

SOCIAL SKILLS INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

A guideline to treatment for children in the early school years (Prep, Year 1 -2)

What are Social Skills?

- Social Skills are specific behaviours that result in a positive social interaction and encompass both verbal and non-verbal behaviors necessary for effective interpersonal communication.

Why teach Social Skills?

- Children with autism need specific instruction in social skills. It is unlikely that simply placing a child in a classroom and hoping for them to learn by social osmosis will be enough to improve their social skills (Odom & Brown, 1993).



What is the best way to learn Social Skills at school?

- Social skills teaching should be conducted in the child's natural social setting using materials typically used by the child (Brown, McEvoy, & Bishop, 1991; Frea, Craig-Unkefer, Odom, & Johnson, 1999; Rule, Losardo, Dinnebeil, Kaiser, & Rowland, 1998). For school aged children, their social setting is the classroom.
- Pull out programs where the child is taken to a separate room at school for social skills therapy have proven to be ineffective (Scott Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007).
- Social skills learning should be based on the needs of the individual (Hart & Whalon, 2008).

What does the research say about Social Skills groups?

- Research on the effectiveness of social skills groups is fairly limited (Reichow & Volkmar, 2010).
- They are more effective for secondary students than for younger students (S. Bellini, Gardner, & Markoff, 2014)

What are the most effective social skills interventions?

- Peer mediated interventions when peers are taught how to facilitate interactions
- Adult mediated behavioural approaches including instruction, modelling, prompting, rewarding
- Video modeling
- Visual scripts and fading
- Visual supports
- Self-monitoring
- Pivotal response training (a naturalistic, behavioural approach)
- Social Stories (less effective for social skills)
- Technology based interventions

“Match the intervention strategy to the type of skills deficit exhibited by the child

*Bellini, Benner & Hopf
(2007 pp 161*

Embedding social skills instruction into the curriculum

- Embedding social skills learning into content areas such as literacy and science has the advantage of being time efficient and may have the potential to improve the generalisation of these skills (Schoenfeld, Rutherford, Gable, & Rock, 2008).

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- We evaluate the child's social skills by observing the child interacting with peers in the classroom and through the use of standardised assessments completed by teachers and parents.
- Then we provide an individualised intervention plan for each child based on their strengths and challenges.
- We embed social skills learning into the classroom program.
- By teaching the teachers and making instruction on social skills a part of the curriculum, we are able to achieve the dosage required to effect change.
- We use peer mediated interventions with video modeling, visual scripts and supports as well as technology based interventions, limited adult mediated approaches and lots of structured practice with peers.

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To arrange a social skills assessment please contact us

Bronwyn Sutton Speech Pathology

Email: bsutton@suttonspeech.com.au

Phone: 3876 9529

Web: www.suttonspeech.com.au

