rick. I just hope I can do it.”

Dr. Rick: “You can do it, Julie. I have faith in you because you know it’s best for Jacob and you always want what’s best for your boys.”

Dad: “And I can see how these tricks will help with lots of transitions.”

Mom: “But what about the other situations like getting up in the morning or going to the grocery stores or driving in the car?”

Dad: “Or the fighting with Charlie?”

Mom: “Or getting him toilet trained?”

Dr. Rick: “The natives are getting restless.”

Charlie and Jacob are pushing each other over my new dragon toy that shoots gold coins from his mouth. The room is totally trashed. Our time is up today.

Dr. Rick: “Why don’t you try these tricks out and then we’ll get back together to cover these other issues. Call me. (To the boys) OK guys, we’re done here. (I start singing the clean up song.) Time to ‘clean up, clean up, everybody clean up’.”

I promise them another sucker. The room is clean in no time. I keep my promises.

Dr. Rick: “Who wants another sucker?”

Charlie: “I do!”

Jacob: “I do!”

Dad: “I do. I need one after all this.”

Dr. Rick: “It sounds like a lot but you’ve got our recording. I’ll email it to you. You’ve got the list of tricks and you have the phone. Give me a buzz. I really want to hear how Jacob does with turning off the TV and coming to the dinner table. Call me.” (See *Phone Follow-up* below).

Mom: “I like that *Preview/Review* trick. Along with the chart I think that will work.”

Dr. Rick: “And *Emily*.”

Jacob’s head turned at that. I think we may have found his *m&m*’s.

Phone Follow Up: One week later. . .

Julie called a week after the appointment to say that the plan worked like a charm—at first.

- They mirrored Jacob’s feelings
- Made him a chart/schedule/list
- Pictured and told him a social story
- And gave him an *Emily* and other Thomas toys from a big brown bag for coming to the dinner table
- They even videotaped a silly dad doing things ‘the wrong way’ and ‘the right way’; Jacob loved the video
- They previewed and reviewed feelings
- And told him how much they loved having him and Charlie together at the dinner table for ‘family time’

Mom: “Everything worked amazingly well for four or five days until yesterday, Dr. Rick. Then, I don’t know what it was but he wanted to watch TV and there was no way he was going to stop.”

Dr. Rick: “So what did you do?”

Mom: “Jim wasn’t home. He had to work late. I tried all the positive tricks. Jacob just didn’t care. I even waited until his show was over but he wanted to watch the *next* show.”

Dr. Rick: “Had Jim been bringing Jacob to the table?”

Mom: “You know, you’re right. Jim took it on. Maybe it was because Jim wasn’t home.”

Dr. Rick: “Jacob was testing you, Julie. You’re the one who backs off when he gets mad.”

Mom (firmly): “Well, I didn’t back off. Because of our plan I knew just what to do. I got down to the power tricks, ‘1-2-3 Magic’, threats, and time out so fast it made Jacob’s head spin. I took him by the arm and sat him in the chair for a short time out and I think Jacob was shocked. He whimpered a little, got up and sat at the dinner table. I let him and Charlie pick from the bag (which is down to little prizes from the dollar store—which they still love) and we had a very nice dinner.”

Dr. Rick: “Way to go Julie! How did you feel about it?”

Mom: “Great. Instead of feeling anxious I felt great. Having a plan really helped me give him a clear message.”

Dr. Rick: “A message of competence!”

Mom: “We had a very nice dinner thank you.”

Dr. Rick: “Congratulations! I am so glad.”

Mom: “Now we have to deal with the terrible morning routine. We’ve got an appointment coming up.”

Dr. Rick: “See you then. Way to go Julie! High five.”

Summary

- Jacob won't turn off the TV to come to dinner. In fact, he's having problems with nearly all the transitions in his life. They make him anxious and upset.
- We review *Dr. Rick's Twenty Transition Tricks* to give the Grants principles, strategies, and techniques to help Jacob understand that transitions are not the 'end of the world'.
- We use transitions and upsets to work on Jacob's logical and emotional thinking, to help him delay gratification, and to use his words. We believe in him and, by making appropriate demands we give him *a message of competence*. In short we are helping Jacob to become more mature.

Resources & Websites

- Carol Grey's *Social Stories*
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* (1980) Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish.
- *1,2,3 Magic* (5th Edition, 2014), Thomas Phelan
- *Autism Solutions* (2011) Ricki Robinson MD

Coming Up Next

- Sleep routines have become a nightmare with bedtime resistance and night waking. We help Jacob go to sleep without a big hassle and stay asleep in his own bed.