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

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- Considering this, social skills training should also begin early

- We need to incorporate peers

  - If not, skills that are taught may only be displayed with adults

  - Children may prefer adult interaction to peer interaction

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

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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

- # of trainers – recommend 2 work together for ease of group management

- # of trainees – ideal for 6-8 individuals in group

- Frequency of sessions – 2 per week

- Length of sessions – about 45 minutes

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

- 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

- – 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

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)

- • 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.

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.

- • 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

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)

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!

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Thank You!

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