

# Generalization

## Definition:

- The process of taking a skill learned in one setting (e.g. home) and applying it in other settings (e.g. daycare/school). It may also be used to define the process of taking one skill and applying it in a different way, such as zipping up a coat or backpack (Fouse & Wheeler, 1997).

## Also known as:

- Transferring skills and concepts
- Using a learned skill in different environments

### You are already doing it...

- When you talk about chairs, you show all different types of chairs (e.g., kitchen chairs, school chairs, desk chairs)
- When your child puts on their coat themselves at home, and they will put on their coat when leaving their grandparents' house, or when leaving the mall
- Teaching your child to stay on topic during a conversation with a friend, sibling or adult

### Can your child generalize a skill taught from...

- Familiar materials → New and different materials
- Familiar individuals → New and different individuals
- Familiar setting → New and different settings

## Consider this to promote generalization:

- Vary how you state your instructions (e.g. "come sit", "sit down", "take a seat")
- Vary the materials you use (e.g. learning to do up buttons, large buttons on coats, small buttons on dress shirts)
- Ensure your child responds to a variety of people (e.g. teacher, daycare staff, librarian, and grandparent)
- Vary the setting (e.g., ordering his/her meals at McDonalds, Harvey's and Swiss Chalet)
- Reinforce the behaviour/skill when your child demonstrates it in the natural environment

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Why is generalization so important?**

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) sometimes exhibit a behaviour or skill only in the context that it was taught. Hence, each child should be taught to transfer learned skills from one context to different contexts or settings. By encouraging your child to apply an acquired skill in a wide variety of environments, with different materials and across different people, you are able to increase your child's independence. Ultimately, this will encourage your child to become more flexible.

#### **When do I plan for generalization?**

Begin to plan for generalization when starting to teach a new skill. Your child may need repeated exposure to the same activity before transferring the skill. Other children may benefit from being introduced to a variety of people, places, instructions and materials right from the beginning.

#### **My child consistently asks for what they want at home. Why doesn't she demonstrate this skill with at school/daycare?**

Your child may not have learned how to transfer the skill to unfamiliar people. Providing numerous opportunities for your child to ask for items from other people (other than the parents) may encourage the generalization of this specific skill. With new people, an initial prompt may be needed (e.g., your child washes their hands at home but not at school or greets a friend on the playground but not at daycare)

#### **My child joined an ABA run social skills group and has learned how to take turns playing Monopoly with his friends. Why doesn't he show us the same skills while at home playing Candy Land with his sibling?**

In this example all three variables associated with generalization have been changed at the same time (people, place and materials). When teaching your child to generalize, it is most successful when only one feature is changed at a time. Try using the same instruction and different materials. Provide more support and reinforcement in the beginning and gradually fade both until your child is performing the skill independently.

#### **References:**

Alberto, P.A., & Troutman, A.C. (2003). *Applied behavior analysis for teachers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Fouse, B., and Wheeler, M. (1997). *A treasure chest of behavioral strategies for individuals with autism*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.