SOCIAL SKILLS & PEER RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT: AN EVIDENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVE ON INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH ASD

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WHY

- ASD is characterized by significant impairment in social interaction and communication.
- Social impairment does not improve with time.
- Rather, social impairment often increases over time due to increasing social demands and complexity of interactions.
- Individuals with ASD may be aware of their social difficulties, causing psychological distress.
- Social impairment is predictive of being bullied.
- Social skills are important for post-school outcomes:
  - Leisure activities
  - Postsecondary education
  - Employment
  - Friendships/Relationships
  - Independent living

APA, 2013; Howlin, 2014; Laugeson & Ellenson, 2014; Picci & Scherf, 2015; Sofronoff et al., 2011
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

0-4 Weeks
- Imitates facial expressions
- Cries for basic needs (e.g., hunger)
- Gazes at caregivers
- Social smiling
- Simple interactions with caregiver (e.g., smile, vocalizations)
- Directed eye contact

1 Month
- Shows interest others
- Differentially interacts with familiar individuals
- Seeks attention
- Recognizes familiar vs. unfamiliar individuals
- Communicative vocalizations
- Imitates vocalizations
- Demonstrates joint attention

4 Months

6 Months

9 Months

Bulman & Savory, 2006; Voress & Pearson, 2003

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

12 Months
- Plays simple games (e.g., peek-a-boo)
- Expresses affection
- Plays alone
- Clearly shows 2+ emotions
- Demonstrates awareness of others’ emotions
- Understands ~20 words

18 Months
- Shows interest others
- Seeks attention
- Uses first words

2 Years
- Shows interest/pleasure in peers
- Engages in parallel play
- Shows difficulty sharing with peers
- Engages in simple pretend play
- Attempts to help others (e.g., cleaning)
- Uses phrases

Bulman & Savory, 2006; Voress & Pearson, 2003
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

3 Years
- Prefers certain “friends”
- Simple reciprocal play with peers
- Comforts others
- Asks for help
- Separates from caregivers
- Engages simple conversation

4 Years
- Demonstrates cooperation and competition
- Takes turns
- Shares with peers
- Uses complex speech
- Plays group games

5 Years
- Appropriately seeks attention
- Wants to be liked by others
- Develops fears
- Prefers to play with others
- Talks about his/her own feelings
- Has best friend

6 Years
- Shows concern/sympathy for others
- Explains rules of games
- Comforts friends
- Works alone for short periods of time (e.g., chores)
- Expresses anger appropriately
- States short-term goals
- Tells stories
- Shows stable friendships

7 Years
- Accepts criticism
- Perspective taking (e.g., others have different opinions/preferences)
- Understands social rules, but believes changeable
- May show preference for same gender
- Tells jokes
- Uses slang
- Demonstrates sense of right and wrong

Bulman & Savory, 2006; Voress & Pearson, 2003
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

8-12 Years

- Effectively lies to others
- Places strong importance on friendships
- Demonstrates concern what others think of him/her
- Expresses uncertainty regarding changes in settings
- Fluent speech
- Uses peer-influenced speech

13-18 Years

- Variable self-esteem, especially related to physical changes
- Prefers to spend time with friends vs. family
- Increasingly influenced by peer pressure
- More secure regarding changes in setting
- Demonstrates increased interest romantic relationships

Bulman & Savory, 2006; Voress & Pearson, 2003
SELECTING A TARGET BEHAVIOR

1. Select a ladder
2. Choose final step in ladder
3. Identify other steps of ladder
4. Identify missing steps
5. Build your ladder

EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS: WITH ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Interventions</td>
<td>Individual’s behavior is altered via reinforcement, prompting, extinction, and other behavioral techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmental/</td>
<td>Parent and/or therapist increases social behaviors towards individual (e.g., imitating client, responding to all communicative attempts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship-Based Interventions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Mediated Intervention</td>
<td>Peers are taught strategies to interact with individual(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Modeling</td>
<td>Individual watches video of self/ adult/ or peer perform desired social behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Teaching</td>
<td>Focus on strengths and alter environment to decrease difficulties, such as using visual supports/schedules (e.g., TEACHH)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Gates et al., 2017; Ke et al., 2018; Walton & Ingersoll, 2013
### Evidence-Based Interventions: Without ID

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Instruction</td>
<td>Describing/modeling the desired behavior, prompting and practicing the desired behavior, and providing reinforcement or feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology-based</td>
<td>Computer-based instruction (e.g., PowerPoint), using video models, or providing feedback based on videos of the individual’s social behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic</td>
<td>Individuals were prompted to participate in structured social/recreational activities (e.g., a club at school of their interest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotherapy</td>
<td>Narrative therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness-based intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured/Manualized Social Skills Programs</td>
<td>Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS); Socio-Dramatic Affective-Relational Intervention (SDAR); The Social Competence Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Gates et al., 2017; Ke et al., 2018; Walton & Ingersoll, 2013

### Considerations for Selecting an Intervention

- Purpose / Target Skill
- Qualifications of provider
- Available resources
- Skill repertoire of client
TAKE-AWAY:
HAVE A REASON FOR ALL TREATMENT DECISIONS!

- For selecting a skill, consider:
  - Typical social development
  - The individual’s current skill set
  - The individual’s typical social environment
- For selecting an intervention, consider:
  - What you want to teach
  - Your qualifications
  - Your resources
  - The individual’s unique skill profile
- For selecting the specifics, consider:
  - Typical development / social behavior
  - Your resources
  - The individual’s skill profile
- For selecting a data collection method, consider:
  - What is feasible
  - What is accurate
  - What best guides treatment evaluation and decisions

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