It’s So Hard to be Your Friend:
Teaching Social Skills to Teens

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Do You Know...?
• Stewie Griffin
  - Vocabulary of an adult
  - Intent on world domination
  - Hates his mother
  - Doesn’t get along well with his peers
  - Aggressive Duck, Duck, Goose player
  - Playground bully
Do You Know...?
• Bart Simpson
  - Playground bully
  - Lives in after school detention
  - Disrespectful to parents
  - Looking for attention
  - Chooses wrong friends
Do You Know...?
- **Michael Scott**
  - Socially immature
  - Social difficulties as a child
    - (ask Phyllis, he went to elementary school with her)
  - Inappropriate humor
  - Inappropriate conversations
Do You Know...?

- A child who doesn’t understand body language?
- A child who doesn’t understand facial expressions?
- A child who doesn’t get the joke?
- A child who laughs at inappropriate times?
- A child who gets angry when he loses?
- A child who only wants to talk about one subject?
Social skills are the means by which people can make connections to others, exchange information and ideas, make their needs and desires known, and enter into and maintain relationships.

Taylor, Richards, and Brady, 2005, pp 266-67.
Social Skills

• Social skills are communication, problem-solving, decision making, self-management, and peer relations abilities that allow one to initiate and maintain positive social relationships with others.

• Deficits or excesses in social behavior interfere with learning, teaching, and the classroom's orchestration and climate.

• Social competence is linked to peer-acceptance, teacher acceptance, inclusion success, and post-school success.
• According to Court and Givon (2003), it is important for adolescents to have healthy social interactions.

• Merrell and Gimpel (1998) believe that the lack of social skills may have “powerful and far-reaching implications” during the formative years of development, but also throughout the course of life.
• Social interactions with peers and adults can be difficult in both academic and home settings
• Students often display social behaviors that negatively influence their relationships with others
• Students display social skill deficits in areas such as conversation, play, cooperation, conflict, dealing with frustration, and anger management
• These deficits may manifest themselves from deficits in knowledge, performance, or social reinforcement (Elliot & Gresham, 1991)

• Many students do not know how to handle interpersonal social situations that involve following directions, holding a proper conversation, listening, giving compliments, proper behavior during transition times, teasing, bullying, or just “hanging out” with friends.
Theoretical Background

• **Bandura’s social learning theory** provides an exceptional understanding of social skills within a social cognitive development framework.  
  (Slee & Shute, 2003; Merrell & Gimpel, 1998; Matson & Ollendick, 1988; Gresham, 1982; Gresham, 1981; Bandura, 1977)

• **Many social skills can be learned through observation, role-playing, and modeling** which Bandura believed were important to social cognitive development.  
  (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Merrell & Gimpel, 1998, Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1997; Bandura, 1977).
An Effective Social Skills Program

• With the proper combination of social skills assessments, methods, and curriculum, an effective social skills training system can be developed to help students learn and generalize social skills in a variety of settings, including school and home.

• Teachers, parents, and other educators must work together to form a proactive plan to implement social skills instruction in their schools.
Social Skills Assessment

- Assessments can help identify serious deficits in social skills, collect information about the problems with social skills, and play an important role in planning a suitable social skills training program (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998; Sugai & Lewis, 1996).
- With this information teachers can select, modify, or develop appropriate social skills programming for their students.
- Assessment information can also be used to monitor and evaluate the progress of their students from their social skills instruction (Sugai & Lewis, 1996).
- Multiple assessments measuring and evaluating social skills should be conducted to provide reliable and valid results to properly plan and develop a social skills curriculum.
What is an Effective Social Skills Training Program?

- Assesses the social skills needed to be taught
- Develops lessons based on the assessments and needs of the students
- Doesn’t use a canned approach
- MODEL, MODEL, MODEL
- Collects data.... drives instruction
- Uses the natural setting to help generalize skills
What is an Effective Social Skills Training Program?

• Reinforces appropriate behaviors.
• Is creative - kids have fun.
• Uses teachable moments and verbal cues throughout the classes.
• Tries to involve general ed peers.
• Collaborates with other teachers and parents to help generalize skills in other settings.
An Effective Social Skills Program

- Social skills training is not effective unless students generalize these skills in natural settings.
  (Miller et al, 2005; Smith & Gilles, 2003; Mathur, Kavale, Quinn, Forness, & Rutherford, 1998; Gresham & Elliott, 1989)

- Social skills are generalized best when students are allowed to practice them in a variety of natural settings.
  (Smith & Gilles, 2003)
How Can I Help My Child?

• Parents can help their child with their social skills by involving them in activities with their peers
  - Sports (soccer, basketball, etc)
  - Church activities
  - Boy/Girl Scouts
  - School clubs
  - Library
  - YMCA
How Can I Help My Child?

• Non-disabled students will have the opportunity to see your child in successful roles outside of school and get to know him as a friend, rather than an acquaintance.
How Can I Help My Child?

- Many children in special education programs do not participate in extracurricular activities, and they miss this important social skills teaching opportunity.
- Help your child discover his strengths and interests to help him choose the right place for him to learn social skills.
- Whatever your child enjoys, it is likely there are opportunities to teach social skills in your community and for him to join with others.
How Can I Help My Child?

• Have your child participate in as many social opportunities as possible:
  - Order food at a restaurant
  - Pay cashiers at stores
  - Introductions/greetings
  - Call your child or have them call you or a friend
How Can I Help My Child?

• Arrange play dates for your child
  - No more than 1 or 2 children
  - Try to match up with others that have common interests
  - Have children call one another
  - Find activities that encourage social opportunities
    • Video games with 2 player option
    • Games like Uno, Jenga, Sorry, or that have players take turns
How Can I Help My Child?

• Teach your child social skills needed to develop friendships in small, easy steps.

• Social skills may not come easily for your child.

• Children with disabilities may feel intimidated by other kids, and they may find it too uncomfortable to try to reach out to them.
How Can I Help My Child?

• Teach social skills by rehearsing social situations ahead of time.

• Role play meeting a new person with each other. Take turns being the greeter and "greetee."
How Can I Help My Child?

• Teach your child the art of getting others to talk about themselves.
  - Your child can learn about his peers and find common interests.
  - Kids can use friendly, polite questions to encourage kids to talk and break the ice.
  - Focusing on others will also help your child feel less self-conscious.
  - Help your child learn how to choose good friends to develop healthy relationships.
How Can I Help My Child?

• Help your child work on these social skills by setting small goals.
  - Ask your child to smile and greet one new child each day. Just say, "Hi."
  - This is often enough to reduce the pressure and begin some conversations that build toward relationships.
  - Each night, have a friendly chat about his day, and talk about how many people he spoke to.
How Can I Help My Child?

- If your child has an IEP, work with the IEP team to develop social skills goals.
- Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) can be administered to find areas of weakness in social skills.
- Many of these goals can be worked on in the regular classroom.
- Those children who have speech therapy also have an opportunity to work on social skills.
Social Skill Builders

- Enables students to enhance their social skills.
- Learning social skills can enhance the child's chances for success with their peers in the classroom and can help establish social competence in other areas of their lives as well.
Social Skill Builders

- Offers social skills classes for children who demonstrate difficulties with social skill awareness, social interactions and social behaviors.

- Classes provide opportunities for social skills development, healthy relationship building, and recreation which in turn will help build self-confidence and positive self-esteem.
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