

## CHAPTER 15

# TREATMENTS AND TECHNIQUES

*There is a direct correlation between someone's cognitive experience and his behavior. Anytime we impact the thinking of an individual, we impact his behavior.*

**T**his chapter explores some basic techniques and treatment strategies that can help parents and teachers work effectively with children on the spectrum.

These techniques can help you: 1) better communicate with individuals on the spectrum; 2) create an environment that is better suited for an individual with ASD; 3) learn how to intervene at important points to change behavior; and 4) learn how to teach individuals on the spectrum to control their emotions.

There is a direct correlation between someone's cognitive experience and his behavior. Anytime we impact the thinking of an individual, we impact his behavior. When intervention causes a decrease in linear thinking and an increase in social processing, thinking changes, and thus behavior also begins to change. This connection between experience and behavior is implied as one of the fundamental principals of the control theory.

The shift from a linear world to a social world that is spurred on by treatment forces a reallocation of the focus, resources, energy, and motivation in individuals on the spectrum. They begin to develop in a

more social context and, as a result, they take in more of the external environment. By managing their behavior and their thinking, we are attempting to change brain neurology and the level of brain functioning in those on the spectrum, creating more interconnectivity and the related flexibility. Individuals with autism would not necessarily choose this route on their own, so extrinsic motivation is often needed to get them to accept change and to be more social.

In the following sections, I provide some techniques and suggestions on methods to affect behavior by creating positive intervention.

## VISUALIZATION

A young man named Ryan once told me that he has two sides to his brain, a good side and a bad side. He explained that there was a wall between the good and the bad sides, and when he gets upset, his brain takes a sword and jams it into the wall, puts a hole in it, and then sucks the good into the bad side. This is how he describes what is going on in his life emotionally; he uses a concrete visual image. Eventually, in therapy, we created a mental shield that stops the sword as it tries to come through the wall. Something as simple as that visualization helped him control his mind.

Another one of my clients is a big *Harry Potter* fan; when he gets upset over something, he visualizes himself casting spells that empower him to overcome his problem. You can use visualization techniques to teach a child to learn how to calm himself, such as visualizing a favorite place or activity. I often tell clients, who might be prone to nightmares or other sleeping issues, to imagine one side of the pillow as a good side, and the other as a bad side; then when they are having trouble sleeping, they can just turn the pillow over to the good side.

Visualization is an effective method for changing cognitive experience. Once individuals with autism learn that they can control their brains, therapy can be effective in stimulating other areas of change.