Social Skill Support Strategies for Learners with High-Functioning Autism

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD): The Facts

ASD is a complex developmental disability that typically occurs early in life (usually by year 3).

ASD is a neurological disorder; there is no known psychogenic etiology for autism.

Exact prevalence is unknown, however current estimates are approximately 1 per 88; 1 per 54 boys (CDC).

Approximately 4-5 times more common in boys than girls; there are no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries.

Family income, lifestyle and educational levels do not affect the chance of ASD occurrence.

Foundational Characteristics of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Social Skill/Social Interaction

Speech/Language/Communication

Behavior
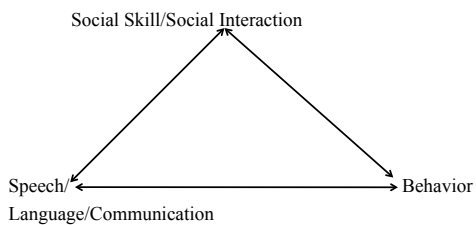
SALIENT FEATURES OF HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM

Social
- ✓ Social withdrawal
- ✓ Unskilled initiations and responses
- ✓ Socially stiff, awkward, emotionally blunted, self-centered, unable to understand social cues, inflexible, lack empathy
- ✓ Emotionally vulnerable and easily stressed
- ✓ Easy targets for teasing and bullying

Speech/Language
- ✓ Good speaking fluency
- ✓ Poor pragmatics
- ✓ Poor non-verbal skills

SALIENT ELEMENTS OF HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM

Cognitive/Academic
- ✓ Generally average intellectual abilities
- ✓ Obsessive, narrowly defined interests
- ✓ Concrete/literal thinking style
- ✓ Rigidity and inflexible demeanor
- ✓ Poor problem solving skills
- ✓ Poor organization
- ✓ Difficulty in discerning relevant stimuli

Sensory
- ✓ Hypo-and hyper-sensitivity to stimuli
- ✓ Poor auditory processing, including sound sensitivity

Physical/Motor
- ✓ Fine and gross motor challenges

HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM CHARACTERISTICS AFFECTING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

- ✓ Distraction/Inattention
- ✓ Difficulty comprehending abstract concepts
- ✓ Tunnel Vision
- ✓ Rote Memory
- ✓ Visual vs. Auditory Processing
- ✓ Problem Solving Difficulties
- ✓ Motor Skills
- ✓ Motivation
- ✓ Difficulty distinguishing relevant information

PILLARS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Development of basic social skills and addressing social deficits are of significant importance

    Social competence strongly correlates with both school and post-school outcomes

School and school personnel are ideally positioned to address and take leadership roles in addressing social challenges

    Also well positioned to coordinate with parents and family members and community and clinical professionals

Social skills and social competence development follow the same basic principles that guide other learning: orderly and explicit instruction

    Without instruction students don't respond

    Cajoling, "therapy", simply pointing out incorrect behavior, unleashing forces of self-determination and motivation alone will be ineffective

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PILLARS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Social skill strategies and methods are not designed to *fundamentally change or "fix" the personalities* or otherwise *alter the core nature* of students

Numerous challenges, however optimism is warranted

    Children/youth with HFAD can acquire improved social behavior and competence; these assets pay significant life-long benefits

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Social Skill Instruction and Social Interaction Underpinnings

Social Success/Competence

- Environmental Supports
  - Appropriate Classroom Settings and Supports
  - Positive and Accepting Attitude Supports
  - Awareness and Understanding Of Special Need Learners
  - Clearly Stated Rules and Expectations and Related Supports
- Social Skills
  - Social Inter-Action, Relationship Cooperation Skills
  - Self-related Behaviors and Social Thinking Skills
  - Academic-Related Behaviors
- Peer Supports

PEER AND ADULT SOCIAL INTERACTION, RELATIONSHIP AND COOPERATION SKILLS

✓Participate in cooperative play and recreational activities
✓Participate in organized activities, e.g., follow rules/protocol
✓Initiate social bids
✓Respond to social bids
✓Request and give information, appropriately
✓Share
✓Give and ask for assistance, appropriately
✓Engage in age-appropriate/ability-appropriate interactions
✓Problem solve, including independently and within group settings
✓Show age- appropriate/ability-appropriate affection
✓Recognize and appropriately respond to authority and rules
✓Appropriately cope with conflict
✓Give and accept age-appropriate feedback and consequences

SELF MANAGEMENT/SELF-ADVOCACY/SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Social Problem Solving Skills
✓Awareness of others' mental states RE: actions and appropriate social interactions
✓Awareness and understanding of others' perspectives
✓Appropriate application of social problem solving strategies
✓Awareness others may not share perspectives, beliefs and interests
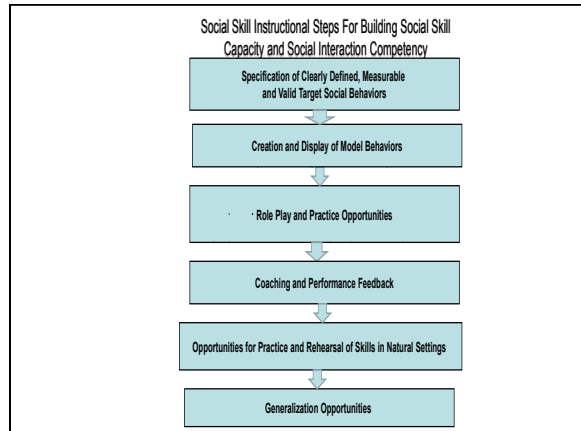
Self-Management Skills
✓Appropriate self-control and self-regulation within a variety of social situations
✓Awareness and appropriate respect for personal and property boundaries
✓Age-appropriate/ability-appropriate self-care and hygiene skills
✓Appropriate display of personal interests

Self-Advocacy Skills
✓Awareness and appropriate communication of social interaction preferences (e.g., group size, activity, familiarity with group members)
✓Awareness and appropriate communication of peer and adult relationship preferences (e.g., familiarity, age, gender)
✓Appropriate communication of avoidance strategies
✓Awareness and demonstration of appropriate attention-seeking strategies
✓Awareness and appropriate communication of stress and anxiety
✓Communication of preferences for eye contact/eye gaze, physical orientation, etc

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School, Classroom and Academic Social Skills

✓Rule and classroom protocol compliance

✓Demonstration of appropriate classroom and task-related attention and participation

✓Compliance in completing teacher-assigned tasks and submitting on-time and completed assignments

✓Compliance in following directions and demonstrating appropriate conformity

✓Demonstration of accepted social behavior and academic participation skills within small groups and cooperative groups

Social Skill Instructional Steps For Building Social Skill Capacity and Social Interaction Competency

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Specification of Clearly Defined, Measurable
and Valid Target Social Behaviors
        ↓
Creation and Display of Model Behaviors
        ↓
· Role Play and Practice Opportunities
        ↓
Coaching and Performance Feedback
        ↓
Opportunities for Practice and Rehearsal of Skills in Natural Settings
        ↓
Generalization Opportunities
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Creation of Appropriate Models

✓ Draw attention to specific target behaviors
✓ Use models whom the learner knows and thinks highly of to demonstrate desired behavior
✓ Use models with similar characteristics to learner, e.g., age, gender, similar traits when possible
✓ Use models that are successful in the social interactions, including brief taped models of target behaviors (1-3 minutes in duration)
✓ Use models who display instructional steps and self-talk

ROLE PLAY EXERCISES

Make role plays enjoyable and varied

Accept each student's uniqueness and personality

Ensure role-plays are suitably challenging and depict real-life

Positive reinforcement (praise for trying, praise specific aspects), including effort

Expect resistance

Include peers after learners have acquired basic skills

COACHING AND FEEDBACK

Majority of social needs of children and adolescents with HFAD relate to social understanding and problem solving and shaded and toned forms of basic social responses required to fit particular situations and circumstances.

✓Teaching these nuanced responses is typically most effectively done via coaching

✓Students unlikely to fully learn and understand advanced social responses via hearing about them, watching models, and role-playing models of what they observe without person-to-person coaching and interpretation

COACHING AND FEEDBACK

✓Coaching ongoing and integrated part of the social skill instruction at every step of process

✓Initial and early-stage coaching best done by individuals who do original teaching
  ✓Preliminary stages emphasize correct understanding and basic execution of target behavior
  ✓Subsequent to this preliminary coaching others enlisted to support and expand the coaching

✓Reinforcement of student's efforts and performance an essential and ongoing component of social coaching

✓Individualize coaching actions and behaviors to fit needs and preferences of individual learners (e.g., some students prefer, tolerate or learn best when a coach uses a "hands on" approach)

COACHING AND FEEDBACK

✓Students not able immediately acquire or understand all facets of complex social behaviors

✓Social skill learning occurs in a gradual fashion and requires time and practice

✓Students can easily become confused and overwhelmed if coaches give too many instructions too quickly, focus on multiple sub-skills, and overwhelm learners with more information than they can functionally use to improve performance

COACHING AND FEEDBACK

✓ Subsequent to basic skill acquisition, coaching focuses on problem-solving, interpreting contextual cues/variables, and understanding dynamic nature of reciprocal social interactions

✓ Include peers in process, subsequent to initially teaching particular social skills

✓ Peers who participate in social coaching should be carefully selected and trained
   ✓ Peers must understand they are volunteer confederates, and not teacher surrogates

PEER INVOLVEMENT

Two prominent roles

Peer groups who possess and demonstrate positive and understanding attitudes and who exhibit acceptance of individual differences and disabilities are fundamental parts of the generic foundation and environment needed for social growth and development

Select classmates of students with HFAD directly support, develop and generalize budding social skills and new social assets.
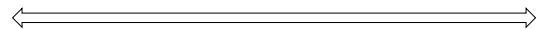
PEER INVOLVEMENT

Foundational Elements: Information and positive experiences

Recruitment and Training
   ✓ Volunteers
   ✓ Rewards
   ✓ Vetting
   ✓ Support peer-to-peer interactions

Learners of new social skills require opportunities to practice and use their developing social skills and assets in natural settings with a variety of peers

Parent/Family Involvement

Ongoing Communication, Information Exchange and Elemental Collaboration

Partnership, Skill Development and Related Support

PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES

✓ Practice where skills independently used
✓ Rehearse skills in natural settings after students can initially perform them
✓ Feedback and coaching are continued on an as-needed basis:
   ✓ Situational problem solving
   ✓ Interpreting events and circumstances
✓ Initially rely on peer confederates known to the learner and supportive of training procedures
✓ Orient peer participants to the training protocol and teach peer-role feedback and coaching
✓ Gradually extend social skill instruction into increasingly less supported settings

MOTIVATING AND SUPPORTING SOCIAL SKILL TRAINING

Evaluate performance, including self-evaluation

Visual supports

Self-monitoring and cognitive self-management supports

Consequence maps

Power cards

Social narratives

Priming

Auditory input devices

Cartooning

Video modeling

Listening without interrupting	Positive actions after careful listening	Stays on topic and takes turns talking	Different opinions
Looks at person talking Listens to what person talking is saying Listens with ears, eyes and thinks about what was said	Makes positive comments and/or gestures after person talks	Takes turns talking Listens after taking turn at talking	Looks and listens without interrupting to different opinions Positive or neutral comments and/or gestures after person talking gives different opinions
1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

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Visual Supports

- ✓ Visual Schedules
- ✓ Task Organizers
- ✓ Turn Taking Cards
- ✓ Waiting Symbols
- ✓ Choice Making
- ✓ Rules and Alternate Behaviors
- ✓ Calming Supports
- ✓ Transition Supports
- ✓ Activity Completion Signals
- ✓ Introducing Change
- ✓ First, Then Cards

COGNITIVE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Students actively monitor their own behaviors

Relies on self-monitoring (self-assessment, self-recording), self-evaluation, and self reinforcement

Involves learners:
✓Differentiating occurrence of target responses
✓Reliably evaluating and self-recording
✓Delivering self-selected reinforcement

✓Frequently involves students covertly or overtly verbalizing cues, questions and other information to themselves required to make correct responses

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COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT: FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

Directions: Circle the number that describes my **following teacher instructions**

9-9:15

Listen for teacher to give directions

0   1   2   3

If I do not understand, I will raise my hand and ask teacher for assistance

0   1   2   3

Follow my teacher's instructions

0   1   2   3

9:20-9:35

Listen for teacher to give directions

0   1   2   3

If I do not understand, I will raise my hand and ask teacher for assistance

0   1   2   3

Follow my teacher's instructions

0   1   2   3

POWER CARDS

Connects target behavior or social skill to an individual's area of special interest.

Power Cards involve scenarios wherein a student's special interest, a hero, or a model connected to a special interest models a solution to a problem similar to the one experienced by the individual.

SOCIAL NARRATIVES

Brief and individualized written and symbol-based descriptions of situations that provide information about events and circumstances that assist in recognizing behavioral expectations and appropriate responses.

These narratives guide and direct the actions of learners within specified social situations by telling them how to respond.

CARTOONING

Uses visuals symbols to enhance social understanding

Abstract and elusive social protocol and situations made more understandable by using cartoons to clarify and structure future responses.

CONSEQUENCE MAPS

Graphic representations of behaviors and consequences. Track depicts a present (and typically undesirable) behavioral response and more socially desirable behavior along with the consequences connected to the options

Maps used to assist students understand and make decisions about their behavior and to become more involved in the process of understanding choices and consequences

VIDEO MODELING AND PROMPTING

Video Modeling:

Learner shown videotape of a model performing a target behavior or completing a desired task

After watching videotape, learner provided opportunity to perform the target behavior or complete the desired task

Video Prompting:

Learner shown a series of video clips in sequence

After watching the first video clip the learner is provided opportunity to perform the each step of the task

VIDEO MODELING TYPES

Adult Models: Adults act out or show desired behaviors

Peer Models: Same age/gender peers model target behaviors

Self Modeling: The learner portrays the desired target behavior.

Point-of-View Modeling: Modeling of target skill from the point of view of the learner.