

Considerations for Developing a Social Skills Program for Persons with ASD

Social competence is essential.

All persons (school staff, family members, and friends) assume responsibility when teaching social competence.

Multiple appropriate opportunities and settings need to be provided to practice a range of skills with sufficient support for each child. No one size fits all.

Components of a Comprehensive Program

Teach social skills in multiple settings communicating as a team

A. School

1. Use existing programs in school utilizing accommodations appropriate to the student (e.g., Effective School Wide Discipline programs; Character Counts).
2. Use recess, lunch, clubs, and other group times with typical peers to teach and practice skills. Use an adult, facilitator, or coach to assist with organizing a game or activities. This may provide an opportunity for a college student who is interested in working with students with ASD to assist at the school.
3. Take advantage of opportunities in the classroom. Social skills can be taught when the teacher directs a cooperative learning activity or discussion. Provide a classroom structure that facilitates peer to peer interaction. Use this opportunity to teach and encourage all students to share and display work to peers, ask a neighbor for something, offer help to a peer, look at each other during discussion, compliment each other, express “friendly” acts, and work with a partner or a small group. Combine social and academic learning through guided reading experiences, class jobs, class projects, and learning centers. Use incidental teaching such as setting up a situation that encourages students to make a request.
4. Use peers as teachers. They can be mentors, be part of a Circle of Friends, participate in lunch bunch activities, and just be a buddy for the day. When using peers, they will need to be coached or taught how to provide instruction and assistance to the student. Using a structured lunch bunch or activity facilitated by an adult provides a great setting for teaching turn taking, conversation skills, personal space, language, voice tone/volume, body language, and facial expressions.

5. Consider encouraging students with ASD to be involved in before and after school activities. If students arrive early pair them with buddies or other students who may provide a social experience.
6. Utilize social skills groups/programs that are designed to teach specific skills to the individual student. When teaching skills through social skills groups, all persons need to know what is taught so they can reinforce the skill in multiple settings. Keep data so that the team can decide if a group/program is working for the student.
7. Use evidence based practices or emerging practices such as video modeling and social stories that specifically address the skill deficits. Use student support systems consistently (e.g., visual strategies, five point scale).
8. Teach to the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is everything that typical persons “know” that have not been systematically taught to individuals.

B. Home/Community

1. Utilize these opportunities to teach social skills: meal time, visits with friends, interactions with siblings, sleep overs, and/or play dates.
2. Practice recess games. Find out what the typical students do at recess and practice these skills at home.
3. Play games with your child and do not let him/her win. Children need to learn how to lose gracefully.
4. Involve the siblings in teaching and reinforcing social skill acquisition.
5. Script out different social situations. Practice the scripts.
6. Find social skill groups and programs that provide instruction and practice in your son/daughter’s deficit skill areas. Use evidence based practices such as video modeling, social stories, and other emerging practices that work for your son/daughter.
7. Visit friends and family and encourage them to teach and support the learning of social skills.
8. Have parties and invite others to participate. Use this to practice or teach social skills.
9. Extend your teaching and reinforcing of social skills into the community. Take your son/daughter shopping or to restaurants. Use priming (practicing the activity through role play, pictures, stories, cue cards, videos, and social stories) before going to a new place. Consider having your child join and/or you lead a scouting troop, youth group, club of child’s interest or teen club.
10. Limit video interactions. Encourage social activities.
11. Revisit life as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Teach how you or your parents were taught (playing games, saying please and thank you, not tolerating bad

behavior, giving direct instruction when being rude, not allowing bad table manners, teaching good grooming and dress).

Determining What Social Skills to Teach

1. Get to know your student/son/daughter
2. Use assessment tools/scales
 - a. To determine present level of performance and current strengths and limitations
 - b. To decide what skills to teach; encourages everyone to focus and prioritize skills for practice and reinforcement at school and home
 - c. Is completed by those persons who know the student
 - d. Examples may include:
 - i. Gresham and Elliot: Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales (standardized for ages 3-18)
 - ii. Baker: Social Skills Menu
 - iii. Bellini: Autism Social Skills Profile
 - iv. Quill: Social Skills Checklist
 - v. Coucouvanis: Profile of Social Difficulty
3. Consider teaching basic skills first
 - a. using greetings/farewells,
 - b. requesting help/assistance,
 - c. starting/ participate in/ending a conversation,
 - d. joining in/inviting others to participate,
 - e. giving a compliment,
 - f. following directions,
 - g. staying on task,
 - h. dealing with mistakes,
 - i. dealing with anger,
 - j. waiting, and
 - k. getting along with others such as attending, responding, being a good sport, compromising, showing initiation with others, cooperating, and being flexible
4. Select skills to teach
 - a. What is the easiest skill for student to use?
 - b. Is the skill practical or socially important?
 - c. Is the skill reasonable for the student to learn right now?
 - d. Is it a social problem?
 - e. Does the student view it as important?
5. Additional considerations for selection

- a. Consider whether the skill is an acquisition or performance deficit
 - b. Consider teaching three new skills per student each six to nine weeks
 - c. Consider a mixture of ease and complexity
6. Collect data on performance of the skills in a variety of settings. Make decisions based on the data.

References:

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