

**Q: "As summer approaches, what strategies can be implemented to effectively run Discrete Trial Training (DTT) and Natural Environment Teaching (NET) in a camp setting? Specifically, I am seeking guidance on how to manage social groups, create natural reinforcement opportunities, and ensure accurate data collection while maintaining an engaging and enjoyable environment for both the clients and new behavior technicians (BTs)?"**

Running Discrete Trial Training (DTT) and Natural Environment Teaching (NET) in a summer camp setting can definitely be a challenge, with new behavior technicians (BTs), and a less structured environment. However, it can also present a wonderful opportunity to make learning feel more natural and fun for the kids. Here are some tips for managing it all:

### **1. Incorporating DTT into Camp Activities**

- **Make DTT Fun & Natural:** In a camp environment, you'll want to keep

DTT structured but embedded into play. For example, during arts and crafts, you can contrive the opportunity for the child to request items (by giving it to a peer or removing the item so he needs to demand for it), give them the job of asking a peer what color or item they need, or practice turn-taking and social greetings in a game.

- **Environment-Based Reinforcement:** Instead of using a set reinforcement like a token board, tie reinforcers directly to the camp environment—interacting with peers, or a favorite outdoor game. Many day camps feature canteens or concession stands, which can serve as an excellent opportunity to incorporate natural reinforcement.

**Natural Environment Teaching (NET) setting:** To implement this effectively, consider discussing with your clients' parents the idea of using the canteen as a reinforcement tool during sessions. Let them know that the child should not have access to independent (bootleg) reinforcement (e.g., bringing in their own money) to ensure the system remains structured and aligned with the behavior plan.

- Token economies or reinforcement systems could involve the child earning money to purchase snacks at the canteen or a special treat, such as ice cream or a Slurpee, by the end of the week. Alternatively, behavior technicians (BTs) can bring in the reinforcement on behalf of the child, ensuring consistency and avoiding issues with independent access.

- **Creating a "Canteen" for Reinforcement:**

- If your camp does not have an actual canteen, you can create a **mini canteen** within the camp environment as a way to teach your client the **value of money** and the concept of **delayed reinforcement**.

- **Brief, Focused Trials:** Use shorter, more frequent DTT trials (e.g., 1–3 minutes), so children don't feel overwhelmed. Then, quickly transition to a more playful or social activity that is reinforcing in itself.

- **Utilizing Transition Times for Social Groups:**

- Transition times, such as the gap between structured activities, can be an excellent opportunity to engage in 1:1 or small group social sessions. These moments, such as after changing for swim and while waiting for others, between sports activities, or during lunch breaks, provide a natural window for social skill development.

- During these times, you can run a social group with two peers, offering an informal setting to practice key social skills like conversation initiation, turn-taking, and collaboration. By leveraging these transitions, you can make the most of downtime to reinforce important behaviors and social goals without disrupting the flow of the camp's schedule.

## 2. Natural Environment Teaching (NET)

- Use Peer Interaction: Encourage the children to interact with peers during unstructured activities. NET can happen when they naturally request a toy, a turn, or even social communication with friends.

## 3. Building Natural Incentives

- Camp-based Reinforcers: Camp activities themselves can be natural incentives.

You can set up these natural opportunities as "rewards" for achieving specific goals, like completing a brief DTT trial or demonstrating a social behavior (e.g., greetings, sharing).

- More time on the swings.
- Extra playtime in a game/or sport/computer time
- Choosing the next group activity

- Use Camp Staff and Peers as Reinforcers: If a child enjoys social interaction, reinforce positive behavior by allowing them to interact with preferred camp staff ex: 10 minutes 1:1 with them, or even allow them to lead a small group in an activity, or running the canteen for a day

## 4. Supporting New BTs to Collect Accurate Data

- Simplify Data Collection: For new BTs, keep data collection systems

simple and easy to follow. Use checklists or visual systems (e.g., color-coded data sheets) so they can quickly mark whether a behavior occurred, especially when they're simultaneously engaging with kids in an outdoor or high-energy environment.

- **Provide Visual Cues:** For BTs to remember to collect data, highlighting maladaptive behaviors so data is taken daily or you can create visual reminders, using clipboards with printed data sheets is really helpful when transitioning between activities all day long. In many camp environments, paper data sheets are essential, especially since camps often discourage counselors or authority figures from using devices like phones in front of children. To maintain structure and accuracy in data collection, it's helpful to create a weekly chart (see enclosed) that includes shorthand names for each target behavior. This format allows behavior technicians (BTs) to easily track progress and ensure that they're covering the necessary targets throughout the week without getting distracted or overwhelmed.
- Additionally, Trinote offers the option to export and print PDF reports of your goals. To do this, simply click on the export box located in the top-right corner of the goals section for easy access to printable data sheets.

## 5. Tracking and Maintaining Data During Fun Activities

- **Build Data Collection into Play:** Instead of thinking about data collection as separate from camp activities, integrate it into the activity itself. For example, if you're playing a game, have the BTs track the child's social responses (e.g., greetings, turn-taking, eye contact). Use discreet note-taking systems to ensure they're not distracted from engaging with the child. A small laminated index card with a list of targeted behaviors is a discreet and effective tool for tracking data during camp activities. The laminated surface allows for easy erasing, so you can quickly update the data using a dry erase marker. By Velcroing the marker to the card, it becomes highly portable and ensures the marker is always on hand. As behaviors occur, you can easily mark the + (present) or - (absent) and erase it between activities.
- For younger children, you can visually represent expected behaviors

by drawing simple icons or pictures (e.g., a picture of a group for "following the group plan"). For readers, you can write out the expected behaviors or use a discreet shorthand—such as the first letter of each behavior (e.g., "G" for following the group plan)—so the child knows exactly which behavior they are being held accountable for. This approach makes it easier for kids to engage with the tracking system while providing immediate feedback during transitions between activities like sports or games.

- **Pictures for Task Analysis:**

- Using pictures for task analysis is an incredibly effective tool in a camp setting, especially for children who may struggle with multi-step tasks. For example, when teaching a child to change in and out of swimwear, rather than verbally prompting them through each step, you can take photos of each piece of clothing or have the child wear each article of clothing for reference.

- For older or more independent learners, you can adapt this approach by writing out the steps of the task, or only including those steps they may struggle with, such as applying sunscreen. This gives them more independence while still providing support where needed.

- Using a tool like LessonPix, you can create a visual sequence for dressing or undressing for swimming. These visuals help the child follow steps independently.

- **Transferring Paper Data Immediately:**

- A great strategy is to have the paraeducator transfer all paper data at the end of each session. This ensures that the data is accurate and immediate, allowing for real-time tracking of the client's progress. By doing this, the para can review the session and make any necessary adjustments on the spot, ensuring consistency in data collection.

## 6. Encourage Peer Interaction and Social Learning

- **Peer Modeling:** Use children who are more advanced in social skills to model appropriate behavior for others. This can provide a fun way to practice social interactions, as peers are often very motivating and engaging. Reinforcing the other peer models will also help increase the likelihood of them modeling appropriate behaviors and interacting with your client. '
- **Acting Out Social Scenarios:**
  - Behavior Skills Training (BST) is an excellent tool for teaching social skills, where peers act out different social scenarios. In this process, peers are assigned roles and work together to practice both expected and unexpected responses to various social situations that the client has encountered. This approach helps the client understand and navigate social dynamics more effectively by providing real-life examples and practice opportunities.

### Summary of Key Tips:

- Make DTT and NET feel fun and integrated into camp activities by using natural reinforcers like sports or favorite camp activities.
- Keep data collection simple with paper data, visual reminders, checklists, to ensure BTs are regularly taking breaks to input data.
- Encourage peer interaction and provide social opportunities during group activities.
- Use natural environment learning to capitalize on moments during camp (e.g., waiting for a turn, requesting a snack).

**With these approaches, you can ensure that the camp setting remains both educational and enjoyable, and that your new BTs feel supported and confident in collecting meaningful data.**

## Support from Supervisors

Remember, your supervisors are available to assist you in implementing these strategies effectively. They are here to provide guidance, offer advice, and answer any questions you may have. If you need further support or would like to schedule a consultation, please reach out to your BCBA supervisor.

Thank you for your continued commitment to enhancing our clients' social skills and overall development. Together, we can make this summer a meaningful and enriching experience for each individual we serve.

**Have a question?  
Need aba clarification on something?  
Fill out the anonymous survey in the  
body of this email. For more resources,  
check out our BCBA library or reach out  
for more support.**