Social Skills for Higher Functioning Children

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Importance
• Core deficits in Language/Communication
• Core deficit in Social Skills
• Social behavior in Neurotypical Children starts early
  – By 4 months
  (http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/)
  • Smiles spontaneously, especially at people
  • Likes to play with people and might cry when playing stops
  • Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning

Components of Social Behavior
• Nonverbal (eye contact, proximity, etc)
• Verbal (manding, intraverbals, etc)

Examples of Social Behavior
• Pretend play
• Walking down the hall with other students
• Board games
• Asking for information about assignments
• Sports/Competition
• Talking on the Phone
• Conversations

Verbal Operants
• Mand- Requesting what you want
• Tact- Labeling environment
• Intraverbal- Answering questions
• Echoic- Repeating what you hear
• Imitation- Copying someone’s movements
• Listener- Following instructions
Social Skill Milestones as listed in the VB-MAPP (Sundberg)

• 0-18 months:
  – Makes eye contact as a mand 5 times
  – Indicates they want to be held or physically played with 2 times
  – Spontaneously makes eye contact with other children 5 times
  – Spontaneously engages in parallel play near other children for 2 minutes
  – Spontaneously follows peers or imitates their motor behavior 2 times

• 18-30 months:
  – Initiates a physical interaction with a peer 2 times
  – Spontaneously mands to peers 5 times
  – Engages in sustained social play with peers for 3 minutes without adult prompts or reinforcement
  – Spontaneously responds to the mands from peers 5 times
  – Spontaneously mands to peers to participate in games, social play, etc. 2 times

• 30-48 months:
  – Spontaneously cooperates with a peer to accomplish a specific outcome 5 times
  – Spontaneously mands to peers with a WH questions 5 times
  – Intraverbally responds to 5 different questions or statements from peers
  – Engages in pretend social play activities with peers for 5 minutes without adult prompts
  – Engages in 4 verbal exchanges on 1 topic with peers for 5 topics

Barriers to Social Skills

• Social behavior is complex
• Rules are vague
• Expectations change with settings (i.e. what is o.k. at a restaurant is not o.k. at church)
• Verbal behavior is defective
• Social interactions are not reinforcing

Common Mistakes in teaching Social Skills

• Failure to pair peers
• Failure to condition attention as reinforcer
• Forcing eye contact
• Forcing turn taking/sharing
• Failure to teach component skills (teach appropriate play w/playdoh before joining playdoh group/teach ‘battleship’ skills before involving in game w/peer)
• Failure to fade adult prompts

Importance of Motivation in Social Skills

• Motivation alters value of things and frequency of previously reinforced behaviors
• Reinforcement- follows behavior that will increase behavior in the future
• If no motivation is established, pairing with reinforcement may need to occur
• ‘Pairing’ consists of delivering positive reinforcement during or immediately following a behavior/activity

• The neutral or aversive behavior/activity acquires reinforcing properties because it has been ‘paired’ with reinforcement

• The process of pairing may be used to condition peers, environments, activities, etc. as reinforcers

Some ‘pairing’ tips

• Do Not chase a child to offer a reinforcer
• Select reinforcers you can control
• Select reinforcers you can deliver in small amounts
• Sanitize environment so not competing with other reinforcement
• Fade your proximity/approach and differentially reinforce when child approaches

Peer to Peer Pairing

• Have willing peer ‘buddy’
  – Deliver items to child that are not reinforcing to peer buddy
  – Use promise reinforcer for peer buddy

• Peer buddy walks over and delivers reinforcement contingent on approach interaction

• Pair tangible reinforcement with social

Mands

• Do not occur unless there is motivation

• Essential for social interaction

• Different types of mands:
  – For items/activities present or out of sight
  – For attention, yes/no, removal of item
  – For information

Peer to Peer Manding

• Once peers are paired with reinforcement
  – Child is now approaching peer buddy or other children

• Prompt child to mand from peer

• Require child to respond to the mands from other peers

• Teach manding in natural and everyday environment when possible

• Capture and contrive many opportunities per day

• Fade prompts as soon as possible

• Data collection

• Generalize to new peers, settings, etc as soon as possible
Manding for Attention

- 2 staff required
  - Staff #1: prompter
  - Staff #2: attention provider
- Contrive situation where attention is valuable
- Staff #1 prompts child to mand for staff #2’s attention
- Staff #2 immediately delivers attention concurrently with tangible reinforcement (token, subtle food reinforcer, coin, etc.)
- Staff #1 gradually fades prompting and physical presence
- Staff #2 gradually fades tangible reinforcement
- Move to Peer Mands for Attention next

Selecting Goals

- Select from assessment/curriculum
  - Skillstreaming (McGinnis and Goldstein)
  - Walker Social Skills
  - Social Skills Solutions (McKinnon and Krempa)
  - Superheroes Social Skills (Jensen)
  - VB-MAPP (Sundberg)
- Ask child what they want to work on
- Ask family/team members what needs to be a priority

SKILLSTREAMING

- Curriculum over 20 years old
- Before 1970’s, approaches assumed desired behaviors were within the individual and just needed to be realized
- Then skills training emerged and was viewed in educational terms

What Facilitates a Positive Outcome

- Trainer selection
  - At ease working with clients
  - Respond effectively to problem behavior
  - Delivers the skills training agenda well
- Screening individuals for participation
  - Assessments found most useful:
    - Direct observation
    - Skill checklists found in Skillstreaming manual
  - Important to note if discrepancy between parent/teacher and individual
    - Teaching skills individual feels are deficient has been a successful motivational tactic
### Grouping Individuals

- **2 ways:**
  - Shared skill deficiency
  - Shared characteristics (in same class, same peer group, live in same neighborhood)
    - This will help with generalization
    - Students’ age, Verbal ability,

### Training CANNOT Happen in Isolation

- ‘Transfer Coach’ – **parents**, siblings, peers, employers, support staff, etc.
- Prompting- in real-life situations
- Encouraging- when individual is reluctant to use skill
- Reassuring- reduce the threat to fail
- Rewarding- increase likelihood of continued use of skill

### Materials

- **Necessary**
  - Chalkboard or easel pad
  - Skill cards listing steps
  - Skill posters
- **Enhance effectiveness**
  - Student manual
  - Program forms booklet

### Who Will Implement?

- Team Effort
  - Collaborate on scheduling
  - Dictate responsibility
  - Treatment Integrity on implementation
- Individualize!

### Training Procedures

- **Core Training Procedures:**
  - Modeling
  - Role-playing
  - Performance feedback
  - Generalization training
9 Steps

- Define the skill
- Model the skill
- Establish trainee skill need
- Select role-player
- Set up the role play
- Conduct the role play
- Provide performance feedback
- Assign skill homework
- Select next role-player

1. Define the Skill

- Be Brief (few minutes)
- Trainer-led discussion
- Review abstract meaning
- Review concrete examples
- Goal is that group begins to understand what skill is about to be taught

2. Model the Skill

- Learning by imitation
  - Modeling enhancers:
    - Model seems to be highly skilled
    - Model is of high status
    - Model controls rewards
    - Model is same sex, age, and social status
    - Model is friendly, helpful, and important
    - Model is rewarded for the behaviors

- Effective modeling:
  - Behaviors are clear and detailed
  - Behaviors are in order from least to most difficult
  - Enough repetition to ‘overlearn’
  - Behaviors modeled with as little irrelevant detail as possible
  - Behaviors are performed by several models

3. Effective observer characteristics

  - Observer is told to imitate
  - Observer is similar to model
  - Observer likes model
  - Observer is rewarded for performing the behaviors

3 Stages of Modeling

- 1. Attention
  - Cannot model unless attend to modeling display

- 2. Retention
  - ‘remember behaviors’

- 3. Reproduction
  - Does individual produce behaviors
Modeling Guidelines

1. Use at least 2 examples for demonstration of a skill
2. Select situations that are relevant
3. Main actor should closely resemble group
4. Displays should depict positive outcomes
5. Displays should depict all steps in correct sequence
6. Displays should depict one skill at a time

3. Establish Trainee Skill Need

- Have trainee describe where, when and whom they would find skill useful
- *Rule of Skillstreaming- EVERY trainee must role-play EVERY skill, NO Exception!

4. Select Role-Player

- Go with volunteers first
- Provide support, encouragement, and reassurance

5. Set up the Role-Play

- Main actor describes real-life situation and picks co-actor
- Pick co-actor that resembles real-life person
- Make as realistic as possible

6. Conduct the Role-Play

- Remind all participants of roles and responsibilities
  - Main actor follows behavioral steps
  - Co-actor stays in role of other person
  - Group observes and gives feedback
- Each session begins with 2 modeling vignettes, even if skill is not new

7. Provide Performance Feedback

- Brief feedback period follows each role-play
- Guidelines to be most effective:
  - Provide reinforcement only after role-plays that follow the behavioral steps
  - Provide reinforcement at earliest opportunity
  - Always reinforce co-actor for being helpful
8. Assign and Set Up Skill ‘Homework’ Practice

- Following successful role-plays, trainees are to try in their own real-life settings
  - Discuss person, day, and place to try with
- Imperative that situations are set up in real life circumstances, don’t just hope it happens
- Start with easy behaviors and once mastered work to target behaviors (shaping)

Training

- Order of skills in manual do not imply a sequence
  - Some skills start where others leave off, so some sequences are necessary
- Behavior steps are ‘thinking’ steps at times, when modeling or role-playing these it is crucial to enact these out loud.

Trainee Motivation and Resistance

- Problems that can occur
  - Showing up for session
  - Participating
  - Using skills on a continuing basis
- Motivators
  - ‘Outside’ reinforcers (delivered by staff that may not be directly related to skill)
  - Intrinsic reinforcers (occur naturally as part of interaction)

- Vary reinforcements offered
- Provide enough role-play activity for all to have sufficient opportunity for reinforcement
- Provide differential reinforcement
- Provide NO reinforcement when role-play deviates significantly from behavioral steps
- Provide reinforcement for improvements over previous performances

- First part of session devoted to presenting and discussing homework
- When most of group demonstrates skill proficiency and success with homework, move onto another skill.

- Sometimes, single skill responses are inadequate
- Skill combos or skill sequences are necessary
  - After several months trainers need to shift from single new skills to selecting sequencing of skills
  - Example sequences:
    - Dealing w/someone else’s anger then Dealing with Fear then Standing up for your rights
    - Dealing w/accusation then Apologizing
3 Ways to Address Problem Behavior

1. Diagnosis of Behavior Suggests Cure
   - Ask why the problem behavior is occurring
     - Too difficult?
     - Afraid of feedback?

2. Behavior Modification
   - Use of Reinforcement

3. Capturing Teachable Moments

Communicating Behavior Rules

- Define and communicate rules in clear specific terms
- Tell students what to do, rather than what not to do
- Rules should be communicated in such a way that they can be memorized
- Rule adherence likely to be greater if trainees participate in creating them
- Develop at start of group

Presenting Positive Reinforcement

- Contingency- make connection explicit
- Immediacy- more immediate more effective
- Consistency- works gradually so need to continue
- Frequency- high frequency first then thin
- Amount- satiation and deprivation
- Variety- maintain potency

Removing Positive Reinforcement

- Extinction- withdraw or removal of reinforcement
- Timeout (Be Careful! This may actually be reinforcing!)
- Response Cost- removing tokens

Enhancing Generalization

- Transfer
  - Provision of general principles (good grasp of concept)
  - Overlearning (repeating successful trials)
  - Stimulus variability (training sufficient exemplars)
  - Identical elements (common stimuli)
  - Mediated generalization (self-recording, self-instruction)

Maintenance

- Thin reinforcement
- Delay reinforcement
- Fade prompts
- Provide booster sessions
- Prepare for real-life nonreinforcement
- Program for reinforcement in the natural environment
- Use natural reinforcers
Summary

• Steps to learning are:
  – Show, try, feedback, and practice

• Use Social Skills Curriculum to assess and program for Social Skills Groups/Lessons

• Important skill our kids need to learn and cannot be overlooked!

References


