



TURN AUTISM AROUND
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 022

Teaching Kids With Autism Games and Leisure Activities

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

Mary: You're listening to another episode of the Turn Autism Around podcast. And in today's episode I am talking to my friend and colleague, Steve Ward, who's been a behavior analyst for a very long time, working in the field for more than two decades, and I met him over a decade ago after he published his book. And we're going to talk all about his journey, and I can't wait to get to that.

Mary: But before I do, let's give a shout out to one of the five star reviews that I got on iTunes from Ssand. She said, "I love this podcast. As a professional in the autism field, I feel myself and my coworkers can all benefit greatly from this, but I can also recommend it to parents of my clients so that they can get a better understanding of what we're doing and hear from other parents who've been through similar situations. It's easy to listen to while I'm driving in between clients, and never ceases to teach me something new." So thanks so much for that positive review and I am sure that you're going to love this podcast too. So let's get to the interview with Steve Ward.

Welcome to the Turn Autism Around podcasts for both parents and professionals in the autism world, who want to turn things around, be less stressed and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst, and bestselling author, Dr. Mary Barbera.

Mary: Okay. So I'd like to introduce my guest, Steve Ward, and Steve is a BCBA and he's been working in the field of behavior analysis since 1995, a long time ago, and he's currently the co-owner of Whole Child Consulting. He's been consulting to individuals, teams, schools and companies around the world. And he was a consultant and lead behavior analyst for a center school. He's coauthored a few books and we're going to talk about those books in today's episode. And he specializes in teaching social behaviors, incorporating knowledge from a variety of perspectives, and I met Steve a few times and I am really excited to have him on today's show. So welcome, Steve.

Steve: Thank you. Thanks for having me, Mary.

Mary: Yeah, it's been a long time. We, I think we last saw each other maybe a year ago at the last ABA conference. So we're going to talk about that a little bit too, because we did speak on a panel together on ethics. But before we get to that, I remember meeting you, at an ABA conference when you're... When our books, my book and your first book came out and, uh, yeah were wearing a red wig at the time when I met you, which we'll uncover that the, uh, why you were wearing a red wig. But before we get to know all of that and how we met and all that, how did you fall into the autism world or the ABA World? And you said you got started in 1995, so can you tell our listeners where you came from and how you, how you got involved with this whole world?

Steve: Sure. I think there was a little bit of luck and a little bit of making my own luck in that, um, I think since I can remember I've had maybe a higher degree of empathy than, than your average person. The ability to see, you know, how interested people were in things and you know, whether people were upset and maybe why they were upset, that kind of stuff. I knew going into college that I wanted to be involved in psychology at some level, but I did not, I was not picking up the ABA was the direction I was going. So I got my degree in psychology and I kept myself in the human services field working in group homes and things like that, but never learning ABA until I stumbled into a job in Florida, a little bit north of south of Palm Beach with Pam Christopher. And she taught me some ABA and it was the first thing that really made systematic sense. It was really the... other things, you know, it's pop this and that, and people feel this way because of that, and then you should be supportive like this, but nothing was defined as well as logical, or really made as much sense as ABA. And it just, it made so much sense to me that I just really consumed it from there on.

Mary: Yeah. So, um, when you were working in the group home, I guess that was back in the 90s, did you see, did the individuals have autism or was that, you know, kind of mixed...

Steve: The group home was mixed. It was mostly very, very low functioning adults with developmental disabilities, um, lots of physical aggression, some that weren't toilet trained, that kind of thing. And there were, you know, looking back upon it, I knew that some, two of the adults got M&Ms every once in a while if they were good... I didn't know that was a DRO, but I knew that they got M&Ms once in a while if they were good. So there were behavior analytic principles being used, but I was only trained at that point, like a frontline tutor basically. Like, here's how you manage these people. Here's what you do, not here's why you do it, or here's the terms, the behavioral terms, describing what you're doing.

Mary: Okay. So you became a behavior analyst in what year?

Steve: I would like to say it was 95. Um, I became a board certified with my masters and that was in 2003.

Mary: Okay. Okay. So you've been working in the field for, you know, over two decades. And, um, did you work as a behavior analyst or were you a teacher, too? Or how did... did you work in schools? How did you get from out of the group home or are you still working in group homes?

Steve: Um, currently I'm not doing any work in group homes. I've been in them on and off through, you know, different arrangements with people. I was, um, let's see... I worked in a school for a while. Basically, really my job was glorified bouncer. If kids ran off campus, I ran them down and physically brought them back. So that was a really great job. I did that and basically what qualified as a timeout room. Uh, but again, uh, I did my job with some degree of care.

Steve: I think I was attentive to whether things were working or not working. And if you, I guess that for me the moral of the story was that I made sure I was in human services at some level all the time, so that I could be around other people in human services learning about it. And then at some point, if you do your job with some care then people notice that you might be worthy of doing other jobs that also involve that level of care and worthy of more education. So that's basically what happened.

Mary: Yeah, yeah. When you were talking about being a bouncer, I remember being in a public school and you know, I'm like arriving for my four hour consultation or something, and the principal like greets me at the door, oh thank God you're here, you know, Johnny's being completely aggressive. I'm like, great.

Steve: Yeah. That's what I'm here to do. I run crisis procedures.

Mary: And, you know, it's unfortunate that, you know, some places aren't real great at preventing problem behavior and having good procedures in place. And it's a scary time for behavior analysts in some ways because you know, these are sometimes older kids and adults with pretty significant behaviors and it's like, it's a lot of of history to undo.

Steve: Yes. And speaking of the crises, I remember the first school job I had once I started getting behavioral training. So this one I wasn't a bouncer, I was a BCABA at the school, but I'm remembering this one day towards the end of the first year there where the vice principal said at the end of the day, "Wow, we had 27 code reds today", and I imagine you know code red is a bad thing, kids ran off and needed to be caught and they were throwing desks in the classroom and things like that. Um, there were 27 code reds today and he said, "Let's, you know, let's hope tomorrow is better". And my response was, and this was because the

proactive things weren't in place, but it was also the end of a long day. I said, "well I don't see why it would be". Why would it be any different than today? We haven't changed anything we're doing. Yeah. So we're probably going to have 27 code reds tomorrow. We might've only had 23 or so, but it was an uphill climb to get some proactive things put in place there.

Mary: Right. And that's why, you know, I'm on such a big mission to turn autism around, to educate parents and professionals with my podcasts and videos and online courses. You get, you know, and I know you and I are very much on the same page in terms of wanting to put in proactive strategies and teach people how to be... You know, proactive, empathetic, consider the whole child. I mean, I love the name of your company, Whole Child Consulting. I mean, I'm constantly saying, step back, look at the forest, not the trees. Look at the whole child. You know, this isn't a backroom. You're not like, oh potty training. That's a parent problem. Oh, sleep. That's a parent problem. You know, teaching reading is, you know, school problems. The child can't speak and doesn't understand, and doesn't have a reinforcement system in place.

Mary: And it's like nobody's looking at like, okay, Johnny's five, where's he going to be at 10 or 15 or 50? And how are we going to get him there? The happiest, the less stressed and all that stuff. So yeah. So I really like the name of your company... I've never really processed that it was such a good fit.

Mary: So, um, okay, so let's move on to 2007, I think at the ABA Conference. Our books came at... Your book is 2007? Your game book?

Steve: Let me think. It might've been 2008.

Mary: Okay. So maybe it was 2008 and we were at a book signing. We happened to just get placed right next to each other. And so that book is called... can you give us the name of the book?

Steve: It is, What You Need To Know About Motivation And Teaching Games: An In-Depth Analysis.

Mary: Right. So on the front cover is Steve with a red wig. And then on the back cover is his back with the red wig. So he was at the book signing with this red wig. And I'd never heard of him, never... You know, met him. So I'm like, who's the guy in the red wig? And then you happened to have, you know, this book. And my book was The Verbal Behavior Approach. And so I'm thinking like, I don't know this guy, he's probably a clown, because he has a clown wig on. So I start asking you about your background, and I'm like, oh wow, you know, about precision teaching. And for those of you that, you know, haven't been listening to my

podcast, I did an episode, I believe episode number 14 with Rick Kubina, who was my BCBA mentor and he's huge in the precision teaching field.

Mary: And, and you were very knowledgeable about Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior, and you are... and it was just like, oh my God, this guy really isn't a clown. He knows what he's doing.

Steve: He just likes to dress like one.

Mary: Yeah. And I got your book that day and then... the book is basically a guide to teach kids like my son Lucas how to play games. And up until that point we were trying to teach him social skills and game playing using ABA principles, but until we really had Steve's book, which gives a much better analysis but also gives you much better step by step instructions on teaching games, we were kind of lost in terms of really knowing that. So it was a phenomenal book.

Mary: In fact, I don't know if I told you this, but I happened to be flying back home... I usually fly into Philadelphia airport and I happened to be sitting next to Andy Bondy and Lori Frost, who are the creators of the PECS system, picture exchange system, and I was reading your book and I'm like, Oh my God, this book is so amazing. I'm like passing it over, showing them, being all into it. And you know when I came home and I said...

Steve: Well thank you for that.

Mary: Did I tell you that?

Steve: Yeah, you actually emailed me that. Appreciate that.

Mary: And when I got home and I said, you know, this book is amazing. It's teaches us how to teach Lucas go fish and things like that. And the behavior specialist was like, oh, well we, you know, he can play go fish or whatever. And I sat down with the checklist and was like, oh my God, there's so much wrong with this. There's like nothing right about the way we were teaching him. So we did make quite a few adjustments in terms of how we taught Lucas to play games. And I was, it's just a phenomenal book.

Steve: Thank you. I should say, um, the part of your story, you mentioned that you got my book, my recollection was that we traded books at the book signing and we signed each other's books, and uh, I read yours the following weekend as well. And it was very well done. It is very reader friendly and spot on in terms of getting communication training going.

Mary: Yeah. Great. Yeah. I couldn't remember if you gave me a book or if we traded or if I paid for it. I knew I got the book and I actually got a couple copies. So, in that book also, it's not just about teaching board games or card games, it's also about teaching... Which are, you know, definitely more needed, and more oriented towards language, but games like hotter, colder, and those sorts of things. Can you describe why it's important to teach kids things like warm or cold or whatever you call it? Um, stop and go and those kinds of things. Cause I do think that that's a big part of your book and it shouldn't be understated.

Steve: Oh sure. Yeah. Thanks. So one of my motivations for writing the book was that I was finding myself recommending red light, green light for, I don't know, half of the kids... Half of the new kids I saw over the course of about six months. I thought, you know what, they could use red light, green light for this or for that. There's some obvious reasons like, you know, paying attention to the caller, of the person calling out red or green, and I always say stop or go because they're easier English words that are more generalizable, and therefore more important for our students' functioning levels.

Steve: But when you start thinking about it our kids that elope, that have safety issues, would benefit tremendously from learning to respond when you say stop. And if a kid is pursuing something they want to get to say, let's say I'm holding a cookie or I'm going to give them a big bear hug or something when they get to me... If they're perusing something they want to get to and I tell them to stop, it's really in their interest to naturally be paying attention to when I'm going to say go, they want to hear the word go, right. So when I say go, that's going to function like a reinforcer. [Inaudible] did a lot of work in this kind of thing, not red light, green light, but it essentially turns into the same thing where kids were provided with something that they really wanted but not allowed to take it yet. It was within reach, but they weren't allowed to get it until the teacher either smiled or nodded or said, okay, and this is a discriminative stimulus method of conditioning reinforcers. Different than discriminative stimulus pairing.

Steve: So in the discriminative stimulus method, you would appreciate hearing the yes, because it means yes cookie. So alright. Yeah. Yes is a great thing. I'm going to tune into Mary. I'm gonna pay attention to when she's going to say yes. She's probably going to be smiling when she says yes. So smiles are good. She might nod when she says it so nodding is good. So all of that stuff becomes conditioned as reinforcers relatively quickly with a lot of kids.

Steve: Since I was recommending that for a lot of different teams and I found myself... I wrote up the script for how to teach it and why to teach it about four or five times I thought, why should I keep rewriting the script if I, if there's this many kids that would benefit from it for one reason or another? Let me turn it into a book and put the other games with it. Getting into hotter, colder,, I usually use

the words yes and no with kids for the same reason as I use stop and go, I want yes to be good. Yes, keep doing what you're doing. And I want no, not to be like this massive punishing stimulus than it is for so many of our kids. Right.

Steve: So with some kids who are really, really upset when they hear no... really, they really protest or fight a lot about hearing the word no. If I put it into the context of hotter, colder,, no, that candy isn't there, it's here. That's a really easy context. That's a lot easier than, no, we're not going to McDonald's, we're driving past McDonald's and going home and eating celery. That's a whole lot better than say, no your candy is not there, it's there. It's immediate, they're accessing the reinforcer, all of those things. For some of the kids that have been really, really turned off by no, just playing hotter, colder, and just using the words yes and no, that by itself entirely fixed the problem. No tears involved... just a really fun and easy way to teach it. Of course, that hasn't fixed the problem for everybody.

Steve: Another big thing that is addressed with hotter, colder is for students to learn what to do when they don't know what to do. One of the things that can come from, let me say, unwitting programming, if we're discrete trial training everything and we're prompting and fading for every new skill, our students don't get the chance to learn what to do when they don't know what to do. And those students will either give up sometimes or they'll demonstrate a problem behavior or they'll be paralyzed and they'll be waiting for you to just instruct them on exactly what to do. This game isolates that behavior. And I can start it with a kid who has given to prompt dependence.

Steve: Say someone who, if you don't say take a step forward, they don't take a step forward or they don't scan. I'll start it with the prize hidden in a really, really easy place, just to learn, look, if you turn your head five degrees to the side, you're going to see your iPad. Just walk to it. It's there. You can have it when you get it. I can really get kids more flexible a lot of times within one or two repetitions of the game learning to scan spontaneously. And it's such a foundational tool or repertoire for a problem solving.

Steve: If you think about it, anyone encountering any problem, if what you do is just paralyze and wait for help, well you're never gonna learn problem solving that way. But if you're at least scanning to, what I like to call, recruit your own SDs, that's the issue with problem solving is there's no... When you're, when you're faced with a problem, there's no immediate SD as to how to proceed, or it wouldn't be problem solving. It would just be working hard, persevering, right? If there's no immediate SD available, meaning there's no green light, here's what you do to fix the issue, and you give up, then you can't solve problems. But if you at least look around for SDs, I wonder if it's this way, would Steve say yes if I look in that direction, um, if I take some steps around there, will I be able to see

around the shelf or will it be behind that? That repertoire is, yeah, put another way is foundational to problem solving.

Mary: Yeah. And I believe problem solving is one of the, you know, biggest issues with our kids with serious language disorders, like my son, and I know when I worked with a few adults pretty early on when Lucas was still probably 12 or 14 years old, I was working with some adults trying to figure out what jobs would be best for them. And I went into a hospital laundry and the adult was pretty much functioning language-wise, give or take, like Lucas, you know, pretty impaired. And I was like, okay, could you show me, you know, the job, the options, you know, and uh, you know, a lot of them were like, well, if this happens then you have to do this and if this doesn't work then you have to do this.

Mary: And it's like, okay, like, so I finally pick the simplest job, which was folding, um, taking white washcloths and just folding them in half and stacking them to 25 and then moving the pile. And you know, that was the simplest one. But there were still these, these if then like if it was stained, if it was, if it was dropped on the floor. So it wasn't really stained, it just needed to be rewashed. If it was really stained or torn, it needed to be thrown away.

Mary: And those decisions, you know, you talked earlier about safety issues. You know, Lucas requires supervision all the time because he can't make decisions about safety issues. He doesn't know what a stranger is. He, you know, I could physically teach them to call nine one, but he doesn't understand all of the ramifications involving things that could happen that would be emergency. So I think, you know, it's great that your book and your work really focuses on decision making, but realizing that like, because of whatever neurological impairment may be the case, there are some kids that, you know, only can get to a certain level in terms of safety and decision making. And we're going to have to then select IEP goals and we're going to have to select jobs when they're adults and we're going to have to select living arrangements to keep them safe because of these problem solving deficits that remain with them, unfortunately, many of the kids.

Steve: Yeah. We don't want to give the false impression that if we just really do everything right, then everyone can quote unquote recover. Some people are going to have a ceiling and they're going to get better because of what we do, we're going to help with their functioning. At some point with some of those guys, I have a couple of young adults now that I'm working with, we're at the point where we're deciding what is their lifelong supervision going to look like? Are they going to spend the night in a building by themselves? Two of my kids, no, absolutely not going to spend a night in the building by themselves. Just too many different things could happen that way. But they can work, you know, they can, they can do a lot of other things functionally. They can shower themselves,

which is a really big deal, right. They can do the whole bathroom routine by themselves now which is a really big deal. Um, but they're not going to live by themselves.

Mary: And there's lots of decision and problem making even with that kind of stuff. If you're out of soap, if the water's too hot, and all those things that... you know, your book, even teaching games can, you know... Hotter, colder, and stuff like that. The same principles can work for hot or cold or with water and those sorts of things. So ABA principles are embedded with everything you do, everything I do. And so if somebody did buy your book and the name of the book again is...

Steve: What You Need To Know About Motivation And Teaching Games: An In-Depth Analysis.

Mary: Okay. And so if somebody did buy your book and had you know, a five year old or a 12 year old or 20 year old, like would you suggest they just read it and go in order or would you suggest like they work on things like hotter, colder first before the card games, and maybe that's outlined in your book? I'm not really sure.

Steve: I would suggest that they read the first three chapters. The first three chapters are about what the benefits of play are. Some of the things that people might not necessarily think about, like, uh, some folks in the field think of play as just here's how you build your relationships so you can finally get down to work. You play for a week and then you do discreet trial and that's not, you know... that that's not what the point of play is. Um, I would have them read the first three chapters and then consider which games they think might be appropriate for the student.

Steve: In each chapter with the games is a list of the prerequisites. So you're going to know when you look at the prerequisites, my student has those, they're a decent candidate for this. Uh, the things my student enjoys seem to line up with what the focus is supposed to be for the game. You know, some people like seeking games in general, then clearly you're simply hotter, colder like a seeking game. Whereas kids that like cards, they might be better candidates for go fish or memory or something.

Mary: Yeah, yeah. And those kind of games, you know, the card games especially, I think that the hotter or colder or red light, green light and stuff are definitely great for problem solving and language and everything. But even in where Lucas goes to work everyday, you know, they do on downtime, they do play cards and they do play Uno and that sort of thing. So you know, both are important for, for different reasons and for different kids, like you said.

Mary: Like you, your book kind of outlines the possibilities with 12 or 15 games. It's not an extensive thing. But like I said, you can apply a lot of those things to other areas. Prevocational tasks and breaking things down and helping kids problem solve, helping kids notify someone if there's a problem, um, and that sort of thing. So I think it's great.

Mary: So you do have another book or two books out, too...

Steve: Four.

Mary: Oh, four books. Okay. So we don't have a ton of time, but just tell me like the titles and like what those books are about.

Steve: Great. I'll stick on the game theme for a second first. Last year I put out the sequel to the first motivation and games book, and that's called Another 21 Games: This Time It's Personal. Just because I like the title, it's not personal, but I thought it was a fun title. That also has me in a clown wig but this time I have a camo headband around it. Um, and the character's name is Ramzo, he's Rambo and Bozo. But that one doesn't have as much introduction except it does get into good sportsmanship, tolerance of losing, being able to handle competition, things like that that are that undermine our kids appreciation of lot of games. And then it describes what to do with 21 different games.

Steve: The other three books are all in this series together and it is the Inventory Of Good Learning Of Repertoires. That is an assessment of how and why our particular student is learning: how they learn the best, how they learn the worst, which things they hate the most. And it is meant to... For tougher to reach kids is meant for us to find what the way is to get in. Like what are the learner friendly things? Do they have to be interesting things? They have to be in the context of a tangible that they care about getting, you know, what are they happy, fast paced, we should prompt or we shouldn't? All of those kinds of things are considered there. What learning channels work the best and worst.

Steve: And then there's two companion books for that. So that was just an assessment. Just a questionnaire. From that is the Teaching Good Learning Repertoires, that tells you what to do. Say your kid has this profile in the inventory? Okay, let's go to Teaching Good Learning Repertoires, and here's some ways you can actually intervene to address those foundational learning repertoires. And if they were starting at a really low level, all of those ways, here's how you can get them to a higher level. Here's how you can make them easier to teach. That's the point of it. That involves some play and it involves some other things too. Sometimes extinction or punishment or you know, whatever is appropriate for that student. It doesn't tell you exactly what to do but it tells you how to think about it and it gives you some ideas for what to do.

Steve: And the last book is Teaching Advanced Learning Repertoires. The only difference between that and Teaching Good Learning Repertoires is the advanced book is for kids, the top 15 or 20% of them were... a lot of the advanced kids are appropriate for inclusion, and some of the kids below the advanced levels are appropriate for it. Um, we get into more self-regulation, more advanced forms of problem solving, more advanced forms of self-calming. All of that is in there.

Mary: That's great. So about half of my listeners, at least are parents, so when you said punishment, reinforcement and punishment, can you just clarify like what kind of punishment is maybe included, are recommended in your books because you know, we both know exactly, well, you probably are even more analytical about punishment than I am, but, but um, yeah, just for late people, is it a time out kind of punishment?

Steve: Sure. Yeah. I considered that for a second before I said it and I thought, well, I don't want to softball this whole thing. If you understand what punishment really is, almost all of us use it with people and it's not anything illegal about what we're doing. We're not caning them or anything, right? It's punishment if you we're playing with an iPad and your younger sister came too close to your iPad, came within five feet and you'd chuck the remote control at her head. And I said, you know, let's not do that. Let me take your iPad for a moment until you're calm enough here to do this and then your sister is going to sit next to you.

Steve: Me taking the iPad for five seconds, let's say that was all I did in that circumstance. That's a response cost. That is, you had something in now for a little while you don't. It's a little bit like a timeout, and timeouts are things people use with typically developing kids, you know on a fairly regular basis. What I'm not talking about here is some of the old, the bad PR that ABA got in some of the beginning of Lovaas days where they talk about thigh slaps and things like that. I'm not talking about corporal punishment here, but response cost is something that is in all of our lives.

Steve: I got a speeding ticket about a year ago. It sucked. That was a response cost. I paid a fine for going too fast in the wrong place. You know, that punishment exists. It's something I don't withhold from our kids necessarily either.

Mary: Yeah. I did a podcast interview yesterday and I forgot to hit the record button and that was, that was a punishing. You know, it's like we have a lot of natural punishers in our lives and um, when you're talking about punishment it's, it would be like, like you said, like taking away the iPad for five seconds which, you know, for each child we need to know what the reinforcers are. We need to be planning around the reinforcers. And then for many children we also have to

have some consequences if there are problem behaviors that we can pretty much, you know, get rid of. But you don't want to be, whether you're a teacher or a parent out there, if you are using say timeouts for instance, which aren't horrendous or you know, but nine times out of 10 they're not used properly and they can actually make things worse in my experience.

Steve: That's right. So I have a barometer or something that I feel if I'm engaging with a kid and I find over a period of time that I had to provide even any kind of corrective feedback, you know, whether it's a no or not that one or try this one, it's that redirection even. If I provided corrective feedback, say three times in a row since the last positive feedback, I know where we're going. We're going to a bad place if I do that. So I've got to change something up, change the environment, find another positive thing to do to change that trend before it goes really south.

Mary: Yeah, that's great. Okay. So at the ABA conference last year, you and I and Dr. Megan Miller and Robert Schramm presented an ethical panel together. Something like thinking outside of the Skinner's box or something about ethical implications and, we don't have a lot of time, but let's talk a little bit about ethical issues that you see that are common or some of the bigger ethical issues that you want to, you want to help solve.

Steve: Sure. There's, there's the obvious things with ethical questions that you don't really need me to tell you, like not violating HIPAA and all of those kinds of things. The ethical use of if you are going to punish, making sure that you have considered proactive measures, you know, done your due diligence, everything else and determined that it was necessary and then that enough data was going to be collected and enough supervision and training was provided so that it's done as correctly as possible. All of those things. Um, I think the part... I tend to be more interested in the parts that less people seem to know about because that's like, hey, I could maybe help shed light on something instead of needing to shine light on something that's already very brightly shone, right?

Steve: So for me, a lot of my emphasis ethically, especially over the last few years has been watching the backdoor on some of that. While I fully appreciate the need for the ethics of be careful about extinction, be careful about punishment, I'm focusing largely on the ethical dilemma of withholding effective interventions. By virtue of not being willing to allow a little bit of extinction or a little bit of punishment. You know, basically positive reinforcement is contingent. We have the whole non-contingency oxymoron thing there, but I'll ignore that for a moment. But if we're running a discrete trial session, I see this a lot, uh, we're running a screen trial session and you're getting pretzels every couple of responses, some responses are higher quality, some are lower quality, people are frequently reinforcing independent of the level of effort, independent of

whether they were able to fade prompts. You know, they need help in running correction procedures appropriately and sometimes getting out of scripted correction procedures.

Steve: But one of the parts that makes up the biggest ground for kids learning is us being willing to not reinforce the subpar responses that kind of, I see it waking kids up like, wait a minute, I always get a pretzel if you corrected an error. Well, not for me. You know, not if I correct an error right? Usually not. So now you're going to have to try harder if you actually care about pretzels you're going to try a little bit harder. And kids learn much more quickly and they really wake up.

Mary: Yeah. Yeah. I do see a lot of that. I don't see clients anymore, but through my online courses I see parents and professionals are in there. And you know, there are a lot of schools and group homes and residential placements and they have infrastructures in place and really, very much scripted error correction, scripted steps and it becomes less and less individualized and the kids don't learn well and you know, they don't learn as well as they could. And I think there's, there's a lot of, the... Other thing I'm seeing, I've seen in the past is, you know, you do this assessment in some places, you know, okay they do a VP assessment and then... But the goals are very much like old school. They'll sit and look at me for three seconds. It's like I don't care if they sit and look at me for three seconds, like we're gonna get moving with learning.

Mary: And so, yeah, that's another thing that kind of jumps off of what you're saying is this regimented cookie cutter approach. And also the goals are not really all that individualized cause they just go to their regular goals and if the child doesn't make progress, you know, I used to do probe sheets and it's like if I didn't have half the targets mastered in one week, like there was a problem, right. So kids that are not making progress week after week, we have to do something different and not just continue to dig a big hole. Um, so getting on my ethical soapbox, but I, you know, we did a big ethics presentation and we had, you know, over 500 people in the room. It was great. It's just, you know, it just is hard to reach the masses. But, um, yeah, I also have an ethical series as part of my online course. Um, so BCBA's can get their ethics credits and, and really start making progress in terms of intervening the right way for all kids so that every child can reach their fullest potential.

Mary: So right now, what are your and how can people find you or connect with you?

Steve: We have a website, www.wholechildconsulting.com, kinda easy to remember. That's an easy place to contact us and find out about our services. We continue to serve families in their homes. We are working with behavioral clinics that are interested in having us QC, what they're doing, come in and support them. We're doing some work with school districts. Also our work is in, primarily it's in Florida

and the greater Chicago area and the greater Dallas area. But we do get to some other parts of the country sometimes and other parts of the world sometimes.

Mary: And you do whole day trainings. Um, you came to my area and did a training. Um, and that was great as well.

Steve: Thanks for reminding me.

Mary: Yeah, that was, you know, and I think this whole game thing and social skills. I mean everybody is struggling with that because all our kids are so different and it's difficult to program in that area. Um, so before we end today, Steve, part of my podcast is to help parents and professionals be less stressed and happier, lead happier lives. Um, so do you have any advice for like self-care or anything that kind of keeps you sane as you travel around the country and try to help people?

Steve: Yeah, good question. So as to not misrepresent again, I don't want to put it out there as though I've been the perfect model of self-care over caring for others... A lot more. I've done more of that, although I do understand some of the gist of what is necessary. And I think that the handful of things it boils down to is recognizing the good. Spending some time celebrating accomplishments, and when there is a challenge, recognizing that there's things we can do to impact the challenge that we're faced with, and there's some things that are beyond our control and that the, you know, the best we can do is our, is our best effort with it. Um, and if we end up feeling like, you know, someone else is a better fit for it or calling out to another resource, we'll do that. So we try not to beat ourselves up, recognize that we have limitations, and celebrate our successes.

Mary: I think that's great advice. So we'll end it there. Wholechildconsulting.com to get a hold of Steve, and thanks so much for your insights. I think even though you've been at this for many years I look forward to many more years of collaboration to help turn autism around. Alright. Thank you and have a great day.

Steve: Thanks. You too, Mary.

Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit marybarbera.com.