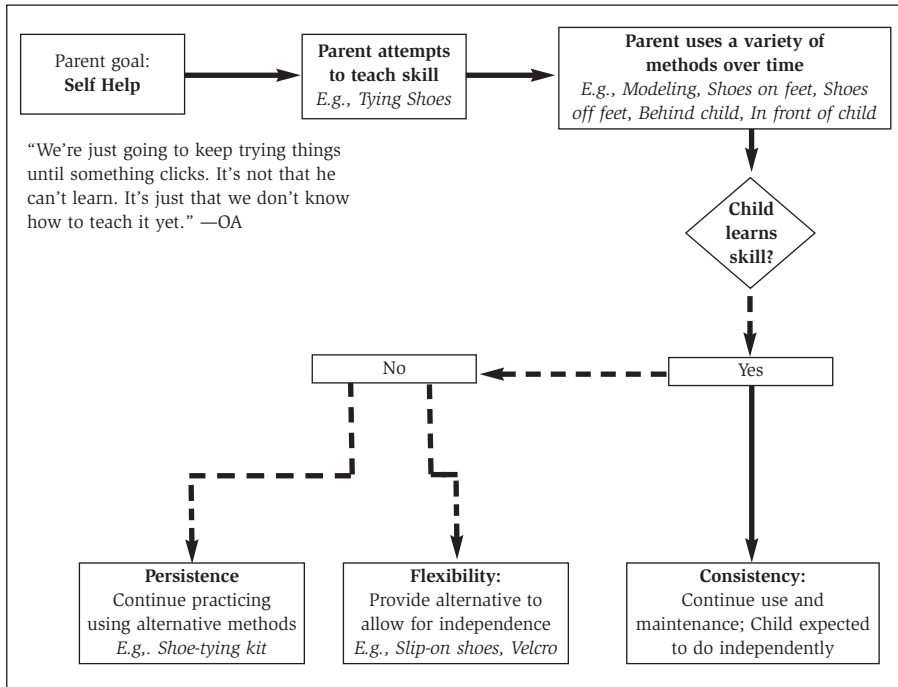


Figure 1. How Parents Facilitate Engagement When Teaching New Skills to Children



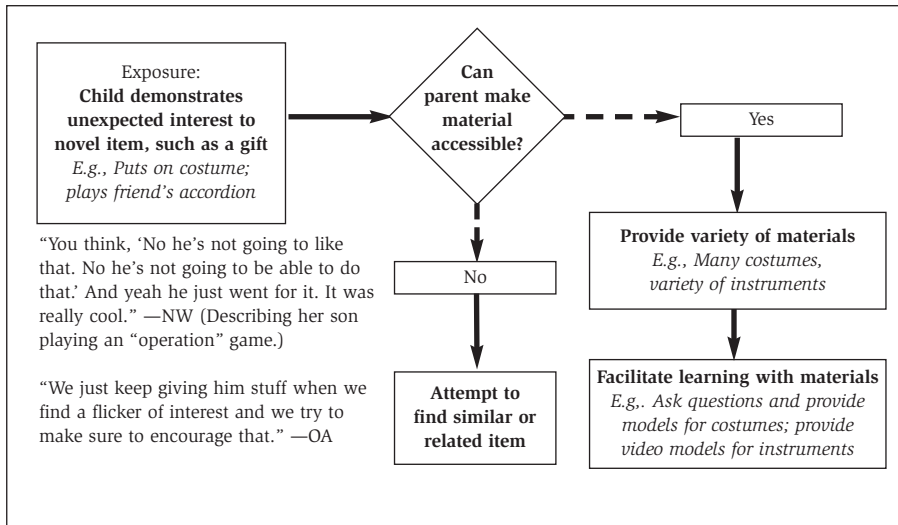
Note. Initials of individuals quoted identify parent participants.

Parents work on goals that can help children be successful and function in society over time and in a variety of settings. Within the range of teaching strategies used every day are connections with parental goals, as well as children’s strengths and challenges. Parents struggle and work to make each moment a teaching moment and to keep children engaged. Parents find a role for children in daily tasks. One parent explains, “[I]t goes back to including him in what we needed to do that day.”

When parents attempt to facilitate engagement, an interesting process determines the methods that they use. Self-help skills are important to parents because they encourage children to be independent and successful. Figure 1 illustrates the process of facilitating engagement in learning a new skill. Parents begin with goals needed to help children be independent. Working toward those goals begins with teaching skills. Parents work on skills over time and practice them daily.

If a child demonstrated an unexpected interest in an activity or with a material, parents attempted to extend and build on that interest. A child might receive an item as a gift or begin using it at the home of a peer. Parents extended that interest by making that item or a similar one accessible. Figure 2 illustrates the process of building on a new interest and exposing children to new items.

Figure 2. Process That Parents Used for Facilitating and Extending Engagement



Note. Initials of individuals quoted identify parent participants.

Children who are engaged are less likely to demonstrate repetitive and self-stimulatory behaviors. Parents recognized that they could sometimes redirect those behaviors into age-appropriate activities. A child could watch an object spinning while interacting with peers, manipulatives, and toys. Parents found ways to make abnormal behaviors look normal (see Figure 3).

The final model (Figure 4) makes connections across various domains and research questions. Parents have goals and wishes for their children. They act on those goals to engage children in activities. Parents use a variety of teaching strategies, and children stay engaged in a variety of ways.

DISCUSSION

Parents combine the previously mentioned strategies with specific knowledge of their children, individual attention, and the use of children’s interests. The dedication, knowledge, and diligence of professionals have a significant effect on the lives of children with autism, and researchers should not ignore or minimize it. The results of this study furnish evidence that parents have expert knowledge, as well as knowledge about their children. Parents of children with autism use many strategies to keep children engaged in the home setting. Parent efforts underscore the well-documented recommendation of the importance of family involvement in children’s education and interventions (NRC, 2001; Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, & Kincaid, 2003; Ozonoff, Rogers, & Hendren, 2003).