



Episode 27: Just Right Challenge and Adaptive Response

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder



LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

This is a love letter to two of Jean Ayres' core ideas, the just right challenge and the adaptive response, with the books physically open on the table. The thread that holds it together is that an adaptive response is never an either-or; it is a continuum of complexity and quality, and our job is to evince the next little bit of capacity already in the child, across whichever domain they are growing in. We read Ayres' own words from the 1972 blue book, unpack the attain, maintain, challenge dimension that became part of STEPPSI, and sit with her lovely word evince, revealing the presence of capacity. We make the case that this is developmental, not just sensory, which is why you need the developmental sequence to pitch a challenge precisely, and why the same logic applies across posture, modulation, praxis, social and executive function. Two case stories ground it: a little one who went from bottom-shuffling to crawling up a slide to climbing a cubby ladder within days, and an impulsive eight-year-old who found his own stop signal when the challenge was social and a less capable friend mattered to him.



Resources & Mentions

- Jean Ayres, *Sensory Integration and Learning Disorders* (1972), the blue book read from throughout.
- STEPPSI and the attain, maintain, challenge dimension, Tracy Stackhouse, Julie Wilbarger and Sharon Trunnell.
- Bill Greenough, on experience-expectant and experience-dependent development.



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1 Think of a recent session. Where on the attain, maintain, challenge dimension was the child, and how consciously were you choosing how far to push versus how much to hold their regulated foundation?

- 2 Ayres calls the adaptive response a continuum of complexity and quality. Where might you be waiting for the polished version of a skill and missing the burgeoning, less precise version that is actually the adaptive response?

- 3 Consider a child whose goals sit in a non-postural domain: social, attention, modulation. Are you confident enough in that developmental sequence to pitch a just right challenge there, or do you default to the physical because it is more concrete?

- 4 Recall a moment you felt something important happened in a session but could not name it. Who could you unpack it with, and what would help you recreate it on purpose?

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The episode describes a child finding his own stop signal when a friend mattered to him. For one impulsive or dysregulated child on your caseload, what just right challenge, in which domain, might evince the capacity you are hoping for?
