



Supporting Social Development for Individuals with ASD

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Social skills allow us to interact and communicate with others.

Social skills include the abilities to:

- be near others
- read nonverbal and verbal cues
- participate in back and forth interactions
- send and receive messages
- understand the perspective of others
- cooperate with others
- sustain relationships over time

The diagnostic criteria for ASD include difficulties in social communication. These difficulties include back and forth interaction, nonverbal communication and developing age-appropriate relationships.

Social skills are not just for making friends — our social skills are needed to function well every day and in all settings!

Social skills impact our academic learning — academic teaching is usually done in a social setting and reading comprehension often requires the ability to understand people!

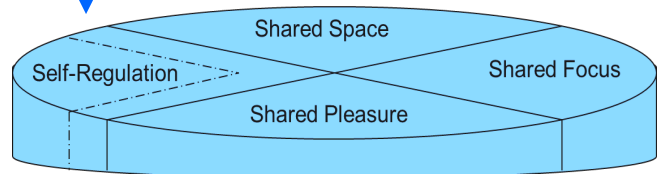
Social skills can make or break an employment opportunity. These are the skills that need to be addressed across a lifetime!

Engagement is the Foundation of all Social Interaction

Four components of engagement

1. Self-Regulation: *(Being in control of body and emotions):*

Calm + Alert = Ready to Learn



2. Sharing the Space:

Being in proximity of another

3. Sharing the Focus:

Both people paying attention to the same thing

4. Sharing the Pleasure:

Enjoying the same moment together

When these four components happen at once we have the “magic of engagement”

You can help engagement happen:

- Make sure the person is regulated
- Shrink the space
- Use motivating objects or topics
- Limit the materials
- Give participants time to process
- Increase the length and frequency of the moments
- Teach others the importance of engagement

Assessing Social Skills

How do I begin?

It can be overwhelming to consider where to begin teaching social skills! The following four steps can make this challenge more manageable:

1. There are several steps to “Being Social.” Some steps build on the previous steps! These steps can include:



Now I know how to choose a priority...

2. Determine:

Which skills are already strong?
Which skills need to be practiced?
Which skills need to be individually taught?

3. Recognize that social skills can be taught by a variety of people in a variety of settings:

Home – friends, parents, siblings, grandparents
Classroom– friends, teachers, aides, tutors, peers
Workplace– peers, friends, supervisors, co-workers, job coaches
Community– teachers, friends, peers, community members

Now I know who and where these can be taught...

4. Individualize

What skills are most essential for use in everyday life?
Where does the person spend time?
What interventions have been supportive in the past?
What motivates the person to do the hard work of interaction?
What types of interaction bring the person joy?

Ahhh...Make it personal and meaningful...

Considerations When Teaching Social Skills

Most people with ASD will not gain specific social skills just by being with other people who have good social skills. People with ASD need to be taught specifically and have many varied opportunities to practice social skills.

When the focus is on teaching **Engagement** consider:

- Finding out what the person likes to do
- Setting up the environment and materials for a short interaction
- Teaching family members to be strong partners of engagement
- Link objects of interest to people. (You might hold an interesting object close to your face and/or make sure that you have control of all the best things)
- Visually structure the space to limit distractions and bring both social partners close enough together to share the focus and pleasure

When you are teaching **Joint Attention and Back and Forth Interaction** consider:

- Practicing in simple games such as passing an exciting object back and forth
- Providing rewards for participation for short periods of time
- Exaggerating your face and body to show how much you want to be together
- Using visual supports to help the person understand that there is a clear beginning and end in the shared experience

When teaching **Conversation Skills and Perspective Taking** consider:

- Using social narratives and video to highlight what is important
- Teaching skills in structured groups (Social Groups) that include guided practice
- Enlisting peers to help teach these important skills
- Using visual supports such as, drawing stick figures with dialogue or thought bubbles to help individuals understand what is being said and thought.

When teaching **Group Cooperation and Friendship** consider:

- Social groups that happen in a variety of settings
- Involving compatible peers in multiple opportunities for practice
- Use of self-management strategies such as exercise plans for self-regulation, motivational charts, self-monitoring graphs, and stress scales
- Use of visual supports such as check lists, time management aides, calendars, and agendas
- Creating videos of positive social interactions

10 Tips for Teaching Social Skills

Things You Can Do!!!

- *Self-regulation is crucial...*

I need to be ready to engage..

- *Teach each skill explicitly...*

What do you want me to learn?

- *Structure the social situation...*

This helps me know what to do.

- *Use visual supports...*

Please SHOW me!

- *Use individual interests...*

Do you know what excites me the most?

- *Provide multiple opportunities for practice...*

I need a lot of chances to get good at this!

- *Capitalize on social opportunities...*

We can work on social anywhere & anytime

- *Get everyone involved...*

I need to try this with lots of people...

- *Break skills down into smaller parts...*

What do I do first?

- *Make it fun...*

Know that this is hard work for me!

Resources:

- National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder: <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/>
- Materials by Michelle Garcia Winner: www.socialthinking.com
- Social stories by Carol Gray: www.thegrayscale.org
- The Hanen Centre: www.hanen.org
- Early Start Denver Model For Young Children with Autism: Sally J Rogers & Geraldine Dawson
- Understanding the Nature of Autism: A Guide to the Autism Spectrum Disorders by Janice E. Janzen

About the Author (s): Kathleen Mo Taylor, OTR/L and Marci Laurel, CCC-SLP have been teaching passionately about engagement and social skills for over 20 years. Mo is an OT with the University of New Mexico, Center for Development and Disability, Autism Programs. Mo's involvement in Camp Rising Sun, the ASD training team, and her private practice "Theraplay" keeps her skills and teachings alive. Marci is an SLP at the University of New Mexico, Center for Development and Disability, Autism Programs. Her dedication to the ASD clinic team, school consultation group, and ASD training team keeps her up to date on evidence based practices and learning from individuals with ASD and their families.

For more information about this resource or to inquire about the Autism Programs call
(505) 272-1852 or 1-800-270-1861

<https://cdd.health.unm.edu/autismportal>

