

A Deep Dive into Verbal and Non-verbal Life Skills

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A casual look at checklists of verbal and non-verbal functional, life skills, like the Assessment of Functional Living Skills (Partington and Mueller, 2012) often results in skills that appear to be quite functional. Some of these skills, however, especially when they are taught with children and adults with moderate-to-severe disabilities, 'turn out not to be' what is required in everyday living.

Sometimes these skills are simply the wrong skills, sometimes the context in which they are taught does not resemble the context in which they are expected to occur, sometimes the skills appear to require prerequisite or concurrent skills that turn out 'to be distracting or unnecessary', and sometimes the skills do not result in a critical outcome that is typically expected in everyday living (White, 2014). In each of these situations, what results are skills that are not useful and do not occur as part of activities of everyday living.

To resolve this issue, we strongly suggest what we call a 'deep dive' into life skills (McGreevy and Fry, 2012), which includes a thoughtful look at the verbal or non-verbal movements expected from the the learner (White and Haring, 1980), the context in which the skill is taught, whether other verbal or non-verbal movements often taught at the same time are distracting and unnecessary, and if the skill results in an outcome which is critical in everyday living (White, 2014).

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