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Teaching Social Skills in the Community to Individuals with Autism

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Teaching Social Skills in the Community to Individuals with Autism

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Presentation Overview

- What are social skills?
- What is typical for social skill development?
- What is autism?
- Why teach social skills?
- How can you teach social skills at school?
- How we taught social skills in the community

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What are social skills?

Social skills

- “Socially-acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others in ways that elicit positive responses and assist the person in avoiding negative responses” (Elliott, Racine, & Busse, 1995)



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Social skills

- Wide range of complexity, heavily linked to language skills, play skills, and preferred items
 - Tracking movements of others
 - Smiling during interactions with others
 - Playing near others (parallel play)
 - Exchanging toys with others
 - Interactively playing
 - Cooperatively playing
 - Incorporating conversation into play

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Social skills

- Requesting preferred items
- Eye contact when communicating
- Imitating peers
- Parallel and cooperative play
- Requesting to peers
- Responding to peers requests
- Sharing
- Taking turns

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What's typical for social skill development?

- 3-4 years old:
 - Cooperates with other children
 - Negotiates solutions to conflicts
- 4-5 years old:
 - Wants to please friends
 - Wants to be like friends
 - More likely to agree to rules
 - Sometimes demanding, sometimes eagerly cooperative



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What's typical for social skill development?

- 6-8 years old
 - Wants to be liked and accepted by friends
- 9-11 years old
 - Forms more complex friendships; especially important to have peers of the same sex
- 12-14 years old
 - Shows concern about body image, looks, clothes
 - More influenced by peer groups; less affection towards parents
- 15-17 years old
 - Shows more interest in opposite sex



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What's typical for social skill development?

- Societal norms play a role
 - Proximity to others during conversation
 - Dialect/slang use in your community



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What is autism?

What is autism?

- Neurological Disorder
 - Onset prior to age 3
 - **Communication and social deficits**
 - Fixed or repetitive behaviors



– "It is difficult to separate communication deficits and social deficits, since these two areas overlap significantly. Communication is often used for social purposes, and communication deficits can dramatically affect social performance."

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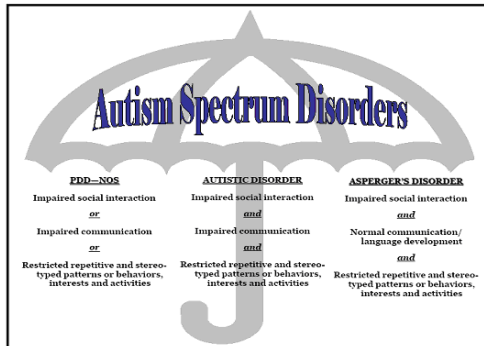
What is autism?



- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction
 - Abnormal social approach and failure of normal back and forth conversation
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
 - Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
- Symptoms must be present in early childhood
- Symptoms must impair everyday functioning

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New DSM-V changes



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What does it really mean to have autism?

- Individuals have impairments in the following areas:
 - social interaction skills
 - communication skills
 - presence of stereotyped behavior
 - interests, and activities
- Children with ASD
 - Seek predictable social interactions
 - Typically lack perspective-taking ability
 - Cannot adapt to social and communicative interactions based on predictability and self-monitoring



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Deficits associated with autism

- Difficulty with turn taking in a conversation
- A preoccupation or very intense interest in a particular subject and only that subject
- Unnatural vocabulary or sounding "lecture style" when speaking
- Literal understanding of language
- Lack of inflection in conversations (known as prosody)
- Difficulty deciphering facial expressions & body language
- Problems reading nonverbal gestures and cues
- Difficulty with interpreting sarcasm
- Being too blunt or brutally honest with others
- Judging proper body distance and appropriate amount of eye contact
- Difficulty in perspective-taking or understanding others
- Difficulty with imitation skills and pretend play
- Limited "affect" (facial expressions)
- Challenges with practicing self-awareness (i.e., clothes being mismatched, poor hygiene, being too loud, etc.)

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Deficits associated with autism

- Executive Function Deficits
 - Neurologically based
 - organization, problem solving deficits, attention, inhibition, self-regulation
- "Theory of Mind" Deficits
 - Metacognition
 - "Knowing about knowing"; self-regulation of learning
- Deficits in Joint Attention
 - Shared enjoyment

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Executive functioning skills

- Higher order processing responsible for regulation and controlling of behavior
- Grounded in the prefrontal cortex of the brain
- Set of mental processes that helps connect past experience with present action
- “Thinking and Doing” skills

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Executive function – “thinking & doing skills”

- **Planning/Prioritizing** – setting goals, prioritizing attention effort
- **Organization** – prioritizing goals, keeping track of materials, etc.
- **Time Management**
- **Working Memory** – mental problem solving
- **Metacognition** – knowing what you know, knowing how you learn, knowing tactics for learning and problem solving, knowing what you learn and what you need to know, etc.
(Dawson and Guare, 2012)
- **Response Inhibition** - think before you do
- **Emotional Control** – manage emotions and reactions to the emotions
- **Sustained/Flexible Attention**
- **Task Initiation**
- **Flexibility/Adaptability**
- **Persistence** follow through to reach a goal; related to sustained attention

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Theory of mind

- The ability to know mental states and knowledge of self and others; Knowing what others are thinking and feeling and how that will effect actions and behavior
- Key brain regions: amygdala and frontal cortex
- Typically develops by age 4-5 years
- Effects empathy, reading non-verbal social cues, problem solving (especially in social situations), understanding others intentions, understanding jokes/sarcasm, pragmatic social exchanges, conversation, play...

(Baron-Cohen, 2001)

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Joint attention

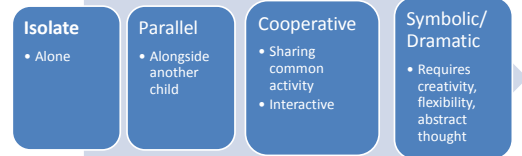
- Joint attention can be described as “shared enjoyment”
 - Deficits or lack of development in functional language
 - Deficits or developmental lags in social play skills



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Developmental progression of play skills

Child development sequence of play



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Deficits with play skills

- Social play may not be pleasurable nor intrinsically motivating for a child with autism (Brown & Murray, 2001)
- It may be difficult for children with autism to engage in play due to interfering behaviors such as repetitive behaviors, impulsiveness, or compulsive tendencies that may be more motivating than play (Peeters, 1997; Veale, 1998)
- Children with autism continue to exist in isolation even though they are within a rich social environment (Goldstein et al., 1992; Gresham, 1984; Pierce & Schreibman, 1997a)

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Why teach social skills?

Why teach social skills?

- Poor social skills correlated with peer rejection (Howlin, 1997; Little, 2001)
- Difficulties persist across the lifespan (Church et al., 2000; Matson et al., 2009)
- Legal implications could also occur



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Why teach social skills?

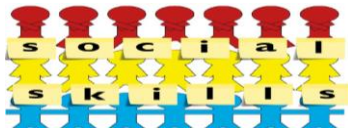
- Possessing good social skills are critical to successful functioning throughout life
 - Improved resiliency in the face of future crises or other stressful life events
 - Strengthens interpersonal relationships
 - Facilitates academic success



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Importance of learning social skills

- Developing meaningful relationships
- Getting and maintaining a job
- Not offending people
- Being able to work near others or with others
- Hygiene requirements
- Personal space and boundaries



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Developing meaningful relationships

- It is essential to establish meaningful social relationships to prevent withdrawal and social isolation
- Often social aloofness is mistaken as a desire to be alone
 - Children with autism do not always have the skills to be around their peers and enjoy those interactions
 - Once children learn and display skills to interact appropriately with their peers can it be determined whether they prefer to be alone or be with others
- It is important to prevent social failure and peer rejection

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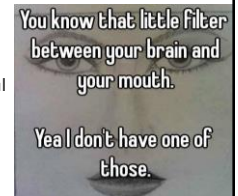
Getting and maintaining a job

- As children become older, academic instruction becomes a central focus and less time is spent working on social skills—recess, specials, free play
 - Individuals may be on grade level or perform higher academically than their typically developing peers
 - Some may go to college in order to learn a trade or gain more knowledge to enter into an occupation
- There are social skills pertinent during a job interview and to maintain a job
 - Presenting oneself as 'put together'
 - Willingness to work as a member of a team
 - Willingness to accept constructive feedback

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Not offending people

- Learning to have a 'filter'
 - Individuals may not be 'think before they speak' or hold their thoughts
 - It can be difficult to take others' perspectives
- Giving and accepting compliments
- Being courteous
 - Using manners
 - Holding door open for an individual walking behind you



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Being able to work near others or with others

- Having the ability to follow instructions when provided
 - Deficits in receptive language can look like noncompliance
- Being able to put on a smile even when you may not be in a good mood
- Being able to work with or near others that you may not personally "get along with"
 - Learning how to keep some thoughts to yourself rather than saying everything you think out loud



Societal norms involving hygiene

- In our society there are expectations of individuals regarding:
 - Showering & applying deodorant regularly
 - Extreme body odor is considered offensive
 - Brushing ones teeth regularly
 - Washing and brushing ones hair
 - Shaving or keeping facial hair well-kempt (if male)
 - Can be considered a violation of dress code in certain jobs
 - Washing clothes or wearing clothing that is clean, without stains, and without rips or tears
- By violating norms related to hygiene, individuals may struggle with developing relationships and potentially could lose their job

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Personal space and boundaries

- Keeping about an arm's length between you and another individual is considered polite
 - Encroaching on others personal space is considered socially unacceptable
- Making some eye contact with others
 - Orienting body towards others when interacting
 - Looking at others but not for an uncomfortable or extended amount of time



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How YOU can teach social skills in the school setting



Social skills in the school setting

- Due to the emergence of standards based instruction typical elementary classroom interactions are now limited to large or small group core academic tasks. In addition, elementary general education teachers seldom address social or play skills within the classroom setting, often the most critically challenging deficit in autism and the most necessary to address.

(Harper, Symon, & Frea, 2007)

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How You can teach social skills!!!!

- Lunch bunch
- Peer buddy
- Reverse inclusion
- Rehearse ahead of time (priming)
- Social Skill of the week
- Catch them being a good friend (provide reinforcement for observed skills)
- Social Stories
- Video Modeling

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Lunch bunch

- Supervised by an instructor
- Group of students gather in a designated space and eat their packed lunch or school lunch
- Lunch can be followed up by a group game



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Peer buddy

- A primary objective of including peers as intervention agents is to increase social participation in naturalistic settings without allowing the children to isolate themselves or rely on teachers for prompting (Strain & Kohler, 1998)
 - The most opportune times are during recess, specials and free play/time
- Recess involves unstructured free play, direct instruction does not occur and instructional aides often take breaks leaving the students with autism alone on the playground without support

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Three different types of peer involvement

- **Proximity Approach:** students with disabilities are placed in typical settings in order to learn by watching and interacting with their neurotypical peers
 - There is no training given to the peers
- **Operant Training Approach:** peers are taught to prompt a response from the student with autism and then to verbally praise the desired behavior
- **Peer-Initiated Approach:** peer tutors are instructed and trained to make social initiations to the target students

(Laushey & Hefflin, 2000)

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Peer involvement approaches

- Research indicates the Operant Training and Peer-Initiated Approaches are typically more effective in teaching specific skills to students with autism (Roeyers, 1996)
- However, the Proximity Approach produces better generalization of skills across peers (Odom & Strain, 1984; Roeyers, 1996)



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Recruiting appropriate peers

- Children with autism viewed negatively by peers when compared to a typically developing child (Campbell, 2006)
 - Explain to peer what to expect
 - Reinforce their participation



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Identify a peer buddy

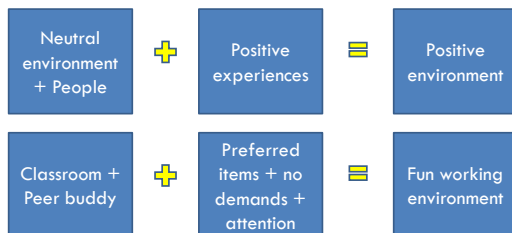
- What to look for in a peer buddy:
 - Ability to model and reinforce appropriate behaviors
 - Willing to follow directions
 - Accepting of a child with disabilities



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Pairing: a strengthening relationship

- A peer in a particular space may be neutral or initially aversive
 - Depends on the child's specific history in that environment!



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Pairing with peers

- Pair yourself with reinforcement first before focusing on pairing peers
- Have peers be the source of providing access to preferred items/activities for your child!
 - Peer offers preferred item
 - Setting up a game
 - Spinning in chair together
- Child-directed interaction, but still very interactive
 - Prompt peer to follow child's lead if needed



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Peer buddies can be helpful throughout the school day...

- Assign a peer buddy during recess
 - Have peer buddy initiate interactions and play with the target child
 - Similar to the 'pairing' procedure discussed earlier, the peer buddy can initially engage in activities the target child is interested in
 - Then the peer buddy can begin introducing and exposing the target child to other activities
- Assign a peer buddy during 'specials'
 - Peer buddy can sit next to the child and deliver prompts as needed in order to get the target child to engage

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Reverse inclusion

- Creating opportunities for neurotypical students to interact with other students in self-contained/resource classrooms
 - Students should go through a process to ensure they meet criteria to be a good model
 - It can be set up for general education students to miss one 'special' (i.e., art, music, PE) a week
 - Give them specific instructions while maintaining a natural environment

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Rehearse ahead of time (priming)

- Priming is a method of practicing or rehearsing a skill **ahead** of time to teach a skill correctly before problems have the chance to develop
- This can be used to practice conversation skills, rules of a game, how to respond when in certain situations, etc.
- Beneficial because it allows for repetition and practice without peers present

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Social skill of the week

- Classroom can select a social skill of the week
 - Can have social skills written on popsicle sticks and a student choose one or it can be a pre-selected skill
- The skill would be taught during a specific time of day to ensure students learn the skill and have an opportunity to model it
 - For example: 'Giving compliments' - If a student is caught giving a compliment, he/she will receive a ticket that can be put into a drawing at the end of the week to earn a preferred activity
 - The activity can be extra time on the computer in the afternoon or first thing in the morning if the student is selected

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Catch them being a good friend (provide reinforcement for observed skills)

- You can set up a system in your classroom for all students (both neurotypical & students with ASDs) to earn something special for demonstrating nice social skills such as:
 - helping someone in need
 - holding the door for others
 - comforting someone upset
 - being patient with others

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Social Stories

- Can be used to teach social skills by writing a specific, concise story (usually 3-4 sentences) by reading the story ahead of time
- Creates rules and boundaries regarding social interactions for situations which can seem very unclear to individuals with autism



Sometimes I don't know the answer. This is OK. When I don't know the answer I say "I don't know."

Video Modeling

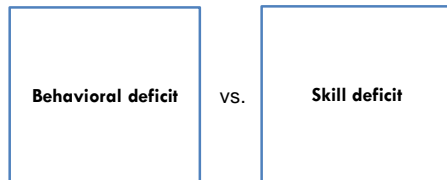
- Video Modeling is a method that occurs by watching a video of someone modeling a targeted behavior or skill and then imitating the behavior/skill watched
- Some students are really motivated by technology so this can be a fun exercise to watch and then practice



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Behavioral Skills Training (BST)

But first you must know the different types of deficits...



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Is it a behavioral deficit?

- **Behavioral Deficit:** Child has the skill but does not demonstrate the skill due to motivational issues

– Example: John knows how to join in a game of kickball, but does not do so because he does not like kickball and prefers to be by himself

– Strategy: Increase/contrive motivation!

- Token systems
- Rewards
- Pairing social interaction with praise and tangible rewards

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Is it a skill deficit?

- **Skill deficit:** Child lacks the requisite skills needed to engage in the behavior

– Example: John wants to join friends on the playground to play kickball but he does not know how to ask friends to join in

– Strategy: Behavioral Skills Training

- More on this next

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Behavioral Skills Training

- A training package used to teach new skills

- How To:

- Identify target behaviors
 - Operational definitions
- Present rationale and instructions
- Model the behavior
- Create opportunities for practice
- Provide feedback



(Miltenberger, 2004; Stewart, Carr, & LeBlanc, 2007)

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Behavioral Skills Training

- Pre-requisites:
 - Child has a history of following rules; verbal rules are generally effective
 - Has a strong motor imitation and vocal imitation repertoire (e.g., can imitate complex behaviors)

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Behavioral Skills Training – Step 1 “WHAT”



- Identify target skill
 - Needs to be a behavior
 - Appropriate greetings
- Operationally define the specific behaviors
 - Approach an individual
 - Orient towards person
 - Make eye contact
 - Is this specific enough? How long should eye contact occur?
 - Smile
 - Say “Hi”

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Behavioral Skills Training – Step 2 “WHY” & “HOW”

- Provide a rationale
 - Saying “Hi” lets people know that you are friendly or that you want to talk or play.
- Give instructions and rules
 - First you walk up to someone you know and stand an arm’s length away
 - Then you look that person in the eye and smile
 - Finally say “Hi” and wait for the person to respond



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Behavioral Skills Training – Step 3

- Model the skill
 - Who serves as a model
 - Yourself
 - Friends
 - Other people
 - Types of models
 - Live model
 - Video model
- Important points
 - Give good and bad examples
 - Discuss the steps demonstrated



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Behavioral Skills Training – Step 4

- Practice, Practice, Practice!!!
 - Role play
 - Controlled setting
 - Who role plays?
 - Yourself
 - Peers
 - Make it natural/realistic
 - Live practice
 - Natural setting
 - Use reinforcement/prompts during teaching

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Behavioral Skills Training – Step 5

- Provide Feedback
 - First, give a general positive statement
 - Praise correct skills
 - Identify incorrect skills
 - Describe how to do the skills correctly
 - Give an opportunity to ask questions
 - Give a final positive or encouraging statement



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Example – Being a Good Sport

- Step 1 - Define the behaviors
 - Make eye contact
 - Smile
 - Make an appropriate comment
 - Voice at normal conversational level
 - Matches the context
 - Does not include negative comments about the other player(s)



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Example – Being a Good Sport

- Rationale
 - You should be a good sport so your friends will want to keep playing with you
- Rules
 - Decide if you won or lost
 - Look at the person you were playing with and smile
 - If you won
 - Say "Good game! Thanks for playing with me."
 - It's OK to cheer for yourself
 - It's NOT OK to brag
 - If you lost
 - Say "Oh well. Thanks for playing with me. Maybe I'll win next time."
 - It's OK to feel upset
 - It's NOT OK to yell, demand another turn, or throw things

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Example – Being a Good Sport

- Model
 - Demonstrate being a good sport and being a bad sport
 - Watch examples in cartoons or movies
 - Describe each rule as it occurs in the model
 - Talk about what is good and what is bad in the model



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Example – Being a Good Sport

- Practice
 - Have the child “pretend” to win or lose
 - Create opportunities for the child to respond to winning and losing
 - Play a game with you
 - Recruit peers to play a game



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Example – Being a Good Sport

- Feedback
 - You did a great job! I can tell you were trying to follow the rules.
 - I like the way you looked at me and told me I played well.
 - Next time try to remember not to brag. You said, “Ha ha ha! I won! I’m the best!” Maybe you can try just saying “Yeah! That was fun!”
 - You’re doing well! Let’s keep practicing.



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How we taught social skills in the community: Using BST, Social Stories, Peer Models, Prompting and Reinforcement



How we addressed some of these deficits in the community

- We collaborated with a community based summer day camp
 - Approximately 150 neurotypical campers
 - Approximately 30 campers with autism
- At our summer camp with neurotypical peers we broke skills down into these 2 categories of social skills:

Increase peer engagement

- Interest in interactions with peers
- Conversation initiation and reciprocation
- Relevant comments

Increase participation

- Activity interest and involvement
- Good sportsmanship
- Comments about activities


Peer Engagement

- **Overview**
- Five sub-goals representing component skills of peer engagement in a hierarchy from beginner to more advanced skills
- **1A (Peer Interest)**
- **1B (Basic Initiation)**
- **1C (Advanced Initiation)**
- **1D (Basic Reciprocation)**
- **1E (Advanced Reciprocation)**
- **1F (Maintaining a Conversation)**

Peer Participation

- **Overview**
- Five sub-goals representing component skills of peer engagement in a hierarchy from beginner to more advanced skills
- **2A (Passive Involvement)**
- **2B (Active Involvement)**
- **2C (Sportsmanship)**
- **2D (Commentary)**
- **2E (Activity Initiation)**

Data collection to show progress


Probe Data Sheet For Peer Engagement

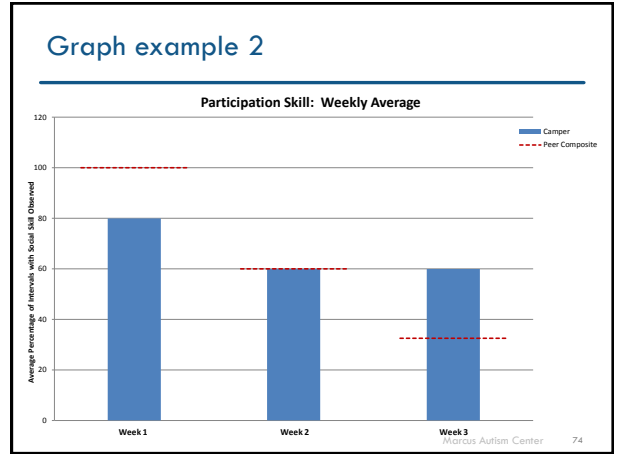
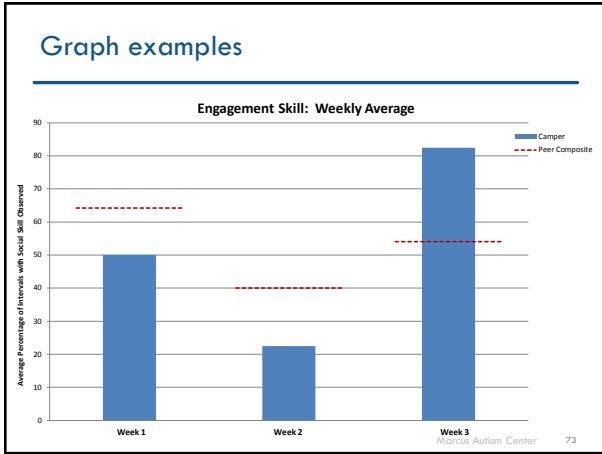
Camper: _____ Observer: _____ Condition: Baseline / Probe / (Circle one)
 Date: _____ Session #: _____ Activity: _____ Primary / Redi (Circle one)
 Assigned Camper: T Control Camper 1: C1 Control Camper 2: C2

Instructions: Place an X for every behavior that occurs for each interval.


	T	C1	T	C2	T	C1	T	C2	T	C1	T	C2	T	C1	T	C2
1A. Any instance in which the camper orients towards a peer (2-5 ft) or voluntarily walks towards a peer (within 3 feet)																
No Opportunity																
1A. Any instance in which the camper orients towards a peer (2-5 ft) or voluntarily walks towards a peer (within 3 feet)																
No Opportunity																

Target Camper	#	Comparison Camper	#
Intervals with Social Bx.		Intervals with Social Bx.	
Intervals w/ No Opportunity:		Intervals w/ No Opportunity:	
Total Intervals Observed:		Total Intervals Observed:	

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Let's recap it all!



- Remember the deficits associated with autism
 - Knowing the deficits and typical development will help guide your approach
- Use unstructured time to focus on social skills including recess and free play/time
- Be creative!

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Questions? Comments?

Thank you for your time!

Feel free to contact us:

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