SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS WITH ASPERGER’S SYNDROME

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SOCIAL SKILL DEFICITS

- Many contributing factors
  - Theory of mind impairments problems with perspective taking, emotion recognition & emotion regulation
  - Executive functioning deficits
  - Detail-focused processing style
  - Special interests
  - Lack of interest/motivation to socialise with others early on?
Strategies supported by evidence

- Emotion recognition
  - Computer programs/DVDs
  - Charades
  - Emotion thermometer

- Emotion regulation
  - Relaxation strategies

- Social skills
  - Step by step guidelines
  - Social stories
  - Power cards

- Peer acceptance & inclusion
  - Peer education sessions
  - Buddy systems
EMOTION RECOGNITION – THE TRANSPORTERS
(4-8 YEAR-OLDS – http://www.thetransporters.com)

Help your child recognize emotions

The fun DVD loved by children with autism
EMOTION RECOGNITION – SECRET AGENT SOCIETY COMPUTER GAME
(8-12 YEAR-OLDS - www.sst-institute.net)
EMOTION RECOGNITION – MINDREADING
(TEENS & ADULTS - http://www.jkp.com/mindreading/)

Introduction

Mind Reading is a unique reference work covering the entire spectrum of human emotions. Using the software you can explore over 400 emotions, seeing and hearing each one performed by six different people.

Mind Reading is for everyone interested in emotions. It has been designed with awareness of the special needs of
EMOTION RECOGNITION – CHARADES
EMOTION RECOGNITION – EMOTION THERMOMETER
EMOTION REGULATION – RELAXATION STRATEGIES

- Children/teens need to be able to manage their emotions to perform well in social situations, irrespective of their level of social skill.

- No permanent cure for unpleasant feelings – relaxation strategies help these feelings to disappear faster.

- **Calm, relaxing activities** work best for mild-moderate anxiety or anger. **Physical activities** work best for high levels of anxiety and anger.

- Best to use strategies at the first signs of anxiety or anger.
EMOTION REGULATION – RELAXATION STRATEGIES

1... 2... 3...
Count and name things

Listen to music

Have a drink

Watch TV

Splash your face with water

Have a relaxing bath or shower

Draw/paint

Tear up paper

Read a book

Play with a toy or puzzle

Watch a funny DVD or movie

Play a computer game

Talk to someone you trust

Play a musical instrument

Make or build something

Play with plasticine or play dough

Do a physical activity

Squeeze a stress ball
Gadget name: THE O₂ REGULATOR (slow breathing)

**HOW IT WORKS:**
Slow breathing helps to reverse the chemical reactions in your body that cause physical signs of anxiety and anger.

**STEP 1**
Place your hands under your ribs.

**STEP 2**
Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 3. Focus on the air coming in through your nose and moving right down to the bottom of your lungs. As you breathe in, your stomach should rise up, and your shoulders and chest should hardly move.

**STEP 3**
Pause briefly.

**STEP 4**
Slowly breathe out through your mouth. Imagine saying ‘relax’ to yourself as you breathe out.

**STEP 5**
Repeat the process until you feel calmer (e.g. 2 to 9 more breaths).

**When to Use it:** Low to moderate levels of anxiety or anger.

**Additional Comments:** Once you’re good at using the O₂ Regulator, you won’t need to put your hands on your stomach any more when breathing. Then, you can use it anywhere and at any time without anyone noticing!
Gadget name: THE HELPFUL THOUGHT MISSILE

HOW IT WORKS:
Your thoughts about a situation have a lot of control over how you feel. Unhelpful ‘enemy’ thoughts lead to unpleasant feelings. Shooting down these thoughts and replacing them with helpful thoughts will help you to feel happier, calmer and braver.

STEP 1
When you detect that you’re feeling sad, angry or anxious, try to catch the unhelpful ‘enemy’ thoughts that are going through your head.

STEP 2
Shoot down these thoughts and replace them with more helpful ones. Thinking in helpful ways will make you feel happier, calmer and braver!

When to Use it: Low to moderate levels of anxiety or anger.

Additional Comments: Helpful thought missiles are a secret weapon that you can use at any time without anyone else knowing.
Social skills training – The process

- Group format – most common for social skills training
- Break down social skill into steps
  - What to pay attention to
  - What to do
- Review skill steps with group members
- Demonstrate skill steps with volunteer(s)
- Review what steps you did well/what steps you could do differently
- Group members role-play skill steps
  - Self-evaluate performance
- Praise/rewards for effort
- Visual reminder to use skill steps in real life
CODE CARDS
Detect the problem and Define it.

A social problem is a situation where someone feels upset because of someone else’s words or actions. The upset person might be you or someone else!

Watch out for Emotion Clues in Yourself and Others:

- Signs of anxiety or anger in your own body.
- The situation you are in.
- Other people’s:
  - Facial expression
  - Body posture and movement
  - Voice tone
  - What they are saying

Use these clues to DEFINE exactly what the problem is that you need to solve.
E Explore possible solutions to the problem.
Try to think of as many different solutions as you can. Be creative! Don’t judge your ideas as good or bad at this step.

C Consider the Consequences and Choose a solution.
For each solution, list the good and bad points for yourself and others.
Choose the solution or combination of solutions that works best for everyone!

WARNING: This might involve giving up part of what you want to agree on a solution with someone else.

O Organise a plan.
Plan EXACTLY how you'll do your solution.
› What relaxation gadgets will you use (e.g. slow breathing, helpful thoughts)?
› What will you say and do?
› How will you say and do these things?
Have a back-up plan ready in case something goes wrong.

D Do it!
Practise your solution and put it into action!

E Evaluate how it went.
› What did you do well?
› What would you do differently next time?
› Review how the solution went with an adult.

R Rewards!
What can you do and think to reward yourself for trying your best?
SOCIAL STORIES™ - CAROL GRAY

- Helps child/teen:
  - understand a social situation
  - know how to respond

- Written in first or third person

- Contain:
  - Descriptive sentences – describe what’s going to happen, where and why; help child/teen focus on relevant social cues
  - Perspective sentences – describe how people feel
  - Directive sentences – tell the child/teen what to do
  - Avoid absolutes (e.g. ‘always’ and ‘never’). Instead, use terms like ‘sometimes’, ‘I will try...’.
  - May be illustrated
  - Newspaper/magazine article format (teens)

- Ratio of 2-5 descriptive or perspective sentences for every directive sentence
EXAMPLE SOCIAL STORY™

“CRYING”

People sometimes cry when they feel sad.

It’s OK to be sad and cry.
Later the crying will stop.

When people cry I can say: “it’s OK.”
When people cry I can give Mummy or a teacher a cuddle
When crying is too noisy I can walk away or cover my ears

I can wait. Soon crying will stop and everyone will be happy again.

SOCIAL STORIES™ – THE EVIDENCE

- Variable effectiveness
- More effective for inappropriate behaviours than teaching new social skills
- Best used in school settings
- Ideal if child/teen reads the story themselves before entering target situation
- Appear most effective for primary school students
- Further research needed: conclusions based on small sample sizes/number of studies

- DVD – Writing Social Stories™ with Carol Gray
  http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories
POWER CARDS - ELISA GAGNON

- Link child/teen’s special interest to a desired behaviour

- Consist of:
  - A written script (describing problem and solution) + visual image of hero related to special interest
  - Small card with brief summary of solution steps + image of hero (Power Card)

- Child/teen reads script before target situation

- Refer to Power Card in situation
Kazuki Takahashi Initiates Conversations that Focus on Other’s Interests

Kazuki Takahashi is interested in other people and has learned to talk about things they like. He knows that people like to hear their name, so whenever he greets them, he says their name and looks them in the eye. He usually makes a point of finding out and remembering what their special interest or hobby is so that he can bring it up in conversation. If the person does not seem very talkative, he will ask a question about their interest and then listen carefully to the reply. Mr. Takahashi will use a key word from the person’s reply to make a positive comment.

Kazuki Takahashi knows that people like to talk about their interests. He wants you to use the four steps that will help you have good conversations:

1. Greet the person by name and look them in the eye.
2. Ask about their interest and wait for response.
3. Ask a question about their interest and listen for a key word in their reply.
4. Comment on the interest using the key word.

Put this strategy to use and find out Kazuki’s secret to enjoying conversations.

POWER CARDS - EXAMPLE POWER CARD

Kazuki Takahashi talks about other's interests

1. Greet the person by name.
2. Ask about their interest and wait.
3. Ask a question about their interest and listen for key word.
4. Comment using the key word.

PROMOTING PEER ACCEPTANCE

Peer Education Sessions

- Help class members develop a better understanding of child/teen’s behaviour → acceptance and inclusion
- Describe individual’s strengths & how they’re similar to typically developing peers
- Describe unique challenges faced by child/teen with AS
- Experimental activities – understanding & empathy
- Ask peers how they can help the child/teen
- Parents attend
- Example programs:
  - Understanding Friends (Faherty, 2001)
  - The Sixth Sense II (Gray, 2002) – doesn’t label ASD)
PROMOTING PEER ACCEPTANCE

Peer Buddies

- Caring, well-liked class/team members
- Liked by child/teen with AS
- Look out for child/teen, spend time with them and offer to help them
- Adult gives guidance on how to do job well (e.g. what to talk about, how to respond if child gets upset)
- Adult checks in with buddies regularly
- Rewarded for their efforts
- Rotate role
- Ideally spend time with child/teen outside of school
CONTACT DETAILS

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