Social Skills and Autism

Autism Consulting & Therapy, LLC
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Who we are

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Jazmin Johnson, M.S., BCBA, LBA- Social Skills Group Leader
What we do

- Providers in a clinical setting that specialize in Applied Behavior Analysis using DTT and NET
- Primarily work with children ranging from 2 to 5 years old
- Provide a social skills program which teaches social skills, functional play, and communication skills
What are social skills?

- Social skills are a group of skills or rules
- There are many different social skills, including:
  - Empathizing
  - Greetings
  - Reading social cues
  - Initiating conversations
  - Understanding the speaker
  - Problem solving
How do social skills develop?

- These skills are usually acquired naturally, but for those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it can be harder to acquire these skills.
- Some reasons it is harder:
  - Delays and difficulty acquiring language skills
  - Sensory input
  - Hard to understand nonverbal communication
  - Fixation on routine
Since it is harder for children with ASD to acquire social skills, they may show no interest in engaging with others
- Completely isolating from others
- Perseveration on topics of interest

This does not mean these children do not want to interact, but that they do not know how to easily interact with others.

Direct instruction is key!!
Why are social skills important?

- Social skills are important for children with ASD to acquire for the following reasons:
  - To form friendships with their peers
  - To be liked by their peers
  - Functional interactions in the everyday environment
  - Acquiring and keeping a job
  - Involvement in family and community events
  - Meeting new people
  - To be a part of social events
What are the foundational social skills?

0-6 months:

- Smiling at people
- Copying facial movements/expressions
- Knowing the difference between familiar people and strangers
- Preferring to play with others
Foundational Social Skills Continued...

6 to 12 months:

- Repeating sounds/actions to get attention
- Playing simple games such as peek-a-boo
- Early requesting
- Imitation
- Parallel play
- JOINT ATTENTION
How do we teach social skills in a clinical setting?

- ABA - Applied Behavior Analysis
- DTT - Discrete Trial Training
- NET - Natural Environment Teaching
- SSG - Social Skills Group
Applied Behavior Analysis

- Science to changing socially significant behavior
- Behavior analysts manipulate environmental variables
- Evidence-based strategies and techniques
  - Reinforcement
  - Punishment
  - Extinction
Reinforcement vs. Punishment

- **Add stimulus**
  - Positive Reinforcement
  - Negative Reinforcement

- **Remove stimulus**
  - Positive Punishment
  - Negative Punishment

**Increase behavior**

**Decrease behavior**
Discrete Trial Training

- One-on-one teaching with client and therapist (RBT)
- Teaching involves discrimination training where responses are under the control of an Sd (discriminative stimulus)
  - Responses occur only when the Sd is presented/given
  - Responses do not occur when Sd is not presented
- Targets skills such as joint attention, receptive language, expressive language, visual performance, vocal and motor imitation, manding (requesting), intraverbals (answering questions), tacting (labeling), etc.
Natural Environment Teaching

- Teaching that may involve the RBT, BCBA, SSGL, parent/caregiver, teacher, etc.
- Involves taking skills taught in the SSG setting or DTT sessions and applying them in the natural environment (SSG, home, community, school, etc.)
- Allows the client to generalize skills
Social Skills Group

- Group of children (may include both children with autism and typically-developing peers) organized to teach and develop social skills
- Also teaches skills such as functional play and communication
- Groups may be organized by age or functioning level
SSG
Clinic vs. in-home setting

- In-home setting involves more opportunities for NET, DTT, and parent training
- Clinical setting allows for more opportunities to teach social skills
What does ACT do?

- ACT’s model
  - Early-intervention focused social skills group (SSG) in which clients attend for half of the day
  - Some clients attend preschool or kindergarten programs for the other half of the day
  - The SSG simulates the opportunity for learning in an environment similar to an elementary or preschool classroom

- Social Skills Group
  - Broken down into activities throughout the morning and afternoon
    - 4 DTT sessions
    - Circle time, art, sensory time, guided play, snack, toy time, puzzle time, games, music, outside time, conversation circle, and goodbye circle
What does ACT do?

- **Social Skills Group Leader**
  - Designs goals to teach age-appropriate social skills
  - Contrive opportunities to teach these skills/take data on these goals during each activity
  - Examples of goals:
    - Sharing when asked
    - Remaining in place until called on
    - Reciprocating or initiating nonverbal interactions with peers
    - Raising hand before speaking
  - RBTs assist in teaching these goals and communicate with parents/caregivers to allow for generalization into natural environment

- **BCBAs/Case Managers**
  - Supervise RBTs weekly using Behavior Skills Training (BST)
    - Provide instructions, model behavior, rehearse/practice, and provide feedback
Assessments We Use

Examples of assessments used in our Social Skills groups include:

- VB-MAPP
- ABLLS-R
- AFLS
- Socially Savvy
- EDEN
VB-MAPP

- Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program
- Designed for children with autism and/or language delays
- 5 components of this assessment
  - Milestones assessment
  - Barriers assessment
  - Transition assessment
  - Task analysis and skill tracking
  - Placement and IEP goals
- In our social skills groups, we commonly use the ‘social behavior and social play’ and ‘classroom routine and group skills’ goals from the task analysis component to write our goals.
ABLLS-R

- Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills- Revised
- Used for children with autism and other developmental disabilities to help with language and other skills
- 544 different skills from 25 skill areas
- For our social skills groups we commonly use the social interactions and group instruction goals
AFLS

- Assessment of Functional Living Skills
- Goal of this assessment is overall independence
- 6 modules
  - Basic living skills
  - Home skills
  - Community participation skills
  - Social skills
  - Vocational skills
  - Independent living skills
- In our social skills group we typically use the following:
  - Social skills modules
  - Community participation module
Socially Savvy

- Measures a child’s social skills
- Measures across 7 areas
  - Social play
  - Joint attention
  - Self-regulation
  - Social language
  - Social emotional
  - Group behavior
  - Nonverbal language
- In our social skills groups we typically use the entire assessment for goals
EDEN

- This assessment is specific to child’s chronological and developmental needs
- 9 domains
  - Learning readiness
  - Cognitive
  - Communication
  - Receptive language
  - Expressive language
  - Oral/motor feeding
  - Play/social
  - Self-care
  - Preschool readiness
- In our social skills groups we typically use the learning readiness, communication, and play social domains from the infant and toddler volume
Questions?
References


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