Social Skill Intervention Strategies for Children with Autism

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Autism

- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)
  - Most prevalent childhood developmental disorder in the U.S
  - 1 in 110 children are affected by ASD

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- Most prevalent developmental disorder in the US

- 4 males: 1 female

- In Arizona in 2002 the median age of diagnosis for autism was 5 years 3 months
Autism

- Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder in which excesses and deficits in behavior are observed that have a neurological basis.
- DSM-IV; 3 areas of impairment:
  - 1. Social interaction.
  - 2. Communication.
  - 3. Restricted and repetitive behavior.
Autism Spectrum Disorders

Social

Communication

Restrictive/Repetitive Behavior
Research on Social Development

- Without support, children with ASD may have difficulty:
  - Starting up a conversation
  - Invite kids over to play
  - Go to parties
  - Joining activities
  - Keeping up with the game or understanding the rules

- Lack of social relationships in childhood may lead to:
  - Decreased employment
  - Decreased independent living
  - Decreased life expectancy
  - Severe mental health problems (depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety)

(Strain, 1991; Wing, 1981; Strain & Schwartz, 2001)
Relationships/Friendships

- Provide continuous, stable relationships with familiar peers
- Bolster self-worth, sense of belonging
- Provide companionship, affection, emotional support
- Create opportunities to share hopes, fears, and interests
- Help us learn about the social world outside our families and self
Skills Necessary for Friendship

- Sharing
- Ability to compromise
- Consider another person’s perspective
- Companionship
- Empathy
- Conflict Resolution
- Reliability
- Ability to exchange feelings

(Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1998)
Physically integrating students alone may not be enough (Gresham, 1984; Kamps et al., 1998)

Students with disabilities considered “least liked” (Sale & Carey, 1995)

Incidence of peer victimization (Shtayermman, 2007; Little, 2002)
  - High levels of bullying
  - Peer shunning
    • Not invited to birthday parties
    • Eating alone at lunch
    • Picked last for teams
Research Directly Related to Recess, Lunch and Unstructured Time

• Increased (Nelson et al., 2007)
  - isolation
  - low engagement

• Less likely to initiate social interactions (Hauck, Fein, Waterhouse, & Feinstein, 1995)

• May not respond (appropriately) to initiations by peers (Lee, Odom, & Loftin, 2007)
The result...
Social Skills- Intervention Approach

- Use treatment approaches based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis as appropriate for each child’s needs

- Promote healthy relationships

- Peer sensitivity/disability awareness to promote awareness and understanding through student education and emersion
Effective Social Skills Interventions

- Occur across multiple naturalistic settings
  (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007)

- Peer mediated
  (Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2008; Kamps et al., 1992; Kohler et al., 2007; Owen-DeSchryver et al., 2008)

- Frequent
  (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007; Strain & Schwartz, 2001)

- Motivating and child directed
  (Kern at al., 1998; Koegel, Dyer, & Bell, 1987; Koegel et al., 2005)

- Include cooperative arrangements
  (Kennedy & Itkonen, 1996; Koegel et al., 2005)

- Mutually reinforcing
  (Koegel, Werner, Vismara, & Koegel, 2006)
Benefits For Those with ASD

• Increased:
  - Peer initiations
    (Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005; McGee et al., 1992; Owen-Des Schryver et al., 2008)
  - Reciprocal interaction (initiations & responses)
    (Harper, Symon & Frea, 2008; Kamps et al., 2002; Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005; Kohler et al., 1997; Kohler et al., 2007; McGee et al., 1992)
  - Peer acceptance
    (Kamps et al., 2002; McGee et al., 1992)
  - Participation in community or after school activities
    (Goldstein, Schneider, & Thiemann 2007)
  - Opportunities to practice and generalize skills
    (Laushey and Heflin, 2000)
  - Engagement
    (Kamps et al., 2002)

• Decreased:
  - Stigmatizing behaviors
    (Lee, Odom, & Loftin, 2007)
Social Skills: Supports
Peer Sensitivity Training

Typical peers are supported so they develop skills and learn how to interact appropriately and, most importantly, develop meaningful relationships with dignity and respect as equal members of the school community.
Types of Social Interactions

- Observing (proximity to peers)
- Parallel Play
- Responding to initiations of peers
- Cooperative Play
- Initiating with peers
Observing (proximity to peers)

- Watching peers complete an activity
  - E.g. standing near or in the middle of a soccer game that is occurring without actually participating
Parallel Play

• Completing the same play activity as peers separately but within close proximity

  – E.g. drawing with chalk; digging in the dirt
Responding

- Responding (verbally or physically) to the initiation of a peer
  
  - E.g. A peer asks a child for a toy and the child gives the peer the toy
  
  - E.g. A peer asks a child what she wants to play and the child responds “game”
Cooperative Play

- Completing a play activity WITH peers
  - E.g. Digging a whole in the sand with peers
  - E.g. Taking turns playing hopscotch
  - E.g. Playing tag with peers
  - E.g. Talking to a peer about the soccer game they are watching
Initiating

- Starting a social interaction with peer(s)
  - E.g. Asking to join a game
  - E.g. Asking a peer if they want to play
Setting up a Social Skills Intervention Program
Getting Started

1. Assess to identify strengths and deficits
2. Identify goals
3. Intervention
4. Collect data to monitor and evaluate progress
5. Teach across all settings (Generalization)
Recognize the Need

- Data-driven decision-making
- Assessment of student
  - Collect baseline data
- IEP
  - Specific goal
  - Specific service-delivery
Assessment for Social Skills Training

• Objectives:
  – To determine what social skills need to be addressed
  – To determine what would be the most effective teaching strategies
  – To determine the most effective teaching modalities

Baker, 2001
Assessment Strategies

- Teacher Checklist
- Parent Interview
- Student Interview
- Observation
IEP- Social Skills Goal

Should be individualized to the needs and abilities of each student contingent on baseline data.

Sample IEP Goal:

Student will interact with typical peers 85% of the time during recess, lunch and other less structured times of the day.
Sample Goals

- **Child A**
  - Increase appropriate initiations with peers:
    - Child A will appropriately initiate with two peers during a recess across three consecutive days.
  - Increase duration of engagement within large group activities
    - Child A will engage with five or more peers in a structured group activity (e.g. red light green light, soccer).

- **Child B**
  - Decrease prompts to engage in activities:
    - Child B will engage in an appropriate recess activity for ten minutes with no more than two prompts from an adult.

- **Child C**
  - Increase cooperative play with peers during group activities:
    - Child C will turn take with peers without displaying challenging behaviors 4 out of 5 opportunities for three consecutive days.

- **Child D**
  - Develop appropriate behavior when loses a game:
    - Child D will not display challenging behaviors after losing a game 4 out of 5 opportunities for three consecutive days.
Social Skills Training-
Examples of What to teach

- Sharing and turn taking
- Initiating interactions
- Responding appropriately to greetings and play initiations
- Bringing up appropriate topics and reciprocal conversations
- Attention to facial expressions and body language
- Respecting personal boundaries and space
- Eye contact
- Appropriate comments and questions
- Ask about others interests and listen
Taking Baseline

- **Data Measures-Specific to goals of students**
  - Social Initiations with peers (frequency)
  - Time engaged with peers (duration/percentage)
  - Responses to peer initiations (percentage)

- **What is baseline?**
  - Recording the current levels of each behavior being measured
  - Do not need to remove any supports provided on the playground; continue to provide same level of support on playground
Baseline
Steps for Effective Social Skills Intervention Program
Provide Structure

- Set up structured activity/prompt peers to invite target children to join
  - E.g. Set up red light green light
  - E.g. Help facilitate students picking teams for kickball
  - E.g. Use chalk to play Pictionary
Follow the Child’s Lead

• First need to find out what the target students like to play

• Use preferred activities to create opportunities to play with peers

• Plan activities for the day with the flexibility of being able to follow the motivation of the targeted child

  – E.g. Student wants to play with a Frisbee so you set up Frisbee golf
Create Opportunities

• Provide opportunities within activity for children to interact with one another at the level appropriate for that child

  – If a child prefers an activity, give that activity to a peer so the child can initiate with the peer

  – If a child wants to play a game, put them in charge of the game so peers will initiate with that child

  – Set up new activities similar to other preferred activities to expand play

    • E.g. set up a cooperative arrangement within an activity building a castle in the sand box
Provide Support

• Contact target student within activity as needed
  – Within activity provide verbal and gestural prompts as needed to help the child complete the activity
  – Prompt the child to ask others to play a game (e.g. “we need more people to play, go ask three friends”)
  – Provide support to peers teaching them how to interact with peers with social deficits
    • E.g. prompt them to ask a target peer to play
    • E.g. prompt a peer to tell a target peer when it is their turn
    • E.g. If a targeted peer does not respond to a child’s initiate, provide support to that child to keep asking until they get a response
REINFORCE GOOD BEHAVIORS

• Immediately reinforce (provide preferred item/praise, etc) appropriate social behaviors within activity for both target and typical students (within 5 sec of the behavior)

• Need to reinforce appropriate behavior of both the typical peers and the targeted child to increase behavior in the future

• When possible, want the reinforcement for their behavior to come from each other (natural contingencies)
  – E.g. Set up bean bag toss where asking your peer for the bean bag (behavior) gives you access to the bean bag (reinforcement)
Positive Practice

- Provide prompting for socially appropriate behavior as needed and set up opportunities to practice socially appropriate behavior for both target and typical students.

  - E.g. If a child is taking a toy from a peer, set up the opportunity again and tell the child to ask the peer for the toy. When the child asks, have the peer give the toy to the child for a turn. Provide praise immediately to the peer and after the child takes his/her turn have him/her return the toy to the peer.
Intervention
Results of Piloting Playground Program at Schools
Engagement with Peers during Recess

Time Engaged with Peers Kindergarten through 4th Grade

Percentage of Time

Student 1  Student 2  Student 3  Student 4

Baseline  Week 2  Week 16
Interactions with Peers during Recess

Interactions with Peers during Recess

Frequency per Minute

- Student 1
- Student 2
- Student 3
- Student 4

Interactions Baseline
Interactions Week 2
Interactions Week 8
Initiations with Peers on Playground

Social Initiations Kindergarten through 4th Grade

Frequency per Minute

Student 1  Student 2  Student 3  Student 4

Baseline  Week 2  Week 16
Additional Recommendations and Resources included in Handout

- Preschool and Elementary
- Middle and High School
- Research articles and Related Books for Social Skill Development and Communication Facilitation
- Resources with recommendations for structured play and activities

*See Additional Slides
SARRC’s mission is to advance research and provide a lifetime of support for individuals with autism and their families.
Recommended Readings
Preschool & Elementary School


Twachtman-Cullen, D. *Trevor Trevor*. Higganum, CT: Starfish Specialty Press
Recommended Readings
Books for Middle and High School


Recommended Resources

Activities

Kaplan, M. (Producer). *The boy inside* [Motion picture]. (Available from Fanlight Productions, 4196 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02131)

