



# Effective Strategies for Social Skills Development at Home and School

**GEISINGER**  
AUTISM & DEVELOPMENTAL MEDICINE



Barbara Haas-Givler, MEd, BCBA  
Geisinger Autism & Developmental Medicine Institute  
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, USA  
June 2015

# 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

# Theory of Mind

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](http://www.thegraycenter.org)

## Social Thinking – Michelle Garcia Winner

- [www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com)

## Best Buddies International

- [www.bestbuddies.org](http://www.bestbuddies.org)

# Social Skills Resources

## Circles

- [www.stanfield.com](http://www.stanfield.com)

## Visual Tools

- [www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/visual-tools](http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/visual-tools)
- [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com)