



Facilitating Relationships... Promoting Independence

Leaving Stuck City: Take the Next Exit!

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Have you ever experienced that moment when your child mentions over and over again a specific toy, movie, CD, etc., but when you give it to them they become even more upset? Or maybe your child is a teenager, but they also seem to be talking about Barney, Disney movies, or any other entertainment that is completely inappropriate for someone their age? Ladies and gentlemen, your child is STUCK.

What do you mean by “stuck?” This phrase means that your child does not always want that specific toy, game, song, movie, etc. that they keep mentioning over and over. Instead, they are unable to stop their voice from the repetition. The neurons in the brain keep firing like they are on autopilot, and when your child tries to vocalize what they truly want, the only thing that comes out of their mouth is often what they do NOT want: their “stuck” idea. Think of it as if you were driving along on Loop 101, but suddenly there were no exits. You would keep circling around and around the city, “stuck” in the loop, never making it to your final destination. In the brain, the neurons are stuck driving on the autopilot loop and there are no new “exits” to share new ideas.

The more often your child is stuck in their words/actions/etc., the easier it is to stay stuck. The more often it happens, the stronger the “autopilot” becomes, and therefore the harder it is to break those patterns. If you notice that you receive the same response from your child every time you say or ask a certain question, change YOUR words. Ask in a different way, find a new way to make a statement, utilize visual supports; help facilitate your child’s change out of the stuck pattern.

Another thing to consider is they often might be thinking something differently than what we hear coming from their voice. If you’re not sure if your child’s words are their true voice, give them an alternative way to communicate. Double check their choice by utilizing a visual support: index cards printed with yes and no, choices on a white board, anything that you can use to write down words.

To help change the picture, you are actually changing the way the brain works. This requires creating new neuropathways (sending the signals in the brain in different ways) in order for your child to access their true voice, wants, and needs. Think of it as building exit ramps off Loop 101 in order for you to end up at your desired destination. It may be as simple as reminding your child to use their true voice or giving them a communication support, but it may also require you to take the “stuck” items from your child.

This is just the first step. If you realize your child is stuck, then it is time to get to work to help change the picture. Is change easy? Not necessarily. Can it be done? Yes! Every person is different and therefore there is not one “cure” to help change the stuck patterns. Fortunately, there are many ways to go about the process and the therapists at NMTSA are excited to help. Talk with your therapist about specific strategies and techniques to help your family, and feel free to ask questions. We are here and very excited to help you CHANGE THE PICTURE.

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