



Web-Based Radio Show

Floortime [™]: What it Really Is and What it Isn't

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Hi, this is Dr. Greenspan. We have a very important show today. Serena, my dear colleague, is here with me and we are going to do this a little more interactively than usual and make it, hopefully, a real treat for you.

The topic for today is going to be “Floortime: What it Really Is, and What it Isn’t.” Floortime, as you know, is at the heart of our DIR Model, and it’s at the heart of a comprehensive program for infants, young children, and families with a variety of developmental challenges including autistic spectrum disorders.

Just to review and set the context for our discussion of Floortime today, a comprehensive program, as you know, includes working on all the elements of the DIR Model – the functional emotional developmental levels, getting children to higher and higher levels, the individual processing differences like auditory processing and language and visual spatial processing and sensory modulation and motor planning and sequencing, as well as sensory modulation and other processing difficulties. It also involves creating those learning relationships that will help the child move ahead in their development – relationships that are tailored to their individual differences that move them up the developmental ladder, mastering each and every functional emotional developmental capacity that they are capable of. That is our fundamental DIR Model. That involves often not just Floortime, but different therapies like speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, education programs, counseling support for parents, and intensive home programs as well as school programs. It often involves many special other learning opportunities for children involving playgroups and other types of learning like music and gymnastics.

We can go on and on, but today we really want to focus on the Floortime component, which is at the heart of the home component and also at the heart of the other components that must be carried out at school. In other words, Floortime is a particular




technique where we get down on the floor and we work with the child to master each of their developmental capacities. But it is also a philosophy that guides the way occupational therapists work and speech pathologists work and educators work with the children. So you need to think about Floortime in two ways:

1. A specific technique where for 20 or more minutes mommy or daddy gets down on the floor with little Johnny or Susie.
2. A general philosophy that characterizes all the interactions with the child, because all interactions have to incorporate the features of Floortime as well as the particular goals of that interaction, be it speech therapy or occupational therapy or special set of educational goals.

Now what we are going to do is talk about what Floortime is and what Floortime isn't, and define it in a way that will hopefully help both professionals and parents and helpers understand why Floortime is the cornerstone; the engine that drives the DIR Model and drives the developmental process.


At the heart of our definition of Floortime are two of what could be called emphases that sometimes work together very easily and other times may appear to be opposite ends of the continuum. But we have to always be aware of both of these polarities or both of these tendencies or both of these dimensions of Floortime. One is, and this is the one that is by far the most widely known and followed, is following the child's lead, harnessing the child's natural interests. Why do we follow the child's lead? After all, we are trying to teach the child, and in the history of education, we have often felt that children have to be taught things they don't want to learn, that we can't just do what a child wants to do because children are historically viewed as creatures of their instincts; creatures of their "primitive pleasures" and they would never get socialized if we just did what they wanted to do and followed their lead. So why do we follow the child's lead? Why do we take our clue and our cue from the child? Well a child's interests or the child's lead is the window to their emotional life. Through the child's interests; through the child's natural desires, we get a picture of what is enjoyable; what is joyful; what is pleasurable for that child. For example, a child is staring off at a fan. That seems like something inappropriate and something we want to discourage. But yet something about that is meaningful or pleasurable to the child. The child is rubbing a spot on the floor over and over again. Something that is meaningful or pleasurable about that to the child. The child is opening and closing his door repetitively or aimlessly wandering around the room. So we always start off with asking the question which must be asked: Why is little Johnny or Susie doing that? And to simply say it's because he or



she has this or that disorder; that it's due to their autism or due to their Down's Syndrome or due to their "this or that" doesn't answer the question. Little Johnnie or Susie are human beings. They may have a disorder or a set of problems, but they are not the disorder or set of problems. They are human beings with real feelings and real desires and real wishes. Sometimes maybe they can't express or tell us about it, so we have to say from what they are doing if they can't tell us about it, what does this tell us about what they enjoy in life? What is giving them pleasure? Why does it have meaning for them? So we follow their lead at the entry point because the first goal is to join them in their world, but not stay in their world with them and pull them into a shared world where they are a part of a world with us. In all human development, it begins with that relationship between the caregiver and the child joining into a shared world. It doesn't happen just in human beings. It happens in our non-human primate cousins like chimpanzees. It happens even in other mammals where we will see a puppy dog and the mommy dog playfully interacting together. So in many forms of life, development begins with a shared world between the caregiver and nurturer and the helpless infant.

So the goal is to pull the child into a shared world from their world, but we don't want to pull them in screaming and yelling and yipping. We want to pull them in with real warmth and pleasure. We want the child to want to be in the shared world and that's the key. How do we help the child want to be in a shared world with us? For a variety of reasons, a child may have elected to be more self-absorbed or more aimless and seemingly in his or her own world. What will motivate them to be a part of a shared world? Well, the first motivation is to join them in their world and show them that you can respect what they are interested in. So if the child is aimlessly wandering around the room and jumping, we wander and jump with the child. The child then experiences a partnership in aimless wandering and jumping. Or we might rub a spot on the floor with them. But, that's one part of the equation – following their lead. If a child is moving a truck, we may move a truck with them. We can put our hand so they can move the truck towards our hand, pretending our hand is a tunnel. But these are all ways of following a child's lead, entering their world to pull them into a shared world. We will see that as a child, instead of looking annoyed or looking irritated or running away from us, starts giving us some friendly looks and some warm smiles and some friendly glances. That's the beginning of that shared world.

But that is only one half of the equation; one half of this dynamic that we call Floortime. There is another half. The other half; the second part of it is we join them in their world and pull them into a shared world in order to help them master each of their Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities. These are the fundamentals of emotional, social, language, and intellectual development. When we talk about




Functional Emotional Capacities, we're talking about the fundamentals of relating, communicating, and thinking.

So we have a bigger goal in joining them in their world. We want to pull them into our shared world to teach them and help them learn how to focus and attend, how to relate with real warmth, how to be purposeful and take initiative, and have a back-and-forth set of communications with us through gestures, and eventually through words. We want to teach them how to problem solve and sequence and get them involved in a continuing interaction with their environments and the people in their environments. We want to teach them to use ideas creatively and then we want to teach them to use ideas logically and then progress up the developmental ladder until they are not only using ideas logically but actually showing high degrees of reflective thinking and high degrees of empathy and high degrees of understanding the world so that they can evaluate their own thoughts and feelings and say things like, "Gee, I'm angrier than I should be today" or "I agree with Mark Twain, but I disagree with Tolstoy because Twain had a similar upbringing to my upbringing." That's our ultimate goal for entering their shared world – to help them be empathetic, creative, logical, reflective individuals. Not every child is capable of achieving the highest level of reflective thinking, but most children are capable of moving up the developmental ladder. Some, we have found, a significant subgroup are capable of reaching the highest levels, regardless of their original diagnoses.

So that's the second part of Floortime. It's helping the child master their Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities – their basic social, emotional, intellectual, language, and academic abilities.

Now how do we use "following their lead," the first part of it, to actually mobilize and help them master these critical developmental milestones? Is it as simple as simply running around and jumping with the child but playing on the floor and building blocks with them, or is it as simple as banging toys with them? Or is it as simple as simply being silly and making funny noises with them and playing copy-cat games with them? In other words, how do we get from following their lead to helping them master all these wonderful and marvelous capacities? Now we are talking about the real skill in doing Floortime; the real infrastructure of Floortime.

What we have worked out is for each of the milestones; each of the capacities the child needs to master and we have identified six core ones and three additional ones – nine altogether that we want all children to master. But the six core ones, as I mentioned, have to do with attending, relating, purposeful communication, problem-solving interactions, using ideas creatively, and using ideas logically. So for these core six, and then three more advanced levels of reflective thinking, we've worked out a number of




strategies where we start with following a child's lead, but we use that; we employ that, to help the child then want to learn this new, wonderful ability. So I'll give just a few examples, then I'll turn it over to Serena to fill in more of these examples and also some of the principles that help at each of these stages.

So for example, to help a child master the first stage of shared attention – the child is wandering away from us all the time – we may play a game where we keep getting in front of the child and the child has to then move around us. But to do that, he has to look at us to see where we are because we are blocking his pathway. So it's a little cat-and-mouse game. And that little cat-and-mouse game is the first little island of shared attention where he looks at us and we look back. We may build what we call a “moving fence” around him where we put our arms around him without actually touching him, and then to keep wandering around the room he has to pick up our hands. That, too, requires him to pay attention to us; to recognize our existence as a separate person from him. That's the beginning of shared attention. It's also the beginning of engagement because he is now involved with us. Interestingly, it is also the beginning of purposeful action because he is moving our hands up in order to move around the room. The child has a favorite toy that he wants to just touch and bang on the floor. We hide that favorite toy outside the door and we show it to him. Now he is banging on the door and we say, “Should we help you? Should we help you?” And pretty soon he's taking our hand and putting it on the doorknob to help us turn the doorknob. Then three weeks later, he's even saying “Op, op, op” and eventually “Open” to get us to open the door to get that favorite toy. So now we have mobilized through following the child's lead, not just attention and engagement and purposeful action, but actually problem solving and even the beginning use of words. We call these strategies “playfully obstructive strategies” and they are for the most aimless child or the most avoidant child, where they are necessary.

Often, they are not necessary, however. The child who is moving the truck back-and-forth and we open our hands up to make it into a tunnel. He may look at that, give us a big smile and move it right into our tunnel. Now we have shared attention, engagement, purposeful action, and some problem solving, and eventually we may introduce the word “truck, truck, truck move?” and he may repeat it, then we have the beginning of words. We can even give him choices: “Do you want to move it into the tunnel or into the house?” He may go, “Ha, ho” indicating “house” and point over there. Then we have thinking occurring along with the use of words.


So there are strategies where we follow the child's lead, helping them do what they want to do, which pulls them into our world and helps them master the different levels. We also have playfully obstructive strategies. But the goal is to follow the child's



lead on the one hand, but then create opportunities and challenges that help the child master each of their functional emotional developmental capacities. That is the, to use a technical term, the “dialectic,” the two opposite polarities of Floortime: joining the child in his rhythms, joining the child in his pleasure, but harnessing that to bring the child into a shared world, and a shared world where they then master each of their functional emotional milestones. So that means creating systematic challenges to master each level of development. It is in those systematic challenges that many of the specific techniques and strategies of Floortime come in. So Floortime is not just simply following the child’s lead. That is what gets into the child’s emotional world, helps the child feel pleasure so the child want to relate to us, want to share attention with us, and want to learn from us. Then we create challenges that help the child move up to higher levels of relating, communicating, and thinking.

So whenever you think about Floortime, I’m asking you to always think about these two poles of Floortime – the following the child’s lead and challenging the child to master new milestones. We are always trying to broaden the child’s capacities in terms of the current milestones that they have – some children can relate a little bit and be a little bit purposeful – so we are strengthening and broadening those and introducing the next one. If they can be a little purposeful, we want them to be very purposeful. If they can open and close what we call three or four circles of communication that have three and four back-and-forth’s with gestures, we want to get it to seven and eight and then to ten and then to twenty until we get 50+. If they have a few words, we want to extend to back-and-forth conversations. So this is at the heart of what we call Floortime.

Now in order to do this; in order to engage in these Floortime interactions where we are following the child’s lead on the one hand and on the other hand we are challenging the child to master each of their functional emotional developmental capacities; their new milestones; we have to do something very, very important which is part of our DIR Model. We have to tune into their individual processing differences. If a child, for example, is under-reactive to touch and sound, we have to be very energetic as we pull the child into a shared world. If a child is over-sensitive to touch and sound where they are holding their ears and they get overwhelmed easily, we may have to be extra soothing while being compelling. Many children have mixtures of over- and under-reactivity, so we have to be soothing and energizing and compelling, but with a soft voice like (whispering) “Here! Here!” at the same time. We also have to pay attention to their auditory processing and language abilities. We don’t like to slow down the cadence of our words or speak in monotones; to simplify the language world in order to help them tune into our words because they may process words more slowly. What we like to do is keep a normal rhythm going in the auditory processing, because that is more pleasurable



to the child and it is actually easier for the child to digest a normal rhythm, but we may use simple phrases and repeat them. So if we are trying to say “open the door” it’s not (in a monotone voice) “ooopen, ooopen,” but it’s (in sing-song voice) “Open door? Open?” and showing the child. So it’s with energy and rhythm, but simple phrases. And we’ll repeat those until the child gets the phrase. But that depends on the child’s auditory processing.


With visual spatial processing, some children may have good visual memory, but can’t see the forest for the trees and they are not yet good visual problem solvers. So we may use lots of visual cues in their visual memory skills to help them come into our world and be part of a shared world. Many children have motor planning and sequencing problems. So we’ll start with simple actions and go to more complex action patterns.

So we have to tune into the child’s individual differences in order to challenge them to master their different levels. Then the last thing we need to pay attention to is ourselves as caregivers; as families; as family members; as therapists. What are our natural strengths and weaknesses? What do we do easily? Are we a high energy person so we are great for kids who are under-reactive and need a lot of energizing and wooing but we have a hard time soothing? Or are we great soothers and very good with hyper-sensitive children who need a lot of calmness and a lot of soothing, but we have a hard time energizing up for the child who is under-reactive? What are our own natural strengths and weaknesses? Do we take the child’s avoidance as a personal rejection and therefore shut down and don’t try as hard? Or do we take the child’s avoidance when he runs away from us as rejection and therefore try too hard and get too intrusive and not pay attention to his pleasure and try to just grab the child and force the child to pay attention to us as opposed to wooing the child into that relationship. So we have to pay attention to our own individual personalities and our family patterns, and as therapists, our therapeutic skills and strategies and what kind of children we have an easier time with and harder time with. When we ask those difficult questions, we can then fine tune our strategies to meet the child’s individual differences; to create the learning interactions that that child requires.

So Floortime then involves this polarity between following the child’s natural interests and pleasures on the one hand, and challenging the child on the other hand. The child is never simply doing aimless activity and us doing aimless activity with him. To do this, we pay attention to their individual differences and we pay attention to our own unique characteristics as caregivers, as family members, and our own family patterns.

Now I’m going to turn it over to Serena to fill in and add to this discussion of basic Floortime principles and our definition of Floortime. Here she is.

SW: Thank you. As you can hear from this wonderful description of Floortime, it's important to remember that Floortime is not a kind of right or wrong thing that you do. It's often a little hard to get going, but if you think of it as a process and if you think of yourself as a player, then you can begin to kind of get in there and see this as an experiment. As you just heard, following the lead doesn't mean commenting about what the child is doing, it doesn't mean just imitating what they are doing – it's finding a way to get in and make it more interactive on that basic level of the child's interest; in other words, what he initiates. It's on the basis of the child's intent of whatever purpose he can organize and mobilize for what he wants to do. It's really, really important to start out by giving yourself a few moments to watch. What is your child doing? You will see that you can identify the meaning and then just try to help your child do more of what he wants to do. That is the way you get in. You don't always start with playful obstruction, but we have to give the child a reason to want to play with you. And to want to play with you, you have to be helpful and useful and join his pleasure. So start out by observing a little bit so that you are not too tempted to take over or to suggest something or to tell the child what to do, but to recognize what seems to be motivating the child. It could be as simple as your child just wanting to line up toys, then giving him the next toy to line up. Once he sees that you are not going to stop him or pull him away, then see if he'll let you put down a toy in that lineup, and then see if he'll wait and stop and pause and look at you. While you are doing this, again, if your child is seeing and you are in front of the child, be sure to try to get in front because everything that your child can see will only support what also he hears. Those are the main two modalities – your child if he has any auditory processing challenge and you are not sure about the words, then he can see what you are doing. If he sees what he hears, it will help him understand what it is that you want to do and how you are going to join in. So think of yourself, number one, as a player. You are there to play with, not just to comment or follow or interrupt. If you attempt to offer the child something else, hold back. How you join in will depend on your affect, your voice, your tone of voice, your movement, what your child sees... Once your child is not going to defend or worry about what you are going to do or worry about your changing what he wants to do, he will let you join in and play because you can actually make it more fun together. We'll do that through conveying this through all the sensory systems, whether it is moving and turning it into a little chase game or running or whether you move into a kind of playful obstruction. What you saw in the description that Dr. Greenspan just gave is that we work on many of the levels at the same time. So it isn't just get that shared attention. You get the shared attention by engaging, by kind of getting it going back-and-forth, by creating a problem to solve or recognizing there's a problem, and wooing the child into this back-and-forth play. There are things you want to avoid, which is asking a lot of questions rather than actually being part of the play,




look out to see if you are trying to interview the child rather than be the player and join in as well as the adult who can kind of guide and coach.

So begin with trying to become that player, trying to interact, be sure not to take over; not to change the topic, try not to get your child to do what you want by controlling their body and holding their hands and pulling them into it. Help them do what they want to do. Break the motor problem down to little pieces because that is part of the problem solving. If they want to open a container, if they want to reach for the toy, if they want to get up to the shelf, if they want to make something work – but mostly if you are the toy; you are the player – depending on the child you may be using more toys or you may not. You may first really be involved in just using yourself and very simple objects. The other thing you want to look out for is whether you are counting on a lot of sensory motor activities because you know your child loves to jump and roll and run and then again that is a good way to get started, but how do we make that interactive? There, by being a player, or being the human obstacle course, your child will begin to figure out what you are doing and begin to work around it. You'll always recognize that when a child realizes, "oh, this is a game!" and that's what you are really looking for.


Now some of the things that sometimes get in the way is again, if you have a preconceived notion of what you want to do versus following the child's lead and the child is not joining you. Another thing is where you don't help the child by wooing them into the fun of it and stay with it. Sometimes the child will change topics. Children will go from thing to thing. When they do, we try to cue them, "Oh, here, don't forget your car! Where is your car, Sweetheart?" and not just automatically drop the car and go to the next thing that they see which may be the way they are thinking, "Oh, I see something else I want" because they haven't yet developed the notion of "Oh, the car is an idea. I'm going to take the car, I'm going to drive through the tunnel that Daddy is making, I'm going to get to the playground (which may be another set of toys or the slide) and if it's not yet an idea, then you're more the player because you are the idea. But you want to get the interaction going versus using the toy in of itself. Once the toy becomes more purposeful, then we can start to think in terms of what this means. How do we help the child connect? Connecting from one step to another, think of yourself as the mediator. You are the bridge to keep that child able to do more purposeful sequences in order to start building ideas.

In between, probably one of the most important approaches is the problem solving. This is where we can get a long, long flow of interactions. This is where by whether you are going to use a little strategy like playing dumb, or whether you are going to think, "I don't have exactly what the child wants, but can I substitute?" Can you gesture? Can you start a search for what we need? Try to expand on the number of




circles or expand on the number of interactions where your child wants something, you try to respond, he is agreeing or disagreeing with you, you try to help take it further, and try to deepen the plot rather than change the topic. That is the way we try to get this flow moving further and further along. With each child, if you step back and think about what happened in that Floortime session, try to think about what it is that is getting in the way of the flow of interactions. One of the most important things is to realize you have to meet the child at the developmental level he is at and challenge building the capacities that we described earlier. I often will hear or see parents disappointed that their child isn't playing with something the way they think they should be playing. If that enters your mind, that is an indication that you are not really following the child's lead enough because we want to help the child be more purposeful around his intent and treat what he is doing as purposeful. You can use, "Oh, oh I see, the horsy is going to ride." And if your child gets on the horsy, then even if it's a toy, this is a wonderful indication that he is at the presymbolic door. You don't want to say, "It's not real." You don't want to say, "pretend." You want to say, "Oh, sure, go for a ride." Your child may not pick up the horsy. You may have to be the horsy. So that would be indications of different levels at which your child might relate to this notion of the horsy, he recognizes it's not a game that you're having fun with, and your horse, if you are the horse, might collapse and he might pull you up. Or he might be ready to start in the world of symbols. That, of course, presents a whole new world of opportunities for different interactions. But starting out, helping the child do what he wants, give him more of what he wants, try to expand with him. If he likes one car and he's moving on, you might see if he wants to have some other cars, and before you know it, you'll be building a garage or you'll be a tunnel for the different cars to go through. But not worrying so much about what you do next, but staying within what your child already started is really, really critical in order to bring more depth and elaboration to it. What really matters, of course, is your interaction with the child more than the toy or the destination which is the end product. You're going to get there, but how you get there is the process. Much of Floortime is about process.

One of the good ways to learn to do Floortime is to actually do it with someone else. If both mom and dad are available, you can kind of take turns and watch each other and see what is going on. We really call this "coaching" when you either coach yourself by examining what happened, or you have someone else kind of commenting. You'll begin becoming much more aware of what help your child is expecting of you, of what it is that you do, or what it is that you change, but you really want to see if there is that rhythm in the flow of going back-and-forth, back-and-forth. Just ask simple things; how are you trying to keep that going? Are you using visual cues and strategies? Is your tone of voice either very lively and energizing or soothing and quiet? Are you giving the child




cues? Remember, the voice is probably the most powerful tool you have to cue your child. Whether or not he understands the words, the message comes from the tone and the rhythm and the loudness and the pacing of it. So see if you are using your voice to pull him in, whether it is a plot or a clap or say, “Wow! I want to do that too!” Getting in there and doing what he is doing or helping him do it better, but find out how you really stay connected to your child. Then see if you are bringing the child back into expanding by creating the opportunities.

Most opportunities we create are done through problem-solving. We need a problem. How do you get what you want? The door was just closed – do you want to get out? How are you going to open it? We bring the words, we bring the language, but then once you are there, what is it for? Our differences are that we have been working with a child who is verbal and symbolic versus working with the child who is pre-verbal. But actually, it is the preverbal components that really keep Floortime going. These are going to be the cues. If we think about the more verbal child than the more symbolic child, I think then the notion is to think about, again what your child can initiate and do with that toy if that is where they are at. Then more often than not, children have loves. They pick the toys, they pick their symbols, and often they will just use the dinosaur for everything. The dinosaur is just a symbol – sometimes one that is a little scary and the child then tries to master. Other times it could be other figures. But accept your child’s symbols. Once they are ready for Barney or Sesame Street or it could be the dinosaurs or the pirates or the Spiderman, your symbol will give you some indication of your child’s emotional life and what is meaningful to them and what they are either trying to figure out or what they like or what they can identify with and see what role they want to give that symbol. So once toys are part of the Floortime, we can focus on getting the interactive flow around the toy and seeing whether we are just going to play in a playfully obstructive or a problem solving way around the toy in terms of getting it to work or using the features of the toy. It could be as simple as a slide. If you put a figure on top of a slide, we will inevitably get a child to push the figure down, especially if you have already been through the fun of your child going down the slide or you are following him down the slide or you are getting his favorite teddy bear to go down the slide. But first think about, ok, here is something, this is our friend, we are going to use this toy as a friend to play with together. Once the toy becomes more meaningful in a symbolic way; that the toy represents something, your child might get into other familiar experiences – doll houses or doctor kits or tool kits or things that are just potter for your life. Then you can fall back on the elaboration of the idea of something they have experienced in a meaningful way. But be sure that it is meaningful. That is very, very critical. If your child is choosing it, you are much more likely to know it has meaning to him because he seems to be interested and initiate it. So you don’t have to offer the doctor set, but you can see



what happens if the child starts something and you offer him the next step. So a character falls or the truck gets stuck and then you can get the elaboration and Floortime by solving a problem and bringing in what you need to fix the truck or to help the person who got hurt. As a player, you can introduce something that responds to what your child did. You don't always just have to wait to see what he does. Remember: you are both the interactor and you can go and see if your child or the figure needs a kiss on it's boo boo's and we're into the more magical solutions. "Oh, you're all better." Or, in fact, whether you want to get the doctor kit or if you want to take a roll of tape and tear off a little bandage and try to keep it going. The magic words in the elaboration are, "What else?" You can tell the child, "What else can we do?" Expanding Floortime is very important at all levels, no matter what developmental level your child is at. The real goal is to keep that interaction going. If it is a child who is already symbolic, then of course, he can fall back on his experience, he can fall back on ideas he has memorized, he can fall back on things you have done together, but the question you would ask is, "What else?" Then move into problem solving so he takes the lead. I think the dilemma we have is really identifying whether we are providing all the support to the child in the Floortime by understanding his processing, by understanding his regulatory system, by understanding his interest and his initiative, and what he is investing in, and by understanding how we respond ourselves in terms of what we are about. So whether we take the lead, or whether we use affect cues, or we actually step back and let the child regulate the flow. And you should trust, this is one of the things you can be sure of, that since this is a process and not a right-or-wrong answer, if something doesn't work, your child is going to keep going. You just follow the next step and you have another chance to expand and get more of the elaboration and the affect flow going.


We are not worried about the content. A big issue is the content concern. But because this is a process, you don't have to worry about the content. We can't move the content ahead of the process. We are not going to get elaborate symbolic stories and a lot of pretend play in any form unless we get that nice back-and-forth flow going. We don't go up the ladder by suggesting and pushing it, but we deepen the level that you're already at because that is where you'll have the most ability of the flow where your child can enjoy. Or it could be later what he might be scared of, or it might be when he is angry – when we start out with the pleasure and then we move into a widening range of emotion, there is no rush. There is no rush in Floortime. If you're not sure, then step back and see what your child is up to and make sure you reconnect and get in there. Then expand on that connection and you'll start rising again. There are many challenges for the child in terms of the developmental capacities he has, so it's really our work to mobilize more rather than have the child kind of do it for us. We mobilize it through the interaction. We mobilize it through being the player with him. So you are a player and not an



interviewer. You are allowed to respond to and help bring the next step through you and not just worry and wait for the child to figure out what to do on his own. There is no reason not to suggest something in relation to what the child already started and that doesn't mean having to change the topic in trying to get him. Your child might be distracted, so you want to be sure that you are not the one who is distracting him. Try to see what makes expansion difficult. Here we can begin to focus a little bit on, before we were saying it had to do with the child's intent and what they are up to and making sure it is pleasurable and fun and deals with the emotions. Next time we will be talking, we'll go into how we strengthen the ideation and the reasoning and the judgment and some of the principles that we will use to help the child move into the higher steps.

SG: Thank you very much, Serena, for filling in a lot of the framework on Floortime. Just to summarize and emphasize some of the points Serena was making and some of the earlier points, remember that Floortime is entering the child's world by following their lead; their interest; so you always observe and pay attention. Many parents ask me, "Well, I don't know what to do and I've tried all my bags of tricks and nothing seems to work." My answer is always the same: Don't feel the pressure to do so much. The goal isn't so much what you do. The goal is to observe what your child is doing. So whenever you feel stuck, and a lot of parents tell me that they are stuck in Floortime, I tell them to take a step back and relax and observe. Ask yourself the question, "How do I build on what little Johnny or Susie is doing? How do I build on their pleasures?" Often the answer is, "Well, they aren't doing anything or they are just walking or they are just banging or they are just wandering." I tell them that that is something. They are always doing something. How do you build on that? What can you do? Always ask yourself that question.

So you join them by joining activities. You can start, as Serena was implying, by even copying what they are doing. But then you have to take it to the next step. How do you create interaction? That gets the shared attention. That creates the relating and that creates the purposeful initiative-taking circles of communication – that back-and-forth interaction. Here the key point is to harness the child's initiative. We don't just want to do to the child. We want the child doing to us. So we challenge the child to do something to us rather than use doing to the child. We can always get something started often with a little tickle game or swinging the children. Children love to be swung and love to get on top of daddy's shoulders and have lots of movement. That's ok to start it off with. We do something to the child that we know they enjoy. But then how do you get the child to do to us? As soon as he is up on our shoulders, he has to gesture or make a sound or point or somehow show us that he wants the horse to move some more or he wants the airplane to go again. So we challenge the child to take initiative. If we are



giving the child a backrub, the child even just showing us where he likes to have his back rubbed or whether he wants his tummy to be rubbed or his back to be rubbed or his arms rubbed. If we are playing a little finger game or a little toe game – which foot he wants rubbed or which toes on which foot – he can show us by wiggling or moving that foot a little bit. So we are always challenging the child to take the initiative to do to us rather than us doing to him. Once we get the interaction cooking, once we get the back-and-forth going where we are getting attention, engagement, and purposeful communication, then the whole question is, and this is the biggest missing piece that I see and the hardest part for both professional colleagues and parents and for other caregivers and educators, is how we get the continuous flow of communication going. In other words, children communicate often once they can be purposeful with gestures – the smile, the head-nods, the arm gestures and body posture – as well as hopefully and eventually, words. But the hardest thing for children is, particularly children with developmental challenges including autism, is how to make that a continuous flow. How to not just have one interaction where they use a single word or a single gesture, but how to make it 50 or 100 back-and-forth's in a row so you are having a real conversation. So a child is interacting and communicating for ten or fifteen minutes and it has a feel to it that has a nice back-and-forth rhythm. Here this is the most difficult part for everyone – getting that continuous flow going. Here my advice is very, very simple: Make it a major objective. Don't skip it. In other words, it is hard to do and we just want to keep it cooking and keep it going. The child who wants to go out the door, well we can make that a 10-step interaction rather than a one-step interaction. Well, mommy can't open the door, you go get daddy. The child pulls daddy and daddy is having a hard time. "Can you show me where to turn the knob?" and the child shows you. And the child can make a sound to make the door open, and so forth and so on, until you are getting 10 circles of communication rather than just one in just the simple act of opening the door.

So extending those circles of communication, getting the continuous flow where the child is taking the initiative, where it isn't just us doing, and the true continuous flow is not just repeating the same action over and over. The child may want to move the car back-and-forth, but if we move our hands and he's following our hands with the car, he's changing the movement all the time. So we always vary what we do and that challenges the child to vary what they do, even if it's within the same basic action or the same basic game. So getting many circles of communication cooking is critical. Once the child has words, it's the same thing: can we get a lot of back-and-forth use of words? Once a child is logical, can we get many logical circles of communication? I see many, many children who are already reading and doing math. They can use whole, long sentences, but can't have a long back-and-forth conversation and that becomes the hard part. So that is often



the missing piece in many children's development. So getting the continuous flow going is important.

So just to conclude, then, Floortime involves this polarity, or this dialectic, or this tension between following the child's lead, entering his world and pulling him into your world, finding his pleasures and his joys, and challenging him to master each of the levels that we are talking about. That means paying attention to the child's individual differences in terms of the way they process sounds and sights and movements and modulate sensations, and also paying attention to the family patterns and therapists to your own personalities so you know how you have to stretch to work with a particular child so you can enter their world and tailor your interactions to their nervous system. That is the heart of Floortime. That is what we are talking about. And that is why Floortime is not just a technique where we often advocate 6-10 times a day for 20 minutes or more with a child at home with mommy or daddy or a helper, but also a philosophy for school interactions and for interactions when you are in the store or in the car. In other words, you always want to mobilize all these levels of back-and-forth interaction.

Thank you for joining us today.