

CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS: INTEGRATING SOCIAL SKILLS INTO THE SCHOOL DAY

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AGENDA

Social skills required for school-age students with ASD to interact successfully with peers and adults

Importance of individualized social goals and the power of preference in the expression of social skills with peers

Methods to integrate social skills teaching, prompting, and experiences into every facet of the school day

Questions from you!

OPENING IDEAS:

Relationships are building blocks of adult independence and happiness

Not all relationships and friendships look the same either across time or across people

Different people value different levels and types of relationship

Failure is the norm –and that's ok!

CONTEXT

Few individuals with autism develop friendships with same-aged peers

Quality of life and successful independence closely tied to development of relationships

Ability to develop meaningful relationships is linked with level of social skills

CONTEXT

Individuals with ASD are 4-7 times more likely to have encounters with law enforcement than the general public (*Cooper, et al, 2022; Curry, et al., 1993; OAR, 2014; Shea, et al., 2021*)

CONTEXT

Individuals with ASD are at higher risk for:

Elopement (*Cassandra, et al., 2021; NCMEC*)

Engagement in unusual public behavior

(*Gardner, et al., 2022; Miller, et al, 2022*)

Use of force (*Gardner, et al., 2022; Kelley & Dubin, 2022; Shah, 2019*)

CONTEXT

Individuals with ASD are at higher risk for:

Sexual abuse (*Latvala, et al., 2022; Pfeffer, 2016; Sevlever, et al., 2013; Weiss & Fardella, 2018*)

Experiencing bullying, assault, theft (*Dodds, 2022; Gibbs & Pellicano, 2023; Pfeffer, 2016*)

CONTEXT

Individuals with ASD are at higher risk for:

Committing a sexual offence (*Sevlever, et al., 2013; Sperry, et al., 2021; Weiss & Fardella, 2018*)

Significant trauma in childhood (*Dodds, 2022*)

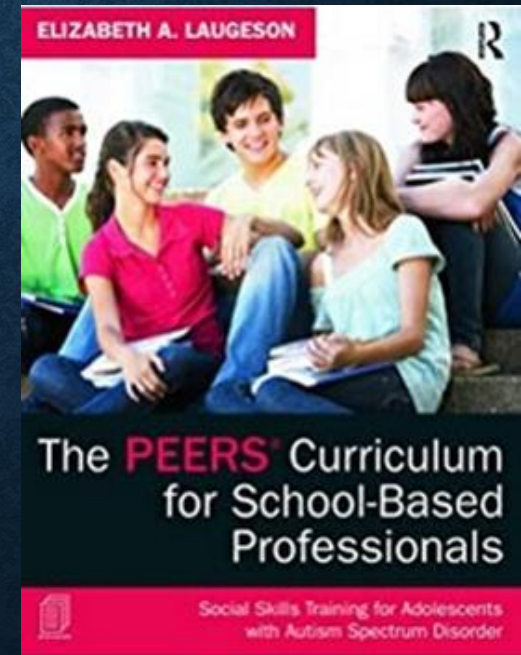
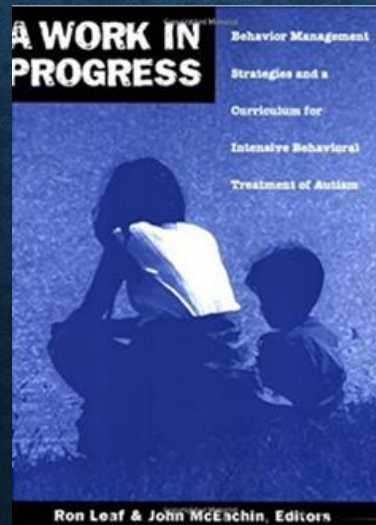
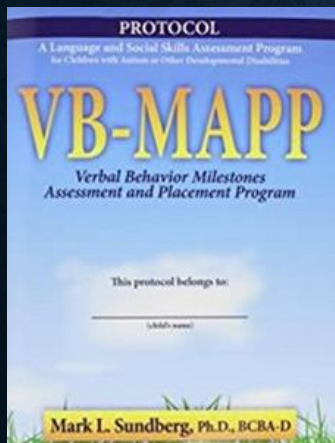
CONTEXT

This risk is higher if co-morbid conditions are present
(*Cooper, et al., 2022; Leydier, 2022; Miller, et al., 2022*)

Rate of co-morbid mental health conditions is
estimated to be as high as 70% (*Chapman, 2019; Hossain, et al., 2020; Lugo-Marin, et al., 2019*)

THE GOOD NEWS

We know A LOT about how to teach social skills and what skills to teach



THE GOOD NEWS

A number of interventions used to develop social, relationship, and life skills, including:

- Video modeling

- Script fading

- Peer mediated strategies

- Teaching Interactions

- Social stories

All have successfully taught these skills

SKILLS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Sorts of social skills required for school-age students with ASD to interact successfully with peers and adults.

Teach social skills that prepare them for what relationships look like at that level

Elementary: Recess, PE, Birthday Parties, Play dates

Middle/High School: Work, Sports, Dates, Social Media

A QUICK EXERCISE

Imagine a student you work with has been invited to attend a birthday party for a classmate.

What skills will they need to navigate the party?

How involved will adults be in facilitating party activities?

What kinds of supports might a student with autism require?

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to teach how positive relationships form:

Relationships built on reciprocity

Ability to recognize reciprocity in others and to offer it yourself are two fundamental skills required to build, maintain, and end healthy relationships

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

Several skills to use reciprocity as a relationship tool:

How to offer reciprocity first

How to recognize reciprocity in return

How to evaluate the equality of the exchange

How to REFUSE reciprocity

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

Some examples:

“He shared his toy”

“She gave me a turn”

”But I gave him my cupcake”

“But he bought me dinner”

TEACHING RECIPROCITY

How to offer reciprocity first:

It's an investment

Young children

Obvious parallel play

Sharing

Offering a turn or inviting

If/Then exchanges

TEACHING RECIPROCITY

How to offer reciprocity first:

It's an investment

Adolescents/Young adults

Texting

Inviting to hang out

Offering to study/work together

Advanced token economies

TEACHING RECIPROCITY

How to offer reciprocity first:

Start small -less is more

It's rarely about "things"

Provide opportunities to approach

A BRIEF ACTIVITY

What are some of the most creative ways you've seen someone make an initial reciprocal bid?

What do you see students with ASD struggle with in making social initiations?

How would you explain this idea to a student of yours using an example you've seen in your setting?

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

How to recognize reciprocity in return

There is “in the moment” and there is “within the relationship”

It's not always an “exact” or identical exchange

It may take time –the older they are the longer it may take

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

Prepare them to fail; teach an age-appropriate exit

Small initial offers are safer

Most initiations will evoke no response, and
require no further action beyond stopping
the attempt

Identify “limits” for attempts in a specific
situation

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

How to evaluate equality of exchange

In the moment

Is this a fair trade

Am I willing to give this

Effort, amount, and return

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

How to evaluate equality of the exchange

Over time

With established relationships, it's rarely
100% equal at any given instant

Both should want to be there

As the adults, we should respect that this is a reasonable
calculation for ANY person to make

A BRIEF ACTIVITY

Reflect on a time you failed to recognize someone else's failure to reciprocate towards you

What signs did you miss?

What finally made you realize what was going on?

What "Lesson learned" would you pass on to a student based on experience that would help them avoid the same outcome?

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

How to REFUSE reciprocity:

Reciprocity is a CHOICE not an obligation

Avoid teaching that you “owe” someone something
in return

Avoid turning a choice into a power struggle

TEACHING RECIPROCITY RECOGNITION

How to REFUSE reciprocity:

If you do not want to be in a relationship, the clearest signal is to NOT reciprocate

Importance of NOT saying that out loud –MOST of the time

Also: MUST teach skills to recognize and respond to high-pressure or exploitative attempts at immediate reciprocity

BRIEF ACTIVITY

Think of a situation in which you've seen a student with ASD not recognize a reciprocity refusal.

Break down the initiation, how the refusal was communicated (or not) and what happened when the student didn't respect the refusal

SOME COMMON RECIPROCITY ISSUES

Or, what I wish someone had talked to me about when I got into teaching social skills...

Some thoughts, some questions to ask yourself, some questions to guide students to ask...

RECIPROCAL VS TRANSACTIONAL

They are NOT the same

One of the most common mistakes we all make

Examples:

The library assistant

The class aide

WHAT IS A FRIEND?

How do you know if someone is your friend?

What does a friend do differently than an acquaintance?

How are you a friend?

What does ____ do that makes you think they are your friend?

Examples:

The house clearing

WHAT IS HEALTHY?

How do you identify if a relationship is healthy?

Do both want to be there?

Are both benefitting?

Is there coercion or imbalance?

Examples:

Lunch buddy

TOLERANCE & GRACE

How long do you stick around when relationship is not “working” for you?

Some relationships span years or even decades

ALL relationships change over time

Example:

The stroke

TOLERANCE & GRACE

What do you owe another person regarding a relationship?

What is loyalty in a relationship?

Do you hold the other person to the same standard?

TOLERANCE & GRACE

Two sayings I try to remember:

You can't care more than they do

Don't light yourself on fire to keep someone else
warm

TOLERANCE & GRACE

In other words...

Be sensitive to what is being offered right now

Modify your behavior to match your expectations first

MOVING RELATIONSHIPS FORWARD

It's OK to do the math

It's OK to change the exchange

It's POWERFUL to model and make transparent that process

Kids learn relationships from relationships around them

INTEGRATING SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

Tips for ways to integrate social skills teaching,
prompting, and experiences into every facet of the
school day

REMEMBER...

Most students WANT to interact with other people more successfully

Embrace frustration and problems with social skills as an opportunity to teach.

This won't always work, and it won't always be pretty, but clearly defined and well-practiced social skills make a HUGE difference!

INDIVIDUALIZED GOALS & PREFERENCE

Individualized social goals and preference play a big part in expression of social skills with peers

Help them find and choose their people

Avoid the danger of over-expectations and pressure

A BRIEF ACTIVITY

How do you identify potential peers who might be a “good fit” for a student with autism?

How do you involve the students in the matchmaking?

How do you know a peer pairing isn’t working?

A QUICK STORY

A tale of two teenagers...

Two goals when integrating social skills instruction into your school environment:

Create a stable, predictable environment in which the student knows what to expect and what to do

Teach functional, desirable skills that help them navigate that environment

IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINES

One type of social skills instruction is to teach the environment:

“At the bell, the class will...”

“Every morning, you will...”

“When you get a worksheet, you...”

A predictable environment causes less stress and allows students to regulate their emotions and responses more effectively.

IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINES

When you explicitly describe social interactions and expectations as part of the environment, you help the student begin to discriminate social stimuli as something to be noticed and accounted for.

LABELLING AND TEACHING ROUTINES

Identify social routines and behavioral expectations for your school and articulate it clearly for your student

Ask them to describe for you what they think the routines and rules are and what they look like

Target for teaching those routines and rules they appear to misunderstand or struggle to follow

A BRIEF ACTIVITY

As quickly as possible, make a list of the routines that students follow in your school

Do the same for your classroom

Examples: arrival, turning in work, walking in the halls, lines

A BRIEF ACTIVITY

Pick 2 routines from your list that you've seen students with ASD struggle to follow.

Make one a classroom routine

Make one a school day routine

Reflect on the specific things you do to teach those routines

How do you remind the students about the routines?

TEACHING NEW SKILLS

Teach functional, desirable skills that help them navigate environment

Focus on the positive –tell them what to do

Give specific things to do that lead to better outcomes

Target teaching to things that interfere with success

Make prompts less conspicuous and more natural

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TEACH A NEW SKILL:

BST is your friend!

ID target skill

Plan for when and where to teach

Describe skill

Practice

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TEACH A NEW SKILL:

Be creative in where and how you do this

Walking down the hall

Via text or video chat

As a part of academic instruction and
banter

A NOT SO BRIEF ACTIVITY

Let's do this for real using an example from the audience

I'll model, then you'll also practice

THE MODEL

Let's pick a skill

ID target skill

Then:

Plan for when and where to teach

Describe skill

Practice

YOUR PRACTICE

Now, you will practice teaching a brief “refresher” lesson to the same student using the same skill.

Partner 1: Walking down the hall to the next class where student needs to use skill

Partner 2: In response to student getting it wrong in your class

SUPPORTING THE LEARNING

Prompts and visual reminders are VITAL in generalizing skills for students

Important to avoid making prompts obvious or targeted

- Remind everybody

- Prompt subtly

- Teach an “invisible” sign

THE LAST BRIEF ACTIVITY

Think of the student that inspired you to be here today

What do you most wish they could communicate to you, or you could communicate with them?

Think of a subtle prompt or invisible sign you could use with that student to let you both know that support is available or needed

THAT'S ALL FOLKS!

Questions?