

# NAVIGATING SOCIAL NORMS



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# What are Good Social Skills?

**According to The National Association of School Psychologists:**

“Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. The extent to which children and adolescents possess good social skills can influence their academic performance, behavior, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety.”

*2002, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD, 20814, (301) 657-0270, fax (301) 657-0275, TTY (301) 657-4155.*

*[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills\\_fs.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills_fs.aspx)*

# The Impact of Poor Social Skills

**Studies show that students with poor social skills:**

- ▶ Evoke negative responses from others that lead to high levels of peer rejection.
- ▶ Have increased depression, aggression, and anxiety.
- ▶ Demonstrate poor academic performance as an indirect consequence.
- ▶ Show higher rate of unemployment and/or job difficulties.
- ▶ Show a higher incidence of involvement in the criminal justice system as adults.

*(2002, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD, 20814)*

[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills\\_fs.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills_fs.aspx)

# Why do some people struggle more with social skills?

▶ **Developmental and/or Biological Differences such as:**

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Executive Functioning (ADHD)
- Learning Disabilities
- Processing Disorders
- Anxiety and Mood Disorders
- Intellectual Disabilities and Gifted Intelligence

**Present differences in thinking, perception, attention, flexibility, etc.**

# Environmental Differences

**Experiences can also effect how we behave and socialize**

- ▶ People who are living in a different/new culture
- ▶ Lack of social and emotional supports
- ▶ Lack of basic human needs (healthy food, sleep, socialization etc.)
- ▶ Experiences of abuse, neglect, trauma, rejection

# Current Obstacles in Helping Individuals Improve Social Skills

- ▶ Stigma of mental health and disabilities
- ▶ Peer rejection, bullying, being misunderstood
- ▶ Lack of quality interventions and resources
- ▶ Gap between what current research is saying vs. what is actually being done

# Stigma of Mental Health

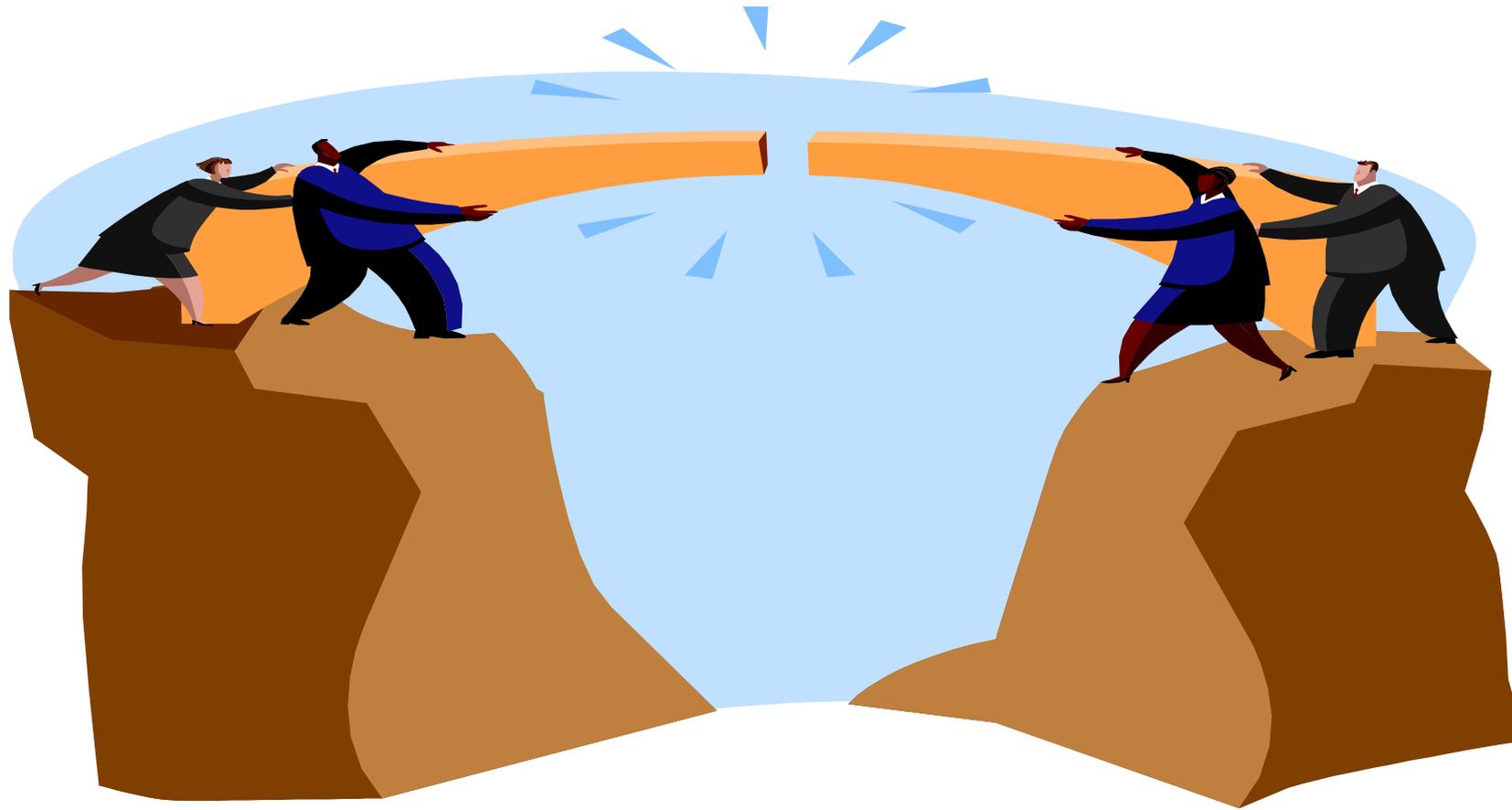
VIDEO Clip of Howie Mandel (CNN with Erin Burnett January 31, 2014)



# Non-Apparent Differences

- ▶ Kids that have non-apparent differences such as: high functioning autism, ADHD, anxiety and mood disorders, etc. are often at a higher risk for teasing, bullying or rejection due to the fact that it is often assumed that they are more capable than they are, their differences are not known, behavior is misinterpreted.
- ▶ Some kids with non-apparent differences (especially higher intelligent) are masters at masking their deficits.
- ▶ Individuals who struggle with social skills tend to “shut down” or “over-act”  
(Shut down- avoid social situations, quiet, little eye contact/ Over-act- struggle to fit in so they often try too hard, talk too much, lack filters, make inappropriate comments, unaware they are turning people off)

# The Gap between Current Research and Interventions



# Findings from Current Studies

## Based on current studies listed below:

- ▶ IQ is a weak predictor of Adaptive behavior in High Functioning Autism
- ▶ The gap between IQ and Adaptive abilities increases with age
- ▶ Adults with high functioning autism vs other disabilities are more underemployed, underpaid, social excluded, and more dependent on parents.
- ▶ Improvement slows at high school exit for HFASD
- ▶ Deficits in Executive Functioning is clearly a factor in adaptive impairments in ASD

Duncan, A. W., & Bishop, S. L. (2013). Understanding the gap between cognitive abilities and daily living skills in adolescents with autism spectrum disorders with average intelligence. *Autism*. Advance online publication. doi: [10.1177/1362361313510068](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361313510068).

Increasing Adaptive Behavior Skills Deficits From Childhood to Adolescence in Autism Spectrum Disorder: Role of Executive Functioning, Pugliese, C.E., Anthony, L., Strang, J.F. et al. *J Autism Dev Disord* (2015) 45: 1579. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2309-1>

# Based on new data, what are we doing wrong?

- ▶ Ignoring adaptive deficits because of high IQ
- ▶ Cutting services to soon and not creating more transition services for young adults (ASD 2/3's age socially and emotionally) pulling services in high school and college when they are at their most vulnerable age (social, emotional, responsibilities organizational issues are much harder)
- ▶ Expecting individuals with ASD to self advocate sooner than they are able to.  
(Just because they know what to do, or even say they will do it, doesn't mean they can do it)
- ▶ Not providing services and interventions that match current research for how to best teach, coach, and generalize social skills.

# Social Skills Programs

▶ There is evidence that some social skills training programs are showing positive results, however, according the review of 55 outcome studies by *Bellini, Peters, Brenner, and Hopf*, they concluded that social skills training efforts were minimally effective because of 4 identified areas.

1. **Targeted goals not matching the child's needs**
2. **Lack of generalization of skills into natural settings**
3. **Too short of a duration of treatment**
4. **Lack of motivators for skill performance**

*(Baker, J., Social Skills Training for Children on the Autism Spectrum/Current Research and Integration)*

*Bellini.S., Peters, J., Brenner, L., & Hopf, A. (2007) A meta-analysis of school-based social skill interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders Remedial and Special Education, 28(3):153-162*

# “Social Skills Training Project”

## Jed Baker, Ph.D.

- ▶ Jed Baker, Clinical Psychologist and Author, developed a plan that includes these crucial components of social skills training based on current research.
- ▶ This example action plan was based off of information and workshops and several of his books.

(See Social Skills Training Action Plan Form)

# Social Skills Training Action Plan

## ► Key Components to developing a good social skills training plan

1. A Good Assessment
2. Modifications
3. Prioritizing Social Skills
4. Motivation
5. Skill Acquisition/Teaching
6. Generalization
7. Professional Education & Peer Sensitivity
8. Evaluating Outcome

# A Good Assessment

- ▶ Skill or performance? (They know what to do, but they don't do it)
- ▶ Receptive Language Ability?
- ▶ Intelligence (Cognitive, Social, and Emotional)?
- ▶ Self Awareness/Acceptance? (Strengths and challenges)
- ▶ Diagnosis/Deficits/Disorders? (Thinking differences?)
- ▶ Observations in Multiple settings?
- ▶ Level of attentiveness?
- ▶ Ability to learn in a group setting?
- ▶ Best place to teach and generalize skills?
- ▶ Environmental Factors?
- ▶ Resources and Supports that may be needed?

# Have you considered Modifications?

**A good assessment should help in determining what modifications may need to be put in place to help support the new skill or reduce a problem**

- ▶ **Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA)- Can help identify triggers that may be causing skill deficit. Address modifications based on triggers.**
- ▶ **May involve identifying replacement behaviors (which could include modifications like allowing to chew gum, fidgets, etc.)**
- ▶ **May include environmental changes (seating, modified work, lighting)**

# Prioritizing Skill Goals

**What is your child doing too much of?**

*EXAMPLES:*

- ▶ Interrupting
- ▶ Invading others space
- ▶ Talking too much
- ▶ Insulting Others

**What is your child doing to little of?**

- ▶ Complimenting others
- ▶ Initiating conversations
- ▶ Making eye contact
- ▶ Showering/deodorant

# Prioritizing Skill Goals

- ▶ Work on skills that are more behavioral first that are getting in way of working on other skills.
- ▶ Pick 1-3 goals (Studies show that targeting 1-3 goals at a time consistently over a long period of time shows most success)
- ▶ Develop how goals will be measured. (Keeping track of progress)

*(Baker, J., (2003). Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communication Problems. Autism Asperger Publishing, pages 17 & 18.)*

# What Increases Motivation

- ▶ HOPE- #1 prediction of success/ “Years of can’t do”
- ▶ Relationship is THE MOST important component to motivation
- ▶ Respecting the child as an individual and consider their feelings and thoughts. They should be involved in developing the plan for working on the skill.
- ▶ Respect Privacy and Individual Fears (Many higher functioning kids are very self conscious about getting help/being pulled out of class/etc./ Be creative in coming up with plans for teaching and generalizing skills)
- ▶ Self Awareness and Acceptance- Being aware that we are all a work in progress and have strengths and challenges.

# Types of Motivators

## Intrinsic

Assessment: What do you want to do when you grow up? What kinds of games do you like to play with others?

- ▶ Links skill with goals
- ▶ Increase self awareness of strengths prior to challenges
- ▶ Works well when kids are motivated by wanting friends

*(Baker, J., (2003). Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communication Problems. Autism Asperger Publishing, pages 17 & 18.)*

## Extrinsic

Assessment: Parents make a list of all the things child likes, and likes to do

- ▶ Motivator is more short term tangible reward
- ▶ behavior charts, token systems (rewards they buy into for targeted behaviors)
- ▶ Often used with kids who have trouble seeing big picture (live in moment), depressed kids, lack of self awareness and acceptance

# Motivation

## Individual Differences

Aware & desires to get better at the skill	Unaware & doesn't see point in working on skill	Aware but resistant to focusing on the issue. May come in forms of defensiveness, denial, depression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The motivator is the goal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Needs more extrinsic and creative motivators</li><li>• Self awareness and acceptance needs to be part of the training/counseling</li><li>• Individual work before social skills group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Also needs more extrinsic and creative motivators</li><li>• Counseling for self esteem, peer sensitivity may be necessary</li><li>• Individual work before social skills group</li></ul>

# Skill Acquisition/Teaching Skills

Teaching skills explicitly that may not come natural

Remember from earlier assessment need to consider:

- ▶ Limited or good receptive language
- ▶ Attentiveness
- ▶ Child/Student's wants and needs.
- ▶ Motivation level
- ▶ Resource availability

Based on these considerations:

- ▶ Where should the skills be taught (Individually, play group, within classroom, in natural community settings, social skills group, dyad, with selected typical peers)

*(Baker, J., (2003). Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communication Problems. Autism Asperger Publishing)*

# Skill Acquisition

## How should Skills Be Taught?

Classrooms:

- ▶ How teachers can integrate social skills with academic lessons

(Polly Bath- Don't Invite Behaviors- Identify needed skills- Youtube clip)



# Types Social Skills Groups

(Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE-AkyaZ9XY> Clip from The Middle)

- ▶ **Time Limited Teaching Groups** teach, role play, practice specific skills with use of different programs such as “PEERS” Curriculum and many others.
  - These work best if parents and teachers are also involved in knowing what the child/teen is working on and how help them to generalize skills
- ▶ **Support/Self Awareness/Generalizing/Activity based Groups** More flexible agenda, often open-ended – Good option for individuals who already know the skills, but are often still struggling at generalizing the skills.

# Group Selection

**When selecting individuals to be in a group you should try and match:**

- Cognitive and Emotional/Social Intelligence level
- Language ability
- Interests
- Level of self awareness/acceptance
- Needs and Objectives
- A good personality match with others in the group

Keep in mind that matching Diagnosis is not as important as above criteria

# Skill Acquisition

## Teaching Topics and Tools

- ▶ Self Awareness/Self Esteem Activities
- ▶ Conversation and Communication strategies
- ▶ Sensitive Topics/ Using a “filter”
- ▶ Flexibility and Executive Functioning strategies
- ▶ Social Thinking Tools
- ▶ Demonstrations/Role Plays/Practice
- ▶ Use of videos, books, social stories
- ▶ Teaching CBT, DBT, Mindfulness, ACT Strategies for help with coping with feelings and thoughts
- ▶ Activities that create opportunities for coaching in moment and generalizing social skills

# Structured Social Skills Curriculums

- ▶ PEERS Curriculum (Routledge Publishing)
- ▶ Preparing for Life, Social Skills Training, Social Skills Picture Books  
(Jed Baker, Ph.D./Future Horizons Publishing)
- ▶ Social Thinking Resources (Michelle Garcia Winner)
- ▶ Navigating the Social World (Future Horizons)
- ▶ Act it Out (AAPC)
- ▶ Quest Program (Future Horizons)
- ▶ Building Social Relationships (Scott Bellini/AAPC)
- ▶ Skillstreaming.com
- ▶ <http://www2.semel.ucla.edu/peers/resources/role-play-videos>

# Social Skills Curriculum Continued..

- ▶ Enhancing Social Skills (Attainment Company)
- ▶ Hidden Curriculum (Brenda Smith-Myles/ AAPC)
- ▶ Language of the Theory of the Mind (Attainment Company)
- ▶ Model Me Kids ([modelmekids.com](http://modelmekids.com))
- ▶ Destination Friendship (AAPC)
- ▶ Social Compass Curriculum (Brookes Publishing)

# Generalization

## **Prime the Skill**

- ▶ Cue the skill verbally or visually

## **Coach skill in the moment**

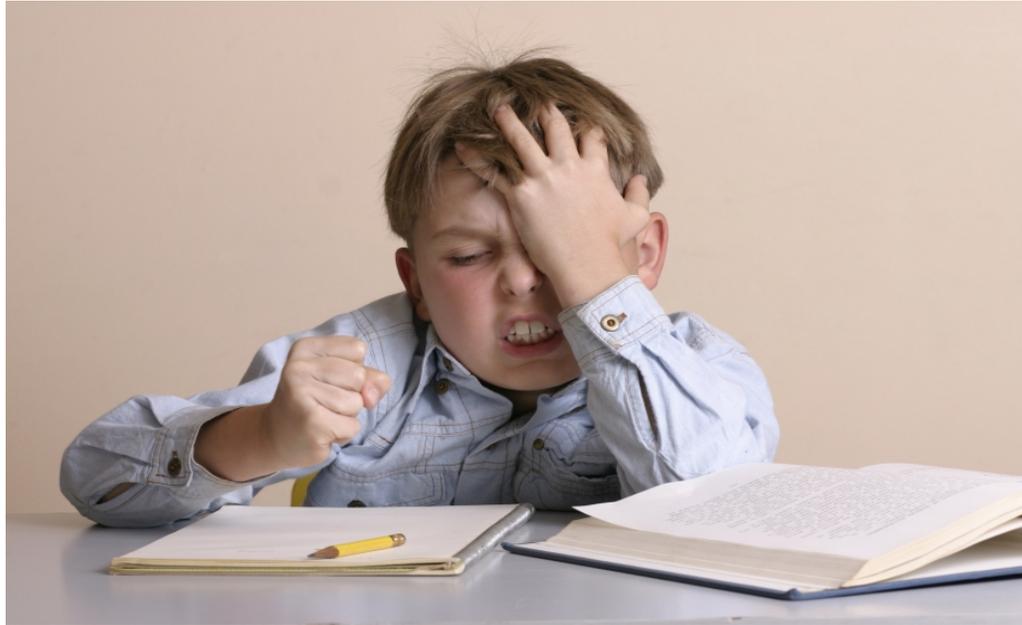
- ▶ Baiting/Creating situations in natural environment to practice skill
- ▶ Natural situations, lunch bunch, group projects, play dates, frustrating situations

## **Review/Provide Feedback**

- ▶ Verbal or visual response (How do you think you did?, thumbs up)
- ▶ Marble jar
- ▶ motivation charts
- ▶ Self monitoring

*Jed E. Baker/Social Skills Training Project/Workshop No More Meltdowns (2013)*

# Teaching and Generalizing Skills (Trying When it's Hard/Jed Baker)



- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkhAeFI0RaU>

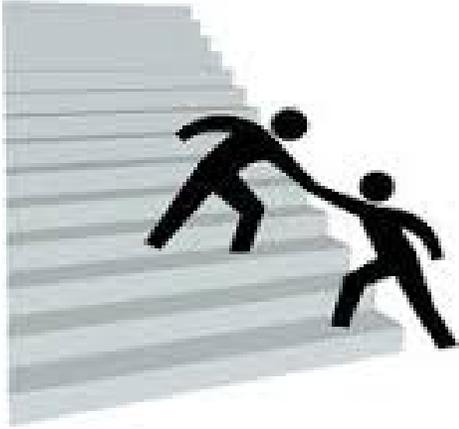
# Knowledge/Tolerance/ Sensitivity

## ► Educating Peers/Parents/Teachers/Siblings/Coaches/Community

- About different kinds diagnoses that often have an impact on social skills
- About the best ways to help
- About Social Skills Training



**Sensitivity Trainings with Peers (Identified/not identified) Building an environment of support, acceptance, respect, and tolerance.**



# Peer Leadership Programs

## **What are Peer Leadership Programs?**

Programs that can be developed in schools or other community organizations that involve training peers to be leaders in helping identified and non-identified students work on social skills and feel more supported.

## **What is Involved?**

1. Selecting an adult who is passionate about the program to lead the development and implementation of the program
2. Carefully selecting well liked typical peers that meet criteria for program
3. Training of peer leaders in sensitivity and ways they can help
4. Organizing plan for how peer leaders will help
5. Giving Peer Leaders ongoing support

# Peer Leadership Programs

## Examples of ways that peer leaders can help:

- ▶ Participating in lunch bunch groups
- ▶ Social skills groups with ½ typical peers
- ▶ Dyads with trained peer
- ▶ Organizational buddy
- ▶ Recess/Lunch buddies
- ▶ Afterschool activity group with /typical peers
- ▶ Peers can even be trained to prime, coach, and reinforce skills
- ▶ Eyes and ears in unstructured settings/identify kids who may need help
- ▶ Increasing safety from bullying and isolation

(Jed Baker 10 minute video/Example of Peer Leadership program)

<http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video?id=3010139#.UtmkPik2qSE.gmail>

# Peer Leadership Programs

## The Benefits:

- ▶ Research shows positive results of peer involvement
- ▶ Creates an environment of understanding, tolerance, respect for differences, anti-bullying, togetherness, and belonging.
- ▶ Helps on playground, hallways, recess, times where there is staff shortage/Also in youth groups, clubs, churches, sports teams
- ▶ Helpful to intervention specialists, para-professionals, teachers, coaches, youth leaders, club leaders, etc.
- ▶ High school student's involvement big plus for someone interested in special needs, psychology, social work, community service.

*(The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention and as Evidence-Based Practice <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu>)*

# Evaluating Outcome

How do you measure progress?

- ▶ Data from point charts/motivation charts
- ▶ Rating Scales
- ▶ Surveys
- ▶ Teacher/Parent report
- ▶ Grades
- ▶ Attendance
- ▶ Friendships

*Jed E. Baker/Social Skills Training Project/Workshop No More Meltdowns (2013)*

# Review of The Major Points

## **Make sure before working on social skills you have considered:**

- ▶ You have hope for the child, considered individual differences, considered biases, are trying to develop a good relationship connection with the child/teen.
- ▶ The components of Social Skills Training (Assessment, Modifications, Prioritizing Skills, Motivation, Skill Acquisition, Generalization, Peer Sensitivity, and evaluation outcome)
- ▶ That the goals match the need
- ▶ That you have motivators in place appropriate to the level/interests
- ▶ That you are consistent and expect it may take a long time
- ▶ That there is a plan to generalize skills to natural environment
- ▶ Don't pull supports too soon (Research shows adults with ASD need teaching and supports longer for adaptive behavior)
- ▶ Don't assume just because high IQ that they can do the skill