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continued

Evidence-Based Strategies for Teaching Children with Autism Critical Skills

Tara Warwick, MS, OTR/L

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continued

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OTR/L

Today's Therapy Solutions
www.todaystherapysolutions.com

Blue Sparrow
www.bluesparrow.co



continued

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Learning Outcomes

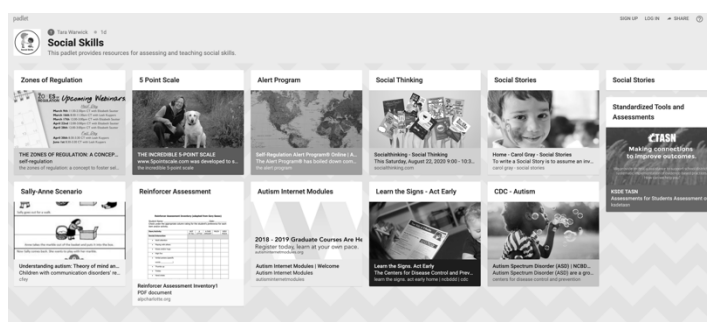
1. Identify at least three critical skills to teach children with autism.
2. Describe the process for breaking down and teaching a new skill to a child with autism.
3. List at least three strategies for teaching social skills to children with autism.

2

Agenda

Characteristics of Children with Autism
Critical Skills to Teach Functional Communication Adaptive Skills Social Skills
Strategies for Teaching
Case Study
Summary, Q&A

Padlet



- All resources available here:
- <https://padlet.com/tara58/y70q8chmwq85m7cl>

Autism Updates

- 1 in 54 children have a diagnosis of autism
 - 4:1 boys to girls
- More children are being evaluated by three years old
 - 84% of 4-year old children had received a first evaluation by the time they were three
 - 1/3 to 1/2 notice a problem before first birthday
 - 80-90% before 24 months

Q1

What We Need to Know

- Signs by age of three - lifelong
- Combination of genes, biology, and environment
Everyday we learn more and more.
- Comprehensive eval can diagnosis well before age of three.
- Parents can learn new strategies and implement within their routines.

Q2

As Providers, We Need to Know

- What is autism?
- How did this happen?
- When did this happen?
- Why did this happen?
- What can we do about it?
- Where can we go for help?

What Families Want Us to Remember

- Give DIRECTION: Know your stuff. We need information, resources, and ideas.
- Give SUPPORT: Think about the big picture. Connect with other families who have children like theirs.
- Give HOPE: Help them feel in control again. We know the road ahead will be filled with good times and bad. Leaving you is hard. Make sure we feel confident in our abilities to navigate that journey.

continued

Possible “Red Flags”

- Not respond to name by 12 months
- Not pointing
- Lack of pretend play
- Avoiding eye contact
- Delayed speech
- Repeated words/phrases
- Upset by minor changes
- Obsessive interest
- Flap hands, rock body, spin
- Unusual reactions to sensory experiences

(CDC, 2020)

Q3

continued

Social Skills

- Poor eye contact
- Prefers to play alone
- Does not share interest with others
- Only interact to achieve a desired goal
- Flat or inappropriate facial expressions
- Difficulty with personal boundaries
- Avoids or resists physical contact
- Not comforted by others during distress
- Trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings

(CDC, 2020)

continued

Communication

- Delayed or atypical language development
- Repeats words/phrases (echolalia)
- Reverses pronouns (you instead of I)
- Gives unrelated answers to questions
- Does not point or gesture
- Uses few gestures
- Flat, robot—like or sing song way
- Does not pretend in play
- Does not understand jokes, sarcasm, or teasing

(CDC, 2020)

Q4

Unusual Interests and Behaviors

- Lines up toys or objects
- Plays with toys same way
- Likes parts of objects
- Gets upset by minor changes
- Has obsessive interests
- Flaps hands, rocks body, or spins self
- Is very organized
- Circumscribed interests
- Rigid adherence to routines and rituals

www.cdc.gov

continued

Other Symptoms

- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Short attention span
- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Unusual sleeping and eating habits
- Unusual mood or emotional reactions
- Lack of fear or more fear than expected
- Unusual reactions to sensory experiences

(CDC, 2020)

Q5

continued

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

- [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

continued

Strengths

- Attention to detail
- Creativity
- Deep focus
- Tenacity and resilience
- Observation skills
- Accepting of differences
- Absorb and retain facts
- Integrity
- Visual skills
- Expertise
- Methodical approach
- Novel approaches

(Bennie, 2019)

Q6

12 Guiding Principles

1. The earliest possible start to intervention is essential.
2. Services must be individualized for children and families
3. Family involvement and participation is critical
4. Families have a right to evidence-based services

(OCALI, 2020)

12 Guiding Principles, Cont'd.

5. Intervention is based on a developmental curriculum designed to address the specialized needs of the child with autism.
 - Strengths and weaknesses
 - Engagement, imitation, initiation, communication, playing reciprocal interactions, spontaneous interactions, making choices, following routines

(OCALI, 2020)

12 Guiding Principles, Cont'd.

6. Intervention is planned and systematic
7. Regular and deliberate exposure to typically developing peers.
8. Challenging behavior addressed through positive behavioral supports.
9. Intervention should focus on developing communication skills.
10. The development of social relationships is integral to successful outcomes.
11. Transitions should be well planned.

(OCALI, 2020)

12 Guiding Principles, Cont'd.

12. Getting to quality outcomes is not just about hours of direct services.
 - Intensity
 - Fidelity of intervention delivery
 - Social validity of goals
 - Comprehensiveness of intervention
 - Data based decision making
- (OCALI, 2020)

Where to start?

1. Motivation
 - a) Motivation assessment
 - b) Giving up a reward
2. Functional communication
 - a) Pointing
 - b) Imitation
 - c) Manding
3. Adaptive skills
 - a) Sitting
 - b) Waiting
 - c) Play/Leisure

continued

1. Motivation (i.e. Reinforcement)

- Difference between positive reinforcement and bribery is all in the timing.
 - Positive reinforcement = continues a desired behavior
 - Bribery = stops a challenging behavior
- It is critical to find what motivates the child and use to teach skills.

Q7

continued

Finding Motivators

- Ask the family
- Observe the child's play
- Reinforcer assessment
- Reinforcer checklist
- Experiment with new reinforcers

Q8

continued

continued

Reinforcer assessment

1. List items in the item assessed box
2. Select the first two items on the list, place them in front of the, observe which one they reach for.
3. Circle the item number the student reaches for and allow them to play with the toy for a minute.
4. Say “my turn” and remove the item
5. Place the 1st and 3rd item and repeat
6. Continue until all items as assessed
7. Total the number of circled items for each number – highest is most desired reward.

www.schools.nyc.gov

continued

Poll

- What is the most unique motivator that you have seen?

continued

continued

Key points

- Better more often, small amounts of time
- 50% rule
- Vary it, the more variety the better
- Save the better reinforcers for harder or new tasks
- Teach how to transition away

continued

Giving up preferred item

Teaching how to give up item:

- Give the student a countdown “3...2...1...my turn”
- Prompt the student to put the item in your hand or in a finished box (do not take it from them)
- Reinforce them with a small edible item when they give up the item
- If you see that they have behaviors when they have to give it up, sometimes it is better to give the small edible to them prior to saying “1..2..3..my turn”. The edible items can serve as a distraction.

continued

2. Functional Communication

- Children with ASD often have difficulty with functional communication
- Functional Communication is the ability to get your wants and needs met easily
 - ✓ Can the child point?
 - ✓ Can the child sign?
 - ✓ Can the child verbally communicate?
 - ✓ Can the child use pictures?

Functional Communication

- Pointing
- Imitation
- Gross motor imitation
- Object imitation
- Fine motor imitation
- Oral imitation
 - Verbal Imitation
- Manding
 - single words only!!
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

continued

Pointing

- Hold the desired item in front of the child.
- As the child reaches for the item, shape their fingers into a point while saying “I want ____”
- Give the item to the child for a short amount of time
- Repeat
- Gradually fade the amount of physical cues you are giving to the child.
- Gradually move the item further away and give the child more than one item to choose from.

continued

Imitation

- Motor (hands up, clapping, touch head, etc.)
- Object (block in cup, bang wand, etc.)
- Verbal (certain sounds, movements with mouth)
- Fine motor (finger movements, writing)

continued

continued

Teaching imitation

- Simple instructions “Do this” or “copy me”
- Help them get it right through prompts
- Make sure you have their attention
- Give them immediate access
- Avoid doing the same one repeated, instead vary from a set of 3-5 different imitation activities

Q9

continued

Manding (request, asking for something)

- Teach approach behavior
- Deliver wanted activities and items freely at first
- Model the response you want to teach (say it as you deliver!)
- Pause and see if the child asks (time delay)
- If necessary prompt the response
- Fade prompts

www.autism.outreach.psu.edu

continued

continued

3. Adaptive skills

- Sitting
- Waiting
- Play/leisure

continued

Teaching “Sitting”

- Sitting is important
- Start young, but developmentally appropriate
- Planned and systematic
- Chair and table appropriate size (90,90, 90)
- Consider adult position to child

continued

continued

Teaching Sitting

- Gather all preferred items, materials and foods
- Bring the child to the table
- Say “sit down” and prompt them to sit
- Give them access to one or two of the preferred items
- Rotate through preferred materials
- Give them edible reinforcers as they sit and access materials
- If child stands up, take materials off of table and say “sit down”

continued

Teaching “waiting”

- Limit use of “no” and “stop”
- Use word “wait”
- Important for safety!

continued

continued

How to teach waiting

- Have a preferred item that the child likes
- Entice them and play with the item
- As the child reaches for the item say “wait”
- Immediately prompt the child’s hands into their lap while placing the item on the table
- Initially you may need to lightly hold their hands
- After 3 seconds say “nice waiting” and give them the item

continued

Teaching play

- Repetitive behaviors = indication of poor play skills
- Learn through rote practice
- Critical for social and emotional development

continued

continued

How to teach play

- Use child's reinforcers
- Break down into small tasks through task analysis
- Start with items that have similar qualities to current reinforcers
- Systematically teach

continued

Task Analysis

Steps	8/1/2020	8/2/2020	8/3/2020
Open playdough container	3	3	3
Take out playdough	2	2	2
Roll into three balls	3	2	1
Place one ball into toy and push	3	2	0
Total	11	9	6

Full Physical (FP)=3
 Partial Physical (PP)=2
 Verbal (V) = 1
 Visual (VS)=1
 Independent = 0

continued

continued

Case Study

- You are working with a 3-year-old girl with autism. When she wants something, she will usually just cry until the family guesses what she wants. She can say a few words, but mostly communicates through her behavior. Anytime they have friends over, she gets upset because the other kids play with her toys. She really likes dolls, she will just hold them, will not do any type of imaginative play with them. She really likes to look through books and watch Frozen video. The family would like to take her out to eat and be able to have friends over.

continued

Where to start?

- Motivation?
 - Teaching how to give up the preferred items.
- Functional communication
 - Pointing to what she wants, making a choice
 - Choice board to show what she wants?
 - Imitation (gross motor, fine motor, object imitation with toys)
- Can she sit and play at the table?
- Play – teaching using task list for play with dolls

continued

Strategies for Teaching Social Skills

Polls

- What challenges have you seen in the children you work with regarding social skill?
- How likely are you as an OT to work on social skills?

continued

Teaching Social Skills

- Why are social skills so important?
- Assessing social skills
- Teaching social skills
 - Types of interventions
 - Sample goals
 - Social skills groups
- Case Study

continued

Poll

- Can you think of one situation in which you do not need social skills?

continued

Importance of Social Skills

- Do you use social skills when:
 - Purchase gas from gas station
 - Eat at a restaurant
 - Go to the bathroom in a public place
 - Read a book
 - Exercise

DSM V – Social Skills

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, as manifested by the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive, see text):
 - Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
 - Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction
 - Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships

(Autism Speaks, 2020)

continued

Nonverbal Communication

- Majority of communication
- Difficulty understanding and interpreting non-verbal language
 - Gestures, body positioning, facial expression

continued

Social Initiation

- Two categories
 - Those who rarely initiate (fear, anxiety)
 - Those who initiate frequently, but inappropriately

continued

Social Reciprocity

- Social reciprocity refers to the give-and-take of social interactions.
- Conversations become monologue versus dialogue
- Conversations often derail back to their special interest
- Might fail to respond to social initiations

(OCALI, 2020)

Social Cognition

- Ability to process social information
- Understanding thoughts, intentions, motives, and behaviors of others and ourselves
- Three main processes: knowledge, perspective taking, and self-awareness

continued

- Sally and Anne scenario

continued

Research – Social Skills Interventions

- Strong evidence to support group-based social skills training
 - Strongly consider in natural environment for generalization and transfer
 - Meet for at least 60 minutes 8 hours
 - Moderate evidence – computer-based interventions (virtual reality, video modeling)
 - Mixed findings - Peer-mediated and social stories

(AOTA, 2015)

continued

Step 1. Assessment

- Standardized tools and checklists
- <https://ksdetasn.org/atbs/assessments-for-social-competencies>
- Observations
 - Naturalistic
 - Structured

Observation

- Naturalistic
 - Playground
 - Community
 - Other
- Structured
 - Small group (peers)
 - Structured activity

continued

Skilled Observation

- How do they initiate an interaction?
- How are they reading cues of another person?
- How is their conversation with others?
- Are they reading non-verbal cues?
- Personal space?
- Are they reading intentions of others?
- How do they repair social mistakes?
- How do they handle rejection/losing?

continued

Step 2. Writing Goals

- Be realistic
- Be specific to the deficit and need

Examples:

- When approached by a peer to play, Sally will respond verbally with a minimum response rate of 70%.
- Johnny will have a conversation with a peer based on the interest of the peer with at least three back and forth turns.
- During a 15 minute play session, Sara will join in a structured play activity with peers a minimum of two times.

continued

Step 3. Social Skills Intervention

- Social Stories, Carol Gray
- Social Scripts
- Social Lessons
- Video Modeling
- Emotional regulation
- Motivation

Poll

- What type of social skills intervention have you used the most frequently? Multiple choice
- Social Stories, Carol Gray
- Social Scripts
- Social Lessons
- Video Modeling
- Emotional regulation
- Motivation

continued

Social Stories TM

- “A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience.”
- www.carolgraysocialstories.com

Q10

continued

Tips for Practice

- Identify a situation that is difficult
- Ex: responding to cues in environment
- Description other point of view
- Defining new routines
- Rules and expectations
- Upcoming event

continued

continued

Writing a Social Story

- From student's perspective
- Language to answer who, what, when, where, and why of the situation and/or target behavior
- 2 descriptive sentences for 1 directive
- Let student help
- Share with the student
- Assess effectiveness

85

continued

Example

There are many kinds of teachers in school.
 (Descriptive) It may be hard to get used to new teachers because I don't know them very well.
 (Descriptive) I will have a new teacher next year.
 (Descriptive) Her name is Mrs. Jones. (Descriptive) She will visit me on Tuesdays until the end of the year for a short time before lunch. (Descriptive) When I am with Mrs. Jones, I will try to be a good listener. (Directive) It may be fun to meet with Mrs. Jones because we might play games, listen to music, or just talk.
 (Descriptive)
 (Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, n.d.)

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continued

Social Scripts

- Prompting procedure for teaching students how to respond in various situations
- Use for engaging in play, initiation interactions, maintaining interactions
- Make sure you have a plan for how to fade the prompt

continued

Tips for Practice - SIMPLE

- S – Select
- I – Identify
- M – Make
- P – Perspective
- L – Look
- E – Evaluate

(STAR Autism Support, 2020)

Social Script Example

- At school, I follow a schedule. My teacher plans the schedule.
- Sometimes my schedule changes. Some of these changes are expected, like a field trip. Some are unexpected, like a fire drill.
- When an unexpected change happens, my teacher will tell me what to do. It is important that I stay quiet so I can hear my teacher give directions. When I follow directions, all students will be safe and ready to learn.
- Unexpected things can happen, my teacher will help me.
- When these happen, I will stay calm and be quiet.

(STAR Autism Support, 2020)²

Social Thinking

- “what we do when we interact with people: we think about them. And how we think about people affects how we behave, which in turn affects how others respond to us, which in turn affects our own emotions.”
- Focuses on teaching
- How their own social minds work
- How their behaviors affect the way others perceive and respond to them
- How this affects their own emotions, responses to and relationship with others across different social contexts.

www.socialthinking.com

continued

Social Thinking

- Teaches “why” behind social interactions not just a script on how to respond
- Expected vs. unexpected behavior
- Recognizing that others have different perspectives
- Understanding how to read cues of other people and change own behavior/responses

continued

- Superflex
- Thinking about You: Thinking About Me
- www.socialthinking.com

continued

Video Modeling

- “an intervention technique often used for social skills training which involves participants watching a video of someone modeling a desired behavior and then imitating the behavior of the person in the video.
- Can be video of another person or edited version of themselves without the prompts

www.modelmekids.com

Tips for practice

- Make sure you video the correct and/or unprompted response
- Individual needs to be able to attend to a video
- Make it available for individuals to watch several times
- Examples: initiating social interactions, engaging in play, performing various self-help skills

continued

Emotional Regulation

- How does your engine run
<https://www.alertprogram.com/>
- 5 point scale
<https://www.5pointscale.com/>
- Zones of Regulation
<https://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>

continued

Motivation

- Is the individual motivated to perform the skill?
- Do we need to target skills with positive reinforcement?
- Behavior contract

continued

Social Groups

- Most important to match students (sex, age, need)
- Have a plan, with flexibility (do not be afraid to veer off as the group does)
- Perform assessment ahead of time
- Communicate with families and teachers on target skills
- Most important skills to start with: understanding thoughts of others, expected/unexpected behaviors
- Have an end (60 minutes -8 week sessions)

Case Study

- Ian is a 6-year-old boy with High Functioning Autism who was referred to occupational therapy services to address social skills in the school setting. He was having difficulty with peers on the playground and during free play time. He would often try, fail, and then end up playing on his own. His family had difficulty taking him to birthday parties or to friends home due to the social skills deficits.

continued

The Plan

- Completed Social Skills Profile by Scott Bellini
- Areas he often had difficulty:
 - Joining in activities with peers
 - Interacting with peers during unstructured activities
 - Talking about or acknowledging the interests of others
 - Recognizing the nonverbal cues of others

continued

Case Study, cont'd

- Goals:
 - When in an unstructured play situation, Ian will join in to play with peers with no more than two cues from an adult.
 - When approached by a peer, Ian will ask the peer one question along with a follow-up response about the interest of the peer 3 of 5 opportunities.

continued

Case Study, cont'd

- Intervention:
 - Video modeling of joining in on play
 - Social scripts on how to join in to play
 - Social lessons about how to think about another person's perspectives for conversation skills.

Summary

- Critical skills = less challenging behavior, more peer interaction, less family stress.
- Be systematic when teaching
- Motivators = critical
- Teach the family!
- Social skills are a part of our everyday world.
- Social skills can be taught!
 - Assessment
 - Writing goals
 - Intervention

continued

Poll

- What is the one thing that you remember most from the training?
- What is one question you still have for the presenter?

B3

continued

Questions?

- tara@bluesparrow.co
- www.bluesparrow.co

B4

continued

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