

9. An Alternative Approach to Social Skills Groups (written by Barb Teawalt)

Sometimes students with Asperger's Syndrome / High Functioning Autism, especially those with challenging behaviors, are not ready to participate in social skills groups. This does not mean that social skills instruction needs to be abandoned. As one alternative, we have created an individualized program we call "T. Time" (Teacher Time).

"T. Time" is one-to-one time with a teacher, psychologist, or paraprofessional for 15-20 minutes per day. This time is usually sandwiched between subjects such as reading or math, and often provides a break for both student and adult. "T. Time" can be held in a resource room, office or a self-contained program.

During "T. Time," students work on a specific social skill. Though students aren't together in the traditional group, they do work on the same skill (i.e. how to take a break using a "Break" card, how to ask for help using a "Help" card). After the skills are taught over several "T. Times," the students come together as a group. They role play the skill in front of the group.

Students can also make a videotape of themselves using the skill, and then applaud each other's achievements! In addition to the large group videotaping, other social skill activities can be done individually, using methods such as reading, drawing, coloring, completing worksheets.

"T. Time" also provides the opportunity to play games to reinforce skills, read social stories, and do comic strip conversations. It also provides each student the private time with an adult to talk about a specific problem. Some students will look specifically for "T. Time" on their visual schedules and save their problem/concern for their private discussion time.

Eventually, students may be ready to join a social skills group.