

## 2. Identifying Facilitators - Who Runs the Social Skills Groups?

In the Forest Lake school district a variety of staff conduct social skills groups for students with AS/HFA, including: special education teachers, speech & language clinicians, and school psychologists. Some groups are co-facilitated by two professionals, e.g., a special education teacher and a speech & language clinician, or a school psychologist and a special education teacher. Professionals who do not have any training or background in facilitating social skills groups are recommended to start by co-facilitating a group with someone who is experienced. The following capacities are suggested for social skills group facilitators:

- Experience and ability to facilitate group brainstorming and problem solving
- Familiarity with and/or availability to observe classroom and other school settings to program for and measure progress in general settings.
- Understanding of AS/HFA and the need to provide very direct teaching of the targeted skills, rather than just general discussions of "feelings" and behaviors.

The consideration of "who" facilitates or co-facilitates a group, should include consideration of the "whole student", (or group of students). What are his/her educational goals in areas other than social skills (i.e. communication, sensory integration processing)? Many specialists could be incorporated into social skills programming depending upon the session topics. For example, when focusing on social communication skills, consider team teaching some lessons with the speech/language pathologist or for identifying and expressing emotion skills consider the school psychologist. The occupational therapist (OT) may be able to team teach a sensory integration lesson. Others that also may be available on a short-term basis are the counselor and DAPE teacher. There are no limits as to whom you might invite as co-facilitator. The added benefit for students is that skill practice and generalization will be better supported as you involve a greater number of professionals who also interact with the students outside the group

setting. Specialists should also be considered as consultants to assist the facilitator with ideas for program planning and implementation, even if they are not co-facilitating. For example, the OT can be a great resource for strategies, tools and physical aids to help students with sensory overload or sensory integration challenges (e.g. for some students, using small manipulative hand toys, called “fidgets,” helps them in focusing attention on lesson content and social interaction.)