

March 23 & March 30, 2002

Teaching Social Skills

Advance Organizer

Today's session addresses the important topic of how to teach social skills to students with challenging behaviors. By the end of this session, you will know the definition of social skills and be able to identify some of the most important social skills for students. You will also know the basic instructional strategies used to teach social skills in school, home, and community settings. Finally, you will also learn a procedure for teaching interactions--which can be used to teach social skills to students "on the fly".

Rationale

Almost by definition, students with disabilities, and especially students with challenging behaviors, have social skills deficits. The negative outcomes associated with a lack of social skills are many and serious: juvenile delinquency, school adjustment problems, grade retention, truancy, dropping out of school, peer acceptance, mental health problems, employment difficulties, and community adjustment issues. It is critical that schools provide social skills instruction to students as a basic part of the overall school program.

In Depth

Definitions of Social Skills

- *Social skills* are the *interpersonal* behaviors that permit an individual to interact successfully with others in the environment.
- Goal-directed, learned behaviors that allow one to interact and function effectively in a variety of contexts. (Sheridan & Walker)
- Social skills are an individual's situation-specific behaviors that others judge as socially appropriate.

Goals of Social Skills Instruction

- The goal of social skill instruction is for students to teach generalize prosocial skills. Students should be able to take these skills and use them outside of the classroom.

Common Themes:

- Social skills are specific behaviors
- Social skills are a component of social competence
- The extent to which an individual is considered socially skilled is determined by the judgements of others.

Types of Social Skills:

- Classroom skills
- Peer interaction skills
- Conflict resolution/Problem solving
- Anger management

Types of Social Skills Deficits:

- Skill
- Performance
- Self-control

Includes both:

1. Verbal Behaviors

—Behaviors that result in a mutually beneficial experience.

2. Non-Verbal Behaviors

Characteristics of students needing Social Skill Instruction:

- limited problem-solving abilities
- use inappropriate tactics to resolve conflicts
- ignore or violate the rights of others
- faulty perception of situations
- interpret social cues inappropriately
- elicit few positive responses from peers
- few skills at initiating positive interactions
- don't take responsibility for behaviors; infer hostile intentions
- unaware of consequences

Assessment of Social Skills:

- multi-method, multi-source, multi-setting approach is recommended
- formal assessment techniques
- informal assessment techniques
- assessing the environment
- continuous assessment for mastery and generalization

Assessment Techniques:

- teacher nomination
- sociometrics
- checklists/rating scales
- skills specific rating scales
- interviews (teacher, parent, students)
- observations
- self-report of specific skills

Social Skills Instruction

1) Components of an Effective Social Skills Program (See Chart)

2) Discussion and instruction

- a) Discuss importance of skill—rationale, examples and non-examples, and prompts and reminders
- b) Provide instruction on how to perform the skill in specific steps (e.g., how to give a compliment)

3) Demonstration and modeling (i.e., coaching)

- a) Provide student with specific rules or steps involved in skill
- b) Model the skill—also model non-examples of skill
- c) Allow students to critique performance
- d) Provide feedback about student's performance
- e) Solicit feedback from peers

4) Practice—behavioral rehearsal and role-play

- a) Using a real or hypothetical situation
 - i) instruct the student to behave “as if”
 - ii) provide coaching during the role play as needed
 - iii) model appropriate use of the skill if necessary
 - iv) provide feedback and elicit feedback from peers
- b) Have students practice skills until fluency is achieved

5) Problem-solving

- a) Teach students to logically evaluate problem situations and consider alternatives
 - i) What is the problem?
 - ii) What are my choices?
 - iii) What are the consequences of these choices?
 - iv) What is the best choice?
 - v) How did I do?

6) Reinforcement

- a) Provide verbal reinforcement
- b) Tangible reinforcers for completing “homework”

7) Cardinal Rules For Conducting Social Skills Training**

- a) Social skills should be taught as academic subject matter, using instructional procedures identical to those for teaching basic academic skills.
- b) Critical test of effectiveness of SST is the functional demonstration and application in natural settings.
- c) SST is not an effective intervention for complex behavioral disorders or problems. By itself, SST cannot remediate aggressive or disruptive behavior patterns.
- d) SST can be an important compliment to behavioral reduction techniques in that it teaches adaptive alternatives to maladaptive or problematic behavior.
- e) The instructional acquisition of social skills does not guarantee either their application or efficiency in natural settings.
- f) There is considerable inertia operating against the behavioral integration of newly taught social skills into one's ongoing behavioral repertoire, as is the case with any newly acquired skill.
- g) To be effective, SST must be accompanied by the provision of response opportunities, feedback, and incentive systems in natural settings to provide for their actual demonstration and mastery.
- h) Social validation of social skills by target consumer groups is a critical step in both the selection and training of social skills.
- i) There are two types of deficits in social-behavior adjustment: skill deficits (cannot do) and performance deficits (will not do). These deficits should be treated differently, as they require different forms of intervention for effective remediation.

****SOURCE:** Walker, H.M., Colvin, G., & Ramsey, E. (1995). Antisocial behavior in the school: Strategies and best practices. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole Publishing.

The Teaching Interaction (A Correction Procedure)

- 1) Interrupt the inappropriate behavior by saying something positive that is related to the situation.
- 2) Ask the child for an alternative way of behaving. If the child doesn't know, you verbalize or model one and have the child repeat it.
 - a) Ask the child to practice the appropriate behavior.
 - b) Give the child positive feedback for any improvement.
 - c) Give the child homework.

Considerations for Implementing a Social Skills Program

- Base goals and objectives on student need
- Inform caregivers of program implementation and seek their assistance
- Allow time for planning and training
- Plan for skill practice and reinforcement
- Plan for generalization and maintenance
- Evaluate outcomes and modify when necessary

Potential Sources of Support

- General and special education teachers
- Guidance counselors
- School Psychologists
- Principals
- Paraeducators
- Employers
- Support staff
 - clerical staff
 - food service workers
 - custodial staff
 - transportation personnel
- Caregivers (parents, family members, guardians)
- Peers

Parent Involvement

- Establish a home note or contract system with parents
- Request that parents review the skill steps being taught
- Teach parents to reinforce, prompt, and model skills being taught
- Include home-based contingencies to reinforce for skill demonstration at home
- Have parents volunteer to help run social skills programs at school

Generalization:

- Conduct training in natural settings when possible
- Make training environment as similar to the natural environment in terms of:
 - tasks or activities
 - demands (cooperation vs. competition)
 - physical features (objects, equipment)
- Structure situations to allow skill training and use to occur
- Include peers in training
- Include individuals who are part of the natural environment
- Use naturally occurring events to foster skill use
- Fade training consequences to approximate naturally occurring reinforcement.

Adults with poor social skills find that their successes or failures in their personal lives or jobs are often more affected by their social skills than by their academic learning. (Richard Lavoie)

Besides practicing social skills in the classroom during a lesson, students need the opportunity to practice these skills in the natural environment.

Considerations:

- Early identification of inappropriate social and communication skills is critical to success in school.
- Realize that learning problems affect students academically as well as socially.
- Students' social problems may in turn affect their attitudes toward school.
- Research has shown that students with poor peer relationships are more likely to develop behavior problems that can lead to school failure and ultimately dropping out.
- Identification of these students prior to their social difficulties and teaching them appropriate skills can prevent problems in the future.

Fast Facts

One of the oldest and most frequently used social skills training programs is the Skillstreaming series, developed by Dr. Arnold Goldstein and colleagues and published through Research Press. To give you an idea about the types of social skills addressed in this program, the skills taught by both the elementary version and the secondary version are listed below. Review them carefully—an application problem follows later in this lesson.

The Skillstreaming Curriculum for Elementary Students: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills (Revised Edition)

Ellen McGinnis & Arnold P. Goldstein. (1997). Champaign, ILL: Research Press.

Group 1 - Classroom Survival Skills

1. Listening
2. Asking for Help
3. Saying Thank You
4. Bringing Materials to Class
5. Following Instructions
6. Completing Assignments
7. Contributing to Discussions
8. Offering Help to an Adult
9. Asking a Question
10. Ignoring Distractions
11. Making Corrections
12. Deciding on Something to Do
13. Setting a Goal

2. Beginning a Conversation
3. Ending a Conversation
4. Joining In
5. Playing a Game
6. Asking a Favor
7. Offering Help to a Classmate
8. Giving a Compliment
9. Accepting a Compliment
10. Suggesting an Activity
11. Sharing
12. Apologizing

Group 2: Friendship-Making Skills

1. Introducing Yourself

Group 3: Skills for Dealing with Feelings

1. Knowing Your Feelings
2. Expressing Your Feelings
3. Recognizing Another's Feelings

4. Showing Understanding of Another's Feelings
5. Expressing Concern for Another
6. Dealing with Your Anger
7. Dealing with Another's Anger
8. Expressing Affection
9. Dealing with Fear
10. Rewarding Yourself

Group 4. Skill Alternatives to Aggression

1. Using Self-Control
2. Asking Permission
3. Responding to Teasing 39. Avoiding Trouble
4. Staying Out of Fights
5. Problem Solving
6. Accepting Consequences
7. Dealing with an Accusation
8. Negotiating

Group 5. Skills for Dealing with Stress

1. Dealing with Boredom
2. Deciding What Caused a Problem

3. Making a Complaint
4. Answering a Complaint
5. Dealing with Losing
6. Being a Good Sport
7. Dealing with Being Left Out
8. Dealing with Embarrassment
9. Reacting to Failure
10. Accepting No
11. Saying No
12. Relaxing
13. Dealing with Group Pressure
14. Dealing with Wanting Something That Isn't Yours
15. Making a Decision
16. Being Honest

The Skillstreaming Curriculum for Adolescents: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills (Revised Edition).

Arnold P. Goldstein & Ellen McGinnis (1997). Champaign, ILL: Research Press.

Group 1: Beginning Social Skills

1. Listening
2. Starting a Conversation
3. Having a Conversation
4. Asking a Question
5. Saying Thank You
6. Introducing Yourself
7. Introducing Other People
8. Giving a Compliment

Group 2: Advanced Social Skills

1. Asking for Help
2. Joining In
3. Giving Instructions
4. Following Instructions
5. Apologizing
6. Convincing Others

Group 3: Skills for Dealing with Feelings

1. Knowing Your Feelings
2. Expressing Your Feelings
3. Understanding the Feelings of Others
4. Dealing with Someone Else's Anger

5. Expressing Affection
6. Dealing with Fear
7. Rewarding Yourself

Group 4: Skill Alternatives to Aggression

1. Asking Permission
2. Sharing Something
3. Helping Others
4. Negotiating
5. Using Self-Control
6. Standing Up for Your Rights
7. Responding to Teasing
8. Avoiding Trouble with Others
9. Keeping Out of Fights

Group 5: Skills for Dealing with Stress

1. Making a Complaint
2. Answering a Complaint
3. Being a Good Sport
4. Dealing with Embarrassment
5. Dealing with Being Left Out
6. Standing Up for a Friend
7. Responding to Persuasion
8. Responding to Failure
9. Dealing with Contradictory Messages

10. Dealing with an Accusation
11. Getting Ready for a Difficult Conversation

12. Dealing with Group Pressure

Group 6: Planning Skills

1. Deciding on Something to Do
2. Deciding What Caused a Problem
3. Setting a Goal
4. Deciding on Your Abilities

5. Gathering Information
6. Arranging Problems by Importance
7. Making a Decision
8. Concentrating on a Task

Application

1. Review the Skillstreaming social skills. What are the primary differences between the elementary and secondary versions? What do you think are the most important skills included in each version? Are there social skills that have been left out of either version, in your opinion?
2. Role-Play the following teaching interaction vignettes:
 - You give directions to a student. He starts right away with a good attitude, but within a few minutes he is out of his seat roaming around the room.
 - You're talking with a student after school. Another student approaches you and interrupts the conversation by asking a question about an assignment.
 - A child tattles to you about other children calling her names. You want the child to solve her own problems without tattling.
 - You ask a student to put away a game and the child whines, "Oh, all right!"

Additional Resources

"Traditional" Social Skills Programs

- *ACCEPTS: A Curriculum for Children's Effective Peer and Teacher Skills* (1983). Published by PRO-ED.
- *Getting Along with Others* (1983). Published by Research Press.
- *Skillstreaming the Elementary Child* (1997). Published by Research Press.
- *Skillstreaming the Adolescent* (1997). Published by Research Press.
- *ACCESS: Adolescent Curriculum for Communication and Effective Social Skills* (1988). Published by Research Press.
- *The PREPARE Curriculum* (1999). Published by Research Press.
- *Social Skills for Daily Living* (1988). Published by American Guidance.
- *ASSET: A Social Skills Program for Adolescents*. Published by Research Press.
- *Learning to Get Along*. (1991). Published by Research Press.

Social Skills Training Resources Listed in Annual Report on School Safety (1998).

U.S. Department of Education/U.S. Department of Justice

- Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers.
- Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT)
- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

- Peace Builders
- Second Step
- Bully Proofing Your School
- First Step to Success
- Healing the Hate: A National Hate Crime Prevention Curriculum
- Flirting or Hurting

Social Skills Training Resources Listed in Making the Grade: A Guide to School Drug Prevention Programs

- Life Skills Training
- Minnesota Smoking Prevention Program
- Project Alert
- Project Northland
- Project TNT
- Reconnecting Youth

Social Skills Training Resources Listed in Youth Violence Prevention: Descriptions and Baseline Data from 13 Evaluation Projects

- Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways
- Students for Peace
- Supporting Adolescents with Guidance and Employment
- The Safe Dates Project
- The Self-Enhancement Program
- SMART Talk
- Resolving Conflict Creatively Program
- Peace Builders