

Social Skills Training Groups

Agenda

- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- What Are Social Skills and How Do I Teach Them?
- Social Skills Groups *Logistics*
- Social Skills Groups *Curriculum*
 - Children's – Child-focused Interactional
 - Adolescent – Community-based Experiential
 - Adult- Psychoeducational/Naturalistic



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Developmental disorder characterized by:
 1. deficits in social communication and interaction
 2. presence of restricted/repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests or activities.
- Onset occurs during early childhood and is lifelong
- Symptoms limit and impair everyday functioning

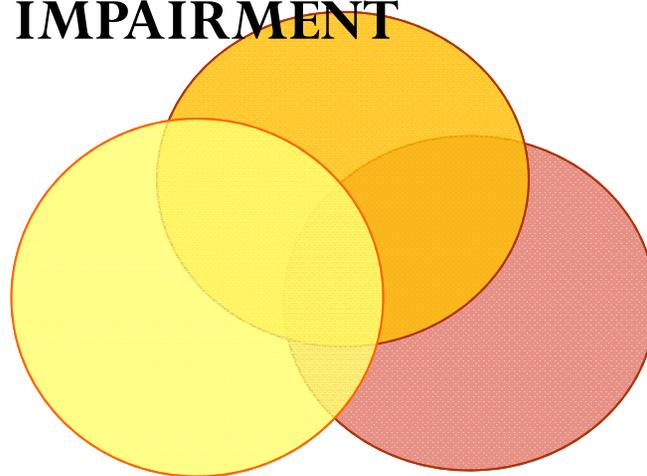


Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Includes the current DSM-IV diagnostic categories of:
 - Autistic Disorder
 - Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified
 - Asperger's Disorder
- In the DSM-V will utilize spectrum approach to enhance conceptualization and treatment planning

AUTISM TRIAD AUTISM DYAD

**COMMUNICATION
IMPAIRMENT**



**REPETITIVE AND
RESTRICTED
INTERESTS**

**SOCIAL
IMPAIRMENT**

Social/Communication Impairments



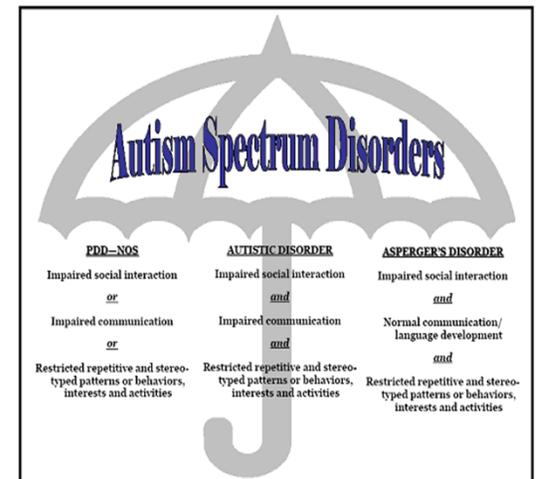
- Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
- Deficits in non-verbal communication used for social interaction
- Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships appropriate to developmental level (beyond those with caregivers)

Restricted/Repetitive Interests

- Stereotyped or repetitive speech, motor movements, or use of objects
- Excessive adherence to routines and resistance to change
- Restricted or obsessive interests
- Unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment

Autism as a Spectrum Disorder

- Factors that contribute to the spectrum nature of Autism:
 - Intellectual ability
 - Expressive Language ability
 - Level of support being received
 - Age



ASD Continuum

Level 1: Requires *Support*

- Mild Deficits
- Minimal Social Supports

Level 2: Requires *Substantial Support*

- Moderate Deficits
- Receiving Social Supports

Level 3: Requires *Very Substantial Support*

- Severe Deficits
- Receiving Social Supports

What do we mean by “social skills”?



- Social Skills are:
 - Rules for interaction
 - Behaviors that predict important social outcomes like love and happiness
 - A vehicle for cognitive and language skills

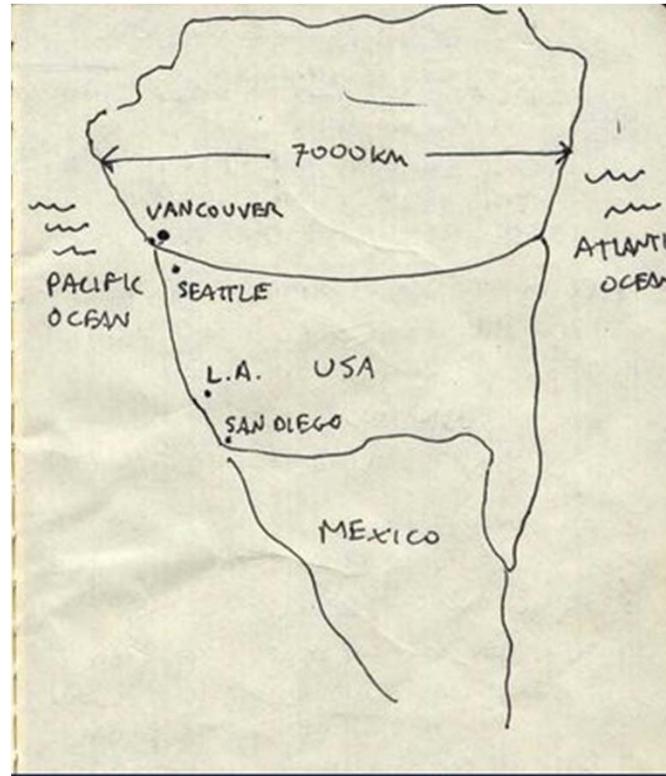
Doesn't Everyone Know This Stuff?

- Most people tend to “pick up” social skills in the same way they pick up language skills: naturally and easily. These people generally have an implicit social “map.”



However...

- Individuals with autism usually don't have an implicit social “map,” and are forced to guess at what the “map” looks like.



So we need to *make the implicit explicit*.

- If social expectations are clearly explained, modeled, practiced, and reinforced, the social “map” of a child with autism is likely to improve.



Research

- So how can we best teach social skills?
 - Group Setting– Research suggests that children in a psychoeducational skills-based *interactional* group show improvements in the specific areas targeted by that group.
 - In fact, social skills groups for school-aged children with ASD have demonstrated enough evidence to be considered “an established Empirically Based Treatment” (EBT) (Barry et al, 2003)



Why This Curriculum?

- Our curriculum includes several key factors found in the research to improve outcomes:
 - Parental involvement (Lim, Kattapuram & Lian, 2007)
 - Didactic format (Barry et al., 2003)
 - CBT techniques like homework (Gresham, 1981)



7-Step Model for teaching Social Skills

1. **Set Goal-** Choose and clearly define a manageable social skills goal.
2. **Teach-** Explain what behavior looks like and why behavior is important.
3. **Model-** Demonstrate the desired social behavior.
4. **Practice-** Role-play the desired behavior.
5. **Prompt-** Prompt for a natural display of desired behavior.
6. **Reinforce-** Reinforce group members after the demonstrate desired behavior.
7. **Generalize-** Encourage practice of the behavior outside the group

Step 1: Set Goal: Choose and clearly define a *manageable goal*.

- What makes a goal manageable?
 - Goal behavior is appropriate for the individual's age and current level of functioning
 - It should be a *small* step up from individual's current level of functioning
 - Have some way of measuring the behavior that will allow you to chart progress.



Step 2: Teach: Explain what behavior looks like and why behavior is important.

- Combine leader explanation with participation for group members
 - Can anyone tell me....?
- Break down the component parts of the targeted social skills
 - Eg. Conversation
 - What makes a conversation?
 - How do you start one?
 - How do you know when it's finished?
- Discuss why social skill is important
 - Give examples to illustrate



Step 3: Model the desired behavior.

Modeling can take many forms. For example, if you want to teach the skills of giving compliments, you could...

- Act out a role-play with fellow group leader where you compliment their new outfit
- Point it out when peers compliment each other
- Provide anecdotes that illustrate the desired skill



Step 4: Practice the behavior.

- Practicing the behavior gives the individual a chance to
 - Try the behavior in a pressure-free situation
 - Figure out exactly what the desired behavior looks like (and what will lead to reinforcement)



Step 5: Prompt for the behavior.

- Start with fairly intrusive, explicit prompts and work your way to less intrusive prompts.
- For example, giving the individual specific instructions to “find one thing to compliment your partner on.”
- Then as the individual’s greeting behavior improved, you might prompt with, “What should you do?” or even a gesture.

Step 6: Reinforce!



- Whenever they perform the goal behavior, reinforce it!
- Reinforcement generally leads to much stronger response patterns than punishment.
- Reinforcers should be fairly small, immediate, and most importantly, of value to the individual.
- Make sure the individual knows what she/he is being reinforced *for*. (i.e. “I’m loving your eye contact!”)

Ideas for Reinforcers

For folks who respond to social (non-tangible) reinforcement:

- Verbal praise (“I like the way you waited for your turn!” “You did a great job of introducing yourself just then!”)
- Hug
- High-five



Ideas for Reinforcers

For others who respond to more tangible rewards:

- Tokens that can be “spent” on rewards later (like TV time, video game time, desired toys, etc.)
- Small piece of candy or a favorite food (e.g., skittles, animal crackers)
- Stickers
- Small toys
- Trading cards
- Monetary incentives
- Activities



Step 7: Generalize: Encourage Practice Outside of Group.

- For children:
 - Provide parents with targeted feedback concerning their child's progress
 - Provide parents with written instruction on how they can practice the skills learned at home with their child.
 - E.g., *“Practice commenting: have your child look around the room and comment on what he/she sees. Reinforce comments liberally.”*
 - Assign manageable and appropriate homework assignments to the child and have the parent supervise and sign off on their completion.
 - Reinforce targeted behaviors!!

Step 7: Generalize: Encourage Practice Outside of Group. (Cont'd)

- For Adolescents and Adults:
 - Provide “achievement” assignments that generalize to both school and home settings
 - Use Monetary Incentives
 - Get parents onboard



Questions?

Next up: Logistics associated with starting a social skills group

Group Logistics

- Start-Up
 - How to recruit participants?
 - Where should group be held?
- Group Specifics
 - How many participants?
 - How much should group cost?
 - Eligibility criteria
- Who should run group?
 - Teachers
 - Therapists
- Confidentiality



Recruiting Participants

- Mailing list – build it up and make connections
 - Previous Clients
 - Community Mental Health Centers/Support Groups/Schools
 - Connections to private practitioners in the area



Location of Group

- Child and Adult Interactional groups
 - Classrooms/therapy rooms of adequate size
 - Chairs arranged in a circle
 - For Child group- provide waiting area for parents
- Experiential groups
 - Group is held in various places throughout the community
 - Identifiable meeting location for each group
 - Parents drive teen to location of activity
 - Build relationships with organizations/sites for activities
 - Liability Release for off site activities



How Many Participants

- Ideal group size ranges from 5-9 for all groups
- Want a fairly low Leader/Helper to Participant ratio for all groups
 - E.g., 2 : 1 or 3:1

Forms



- All Groups:
 - Referral form
 - Allergies to food
 - Parent goals for group
 - Important Information for Group Leaders
 - Parent-Child Demographic Form
 - Parent/Guardian Consent Form
- Adolescent/Experiential Groups
 - Parent Permission/Liability Form
 - Consent for Video/Audio recording
 - Parent and self-report BASC's

Cost of Group

- Set a specific price
- Keep in mind your expenses:
 - Snacks
 - Juice
 - Games
 - Activities
 - Printing
 - Reinforcements: (Prizes/Monetary Incentives)
 - Therapists
- Scholarships



Eligibility Criteria

- Adequate amount of verbal ability
- Social skills deficits
- Appropriate age/developmental level
 - Age cutoffs
 - Children's 5-12
 - Adolescent 12-18
 - Adult 18 - ?
- Gender
- Diagnostic Considerations
- Functional/Adaptive skill level

Getting Ready for Group

- Pick dates, times and location for your group
 - How many sessions/topics?
 - How many days a week?
 - How long?
- Mail an interest letter out with set deadline to respond
 - Includes dates/times and price
- For Child and Adult Groups: Contact those who respond by the deadline to set up an initial screen
 - 20 minutes long
 - Assess for eligibility criteria
 - What do they want to get out of group?

Post-Group

- Post-group letter
 - Summarize group
 - Discuss positive progress observed in group member
 - Areas for growth
- Feedback Questionnaire
 - What went well/not so well?
 - Did you notice improvement in any targeted social skills?
 - Suggestions for program enhancement



feedback

Questions?

Next up: Curriculum for the Children's Social Skills Group

Social Skills in Children

- Research tells us that social skills are important for functioning in a variety of settings (Campbell, Hansen and Nangle, 2010)
- When children do not have adequate social skills, it puts them at risk for:
 - isolation from peers and family
 - emotional and behavioral problems
 - academic underachievement (Klin et al., 2000)



Social Skills Groups for Children

- Children involved in interactional social skills groups demonstrate improvements in:
 - Greetings and conversation skills (Barry et al., 2003)
 - Eye contact (Castorina and Negri, 2011)
 - Identification of feelings (Castorina and Negri, 2011)



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- 1 hr. sessions
 - 10 minutes of unstructured play
 - 5 minutes of review of the previous lesson
 - 35 minutes addressing the main topic
 - Group discussion
 - Activity
 - Role plays
 - 10 minutes for snack/unstructured play

Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

What to do When:

- During Unstructured Play Time
 - Provide feedback
 - Model appropriate behavior
- During Group Discussion
 - Manage behaviors
- During Snack
 - Teach parents the lesson and provide them with a handout for how to work with the kids at home

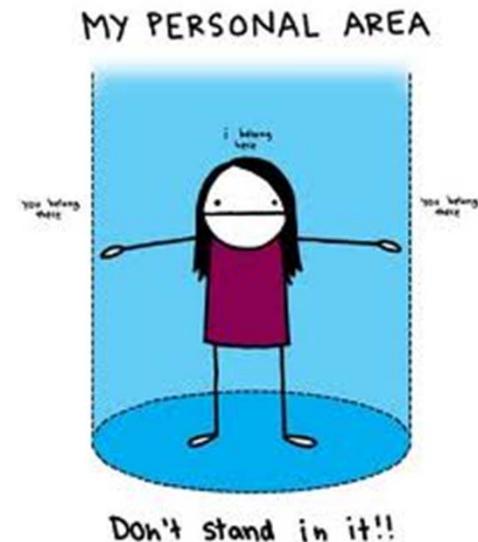


Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- 8 different topics covered
 - Group Rules/Introductions
 - Conversations
 - Friendship Skills and Blockers
 - Identifying/Expressing Emotions
 - Coping with Anger and Anxiety
 - Peer Conflict
 - Sportsmanship
 - Manners
 - * Parent suggested topics

Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Group Rules
 - Set clear boundaries and expectations
- Introductions
 - Formal vs. Informal
 - What should your face look like?
 - Eye contact
 - Smile
 - Personal space/appropriate touch
 - Reciprocity



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Conversations
 - “Give and take”
 - Appropriate topics
 - Keeping the conversation going
 - Facial expressions
 - How do you know when someone is bored?
 - Practice!



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Friendship
 - What are friends?
 - Why is it important to have friends?
 - Friendship Skills and Blockers
 - Friendship skills are things that help us make friends while friendship blockers are things that stop us from making friends
 - Brainstorm ideas and role play scenarios



Children's Social Skills Curriculum

- Identifying/Expressing Emotions
 - What are some feelings you might have had today?
 - Why is it important for us to have feelings?
 - Why might it be important for us to know how others are feeling?
 - How can we know what others are feeling?
 - Be a detective and search for 4 clues:
 - Body language
 - Facial Expressions
 - Words
 - Tone of Voice

Children's Social Skills Curriculum

- Coping with Anger and Anxiety
 - Anger
 - What is anger? What does it feel like in your body? What situations make you angry? What do you do?
 - Anxiety
 - What is anxiety? What does it feel like in your body? What situations make you anxious? What do you do?
 - Coping Steps
 - Stop
 - Take a deep breath
 - Think
 - Make a plan



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Peer Conflict
 - What does conflict mean?
 - Is it okay to have conflict with friends?
 - What are bullies? What types of things do bullies do?
 - How should we handle peer conflict?
 - Compromise
 - Tell an adult
 - Role-plays



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Sportsmanship
 - Importance of being a good sport
 - What are some examples of being a good sport?
 - What are some examples of being a poor sport?
 - How to join a game that has already started
- Flexibility
 - What should we do when we win?
 - What should we do when we lose?



Children's Social Skills Group Curriculum

- Pizza Party/Manners
 - What manners do we need while eating?
 - What kinds of things should we talk about during the meal?
 - How should we behave during the meal?
 - How do we say goodbye?



Adolescent Social Skills Group

- Due to increased complexity of social communication that accompanies aging- social deficits become more prominent in adolescence (Tantam, 2003; Klin & Volkmar, 2003).
- Adolescents with ASD report higher levels of loneliness and lower peer relationship quality than same aged peers (Capps et al., 1996; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000)
- Bullying dramatically increases in adolescence (Tse et al., 2007)



Research

- Adolescents involved in experiential training groups demonstrate:
 - Reduction in school-related “problem behaviors” (Graham & Elliot, 1990)
 - Enhanced knowledge of social skills
 - Increased frequency of get-togethers with friends
 - Improved global social skill- as rated by blind researchers (Barry et al., 2003)
 - Increased perception of peer social support (Tse et al., 2007)

Overview

- 8-week session
 - 2 hours per session
 - Meet at prearranged “sites” for activities
- Activities
 - Pottery, mini-golf, bowling, nature walk, downtown scavenger hunt, shopping at the mall, game night, corn maze/pumpkin picking, public art project, dinner at restaurant
 - Include directions and maps of locations in parent packet



Child Interactional vs. “Experiential” groups

- Experiential vs. non-experiential
 - “Natural setting”
 - Provides adolescents with realistic yet structured behavioral rehearsal opportunity for newly learned skills
 - Parents used as “agents of intervention”
 - Repetition and rehearsal further promoted by assigning parent supervised homework assignments (Barry et. al, 2003)
 - Critical for leaders to elicit community/organizational support

Achievements



- Assignments with measureable outcomes help generalize skills learned in group to home and school settings
- Consist of 2 levels of achievement:
 - Basic achievement –rewarded with \$2 reinforcer
 - “Above and Beyond”- rewarded with \$5 reinforcer
- Build on skills that have been previously taught and encourage group interaction
 - Examples:
 - Watch TV with parent and point out emotions
 - Compliment someone at school
 - Call up group member and ask them questions about themselves
 - Call up group member and have an unscripted conversation
 - Invite group members over your house to socialize
- Parents sign off on completion of the assignment

Structure

- Review last week's lesson/discuss achievement
 - Reinforcement- monetary incentives awarded
- Didactic component
 - Prompted discussion
 - Leaders model behavior
- Practice-
 - Role-Plays
- Activity
 - Review rules applicable to venue/activity
 - Watch for demonstrations of goal behavior and reinforce
- Snack/Discussion
- "Achievement" assignment
- Parental Feedback Session-Parent Handout
 - Generalize behavior outside group- discuss ways to practice/prompt/reinforce at home

First Group Meeting

- “Trial run”
 - Introductions (leaders/parents)
 - Separate parents from group members
 - One leader stays with parents- paperwork/answers ?’s



First Group Meeting cont'd

- Other leader runs icebreaker activities with group members
 - Normalize anxiety
 - Brief Explanation of Group
 - Discuss activities
 - How group is different then “real life?”
 - Discuss need for privacy
 - Group Guidelines
 - Everybody contributes rule
 - Compile list
 - Everybody signs
 - Icebreakers- “everybody who”
 - Find common interests
 - Individual goals



Content

- Emphasize the following domains
 - Conversation (e.g., Corn Maze)
 - Friendship- making and maintaining
 - Conflict Management
 - Flexibility (e.g., Pottery/Public Art Project)
 - Sportsmanship- (e.g., Mini Golf/Bowling/Park Games)
 - Politeness- (e.g., Mall)



Additional Adolescent Relevant Topics

- Assertiveness
- Bullying
- Electronic Communication
- Self-Presentation/ Non-verbal communication
- Dating



Assertiveness

- Discussion:
 - What does it mean to be assertive?
 - Why should we care?
 - Times when it would be important to be assertive?
 - Give some examples of times when you've been assertive-
 - What was the result?
 - What should we do if assertiveness doesn't work?
- Role-plays



Self Presentation

- Discussion:
 - Importance of presenting yourself well
 - What can you do to present yourself well to others?
 - What are some good self-presentation skills you have noticed in other group members?
 - What are some things you feel you need to work on in your self-presentation? (Leaders give examples first)
- Activity- picture presentation, “tell me what you can tell about this person by looking at him/her”
- “Silent Movie” Role Plays

Future Directions/Saying Goodbye

- Appreciation Sheets
 - What kinds of things did people write on your sheet?
 - How did it feel to get that feedback?
- Future Directions
 - Goal Discussion
 - What have you learned from group?
 - Progress on goals
 - How will you continue working on the goal?
- Saying Goodbye
 - What will it be like to say goodbye tonight?
 - Telephone/Email Address Exchange



Politeness/ Gift Giving (Mall)

- Discussion:
 - Why do we care about being polite?
 - Identify components of being polite-
 - Please, Thank you, offering help, making compliments
 - Considerate of others feelings
 - Considerate of others personal space
 - Apologizing when we make mistakes
 - What are “white lies?”
 - Is it possible to tell the truth without hurting someone’s feelings?
- Practice: Role-plays
- Mall Activity
 - Take turns recording each person’s favorite things (themes/ candy)
 - Assign pairs
 - Assist members in selecting thoughtful gift
 - Members exchange gifts and practice polite responses



Teamwork

- Discussion:
 - What are advantages of working as part of a group
 - Can anyone think of a task they've had that was too difficult to accomplish alone?
 - Have you ever been part of a team that worked well together?
 - What is needed for team to work effectively?
 - Spend time together
 - Goal agreement
 - Trust
 - Encouragement
 - Mutual problem solving
 - Clear communication
 - Compromise
 - Respect
- Team building games



Conversation

- Discussion:
 - How do you start a conversation?
 - Keep it going?
 - How do you know when it's over?
 - How do you join a conversation?
 - Silence- what does it mean?
 - Ending conversations
- Practice: Conversation joining game
- Corn Maze Activity

Maintaining Friendships

- Discussion:
 - Friendships- What's the point? How do you know if someone's your friend
 - Maintain Friendships- What kinds of behaviors help maintain friendships?
 - Friendship Blockers
 - "Social Glue"- What kinds of behaviors help people make a lot of friends?
 - Communication strategies- conversation, invitation (in-person, phone, email, text)
- Practice- Phone call/Text messaging role plays

Social Skills in Adulthood

- Adults with AS and HFA experience:
 - Employment difficulties (Barhill, 2007)
 - Higher rates of depression and anxiety (Howlin et al. 1999)
 - Lack of community involvement
 - Lack of close and meaningful friendships (Baxter, 1997)
 - Increased victimization (Shtayermman, 2007)

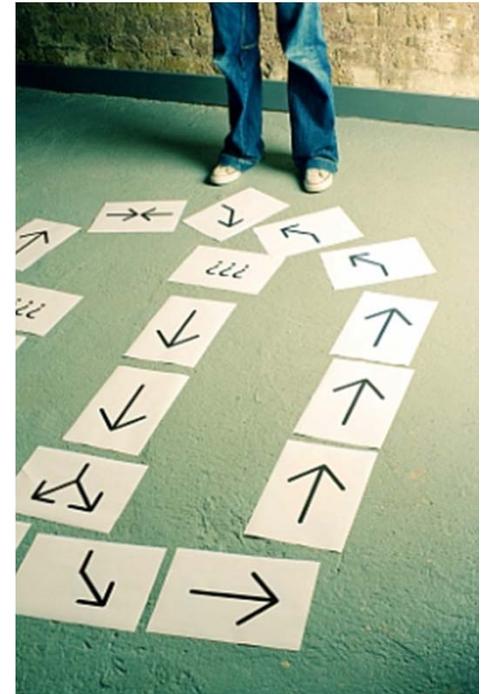
Adult Social Skills Groups

- Research has shown that social skills groups are generally effective in improving skills of individuals with ASD/HFA
 - Extant research conducted with mostly children
 - More research needed on adult social skills groups (Reichow & Volkmar, 2010)



Objectives

- Create a safe environment for honest feedback
- Increase confidence and self-efficacy
- Insight into one's own social skills deficits
- More capable of navigating social situations
- Gain support for challenges related to ASD



Structure



- **Didactic:** Instruction on strategies and techniques
- **Practice:** Opportunity to put skills into use and receive feedback about their skills
- **Process:** Sharing reactions and impact of group member's behavior
- **Support:** Providing emotional support from leaders and members

Adult Social Skills Curriculum

- Conversation
- Nonverbal communication
- Group interaction
- Managing overwhelming emotions
- Professional interaction
- Developing and maintaining friendships
- Relationships and dating
- Joking and sarcasm

Introduction

- Name Learning and Goal Setting
 - Members and leaders say one thing about selves for each M&M chosen
- Rules
 - Attendance, feedback, mutual respect, confidentiality, participation
- Sharing of long-term and short-term goals
- Normalizing and psychoeducation about anxiety
- Get to know each other activity
 - Split into pairs and have group members introduce their partner to the group



Conversation



- Getting to Know New People
 - How do you talk to someone you don't already know?
 - Safe topics, gray topics, and taboo topics
 - Practice getting to know new people using questions in pairs
 - Leaders provide feedback and process the experience
- Starting Conversations with People You Know
- Active Listening
 - Show a good listening position, reflect back what you've heard, empathize, avoid offering solutions, validate their feelings
 - Role play demonstrating reflection and empathy in a situation that is not highly emotional

Nonverbal Behavior

- Welcoming vs. Unwelcoming Cues
 - Ask group members to provide examples of each category of nonverbal behavior and demonstrate welcoming/unwelcoming behaviors.
- Interest vs. Boredom
 - How to show interest/attentiveness
- Repair Strategies (Used when either person is bored)
 - Change the subject
 - Ask them a question about themselves
 - Follow your curiosity
 - Role-play situations in which group members might not have understood what another person said and vice versa

Joking and Sarcasm

- Formal joking vs. sarcasm- how do you know the difference?
- How do you know when someone is telling a joke?
- When is it appropriate/not appropriate to joke with others?
- Teasing as Joking-How do you know?
- Have members generate their own questions (i.e., How was work today?) and respond with sarcasm



Dating and Relationships

- What is a date? (How is a date different than hanging out?)
- Asking Someone Out (How do you know when you should ask someone out?)
- Dos and Don'ts on a Date
 - E.g., Don't talk only about yourself, Do ask the person questions about themselves
- Dealing with feelings of rejection
- Online Dating and profile creation
 - What is “safe” to put on a profile?
 - What is in the “gray”?

Pizza Party

- Typically occurs around the 6th group session, after group members have learned some social skills and are in the position to practice them in a simulated 'party' environment.
- Other adults (ideally individuals aware of the social deficits associated with ASD) are recruited to participate in the pizza party.
- Group members set social skills goals for themselves before the party begins (i.e., I would like to introduce myself to someone new) and challenge themselves to try out new behaviors at the party.
- Group leaders process the experience and provide constructive feedback on group members' social skills.