Effective Strategies for Social Skills Development at Home and School

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Why target social skills?

• Understanding social interactions help us understand other people
• Behavior of others becomes more predictable and less confusing
• Social skills are predictive of job success
  • Adults with disabilities are more likely to lose their jobs due to poor social skills rather than an inability to perform their job duties
  • Disabilities that include social skills deficits (e.g., ASD) have poor rates of employment
What are some challenges?

Play skills
Motivation
Restricted Interests

Pragmatic language skills
Speech intelligibility

Attention span
Organizational skills
Individuals with impaired theory of mind do not understand that other people have their own thoughts, plans or point of view

- difficulty understanding other’s attitudes, emotions
- responses may appear egocentric, blunt, and uncaring
Central Coherence

Heightened focus on details rather than whole
Inability to hold information in mind for future use
Hidden Curriculum

What is the hidden curriculum?

Important social skills that everyone knows, but no one is taught.

• Assumed rules
• Adult or student expectations
• Idioms and metaphors

Understanding the hidden curriculum is difficult for everyone, but it is especially so for individuals with a deficit in social interactions.
Important Unwritten Rules

• Teacher or Parental Expectations

• Peers who are okay to interact with and peers to avoid

• Behaviors that attract positive attention versus cause trouble

• Sensitive topics to avoid
Social Skills Interventions

• Story-Based – Carol Gray
  • Social Story™
  • Comic strip social stories

• Modeling
  • Live modeling
  • Video modeling

• Social Skills Curriculum/Programs
  • Social Thinking – Michelle Garcia Winner
  • CIRCLES
  • ROPES

• Social Skills Groups
  • Social Skills groups during /after school
  • Buddy/mentor programs
What are Social Stories?

Short, personally written “child friendly” stories that:

- Describe social situations
- Written in terms of relevant social cues and define appropriate responses
- Present information while minimizing social aspects of teacher/student interaction
Who are Social Stories for?

- Not just for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder
- Effective with children and adolescents
- Readers and non-readers
- Non-verbal or verbal children
Misconceptions

Goal is to change behavior
Goal is to make parent or professional’s life easier
Who writes them?

Parents
Teachers
Paraprofessionals
Therapists
Students
Useful applications

Parent or staff observe

– Difficult situations
– Responses to questions that indicate misreading social cues
Social stories may

• Teach routines and help accommodate changes/transitions
• Teach academic material - apply to real situations
• Address behaviors including fear, obsession, aggression
• Translate goals into understandable steps
• Explain fictional qualities of stories
• Identify realistically appropriate versus inappropriate interactions
General Guidelines

- Written at student’s comprehension level –
  - Vocabulary, print, illustrations
- Positive language – “voice”
- 50% of stories applaud achievements or positive
- Few sentences per page
- More descriptive than directive
- Title meets Social Story Criteria
- Establish routine, consistent use
- Monitor effectiveness; revise when necessary
Sentences Types

Descriptive Sentences - objective who, what and why
   – My name is ______.
Perspective Sentences - reactions or feelings of others
   – My teacher knows about_____.
Directive Sentences - tell student what is expected
   – I will try to sit in my chair.
Control Sentences - written by child if possible
   – I can think of _________.
Affirmative Sentence - enhance cultural value
   – This is a safe thing to do.
Cooperative Sentence – what other’s may do to help
   - My teacher might remind me to check my schedule
Basic Types of Stories

Checklist social stories
Curriculum stories
Goal stories
Judgment stories
Stories addressing behaviors e.g., fears, aggression
Tips

Pair the social story with a reward structure or other supports for engaging in the desired behavior.

Let the student be involved in coming up with appropriate responses and incorporate them into the story.

Use words that state what the child will “try” to do, rather than what the child “will” do.

Read the story frequently at first and slowly fade.
Social Stories

Meet and Greet
A trip to the beauty parlor
Care and Share
Trip to the Doctor
Homework
Going to a restaurant
Getting a gift
Self-flush toilets
That’s a disappointment
Getting snacks
The only way around it
Go with the flow
Modeling

Live Modeling:
A person models or demonstrates the target behavior in the presence of the child with the disability

Video Modeling:
Uses pre-recorded video clip that models or demonstrates the target skill
Do-It-Yourself Video Modeling

1. Evaluate challenges and needs
2. Select obtainable skills that can be captured on video
3. Choose who will be in video – peers, friends, siblings
4. Decrease auditory and visual distractions
5. Highlight target skill
Tips

Think outside the box!

Video modeling can be used to target:
  - play skills
  - adaptive skills
  - social skills
  - appropriate behavior
Social Thinking

Michelle Garcia Winner

I-LAUGH
I - Initiate
L - Listen with eyes and brain
A - Abstract/inferential
U – Understanding perspective
G – Gestalt – big picture
H - Humor
Social Skills Programs

CIRCLES Program

• Level 1 – Social Distance & Relationship Building
• Level 2 – Rules of Social Boundaries
Social Skills Programs

ROPES

• Team building
• Games – flexibility, turn taking, teams
Personalize

Capitalize on strengths
  - e.g., computers, swimming

Practice/role play all roles
  - variety of settings, children and adults

Real time support/feedback
  - most to least support

What’s popular with peers?
  - Games, shows, language
Elementary Grades

Plan and structure
Just right timing
Include a snack
Make a list - together
Something for everyone
“Social engineer”
  – Kids from school
  – Kids from community
    • Scouts, dance, religious

Photo or video
Monitor don’t hover
Middle School/High School

Bowling lanes
Coffee shops
Volunteer opportunities
Community Centers
Social Skills Resources

Social Stories - Carol Gray
• www.thegraycenter.org

Social Thinking – Michelle Garcia Winner
• www.socialthinking.com

Best Buddies International
• www.bestbuddies.org
Social Skills Resources

Circles
• www.stanfield.com

Visual Tools
• www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/visual-tools
• www.do2learn.com