

6. Methods for Teaching Skills

Building a Resource Library

Finding resources: A plethora of resources are available for teaching social skills; the internet can be a great place to explore your options. While there are too many resources available to complete a comprehensive listing, a bibliography of selected books, children's books, websites, videos, and games is included at the end of the Resource Packets in the Appendix.

Organizing resources: Consider compiling individual file folders of social skills (i.e. Starting a Conversation, Identifying Emotions, Asking for Help, Anger Management) with ideas, worksheets, games, videos, and book lists associated with those skills, so that they are easily accessible when it's time for the lesson. The individual file folders can be organized by broader categories (Conflict / Problem Solving Skills, Communication Skills, Social Skills, Work Habit Skills). The Resource Packets in the Appendix are organized topically to facilitate organizing materials from a variety of sources.

What Does a Typical Group Meeting Look Like?

Typical Social Skills Group for Grades 1-3

Generally our groups last for 45 minutes. The schedule for each meeting is numbered and written on the chalkboard before students arrive. We meet at the same place in the room on the floor.

- 1) Students set up the group by getting their own carpet squares. Each student also completes a job to get ready for group. (Laying out the Boardmaker rules, lining up the reinforcement cups and chips, etc.)
- 2) Students independently place a tongue depressor stick on our Feelings Chart to denote how they are feeling (1-5; 1 - happy and ready to work; 5 - angry and not wanting to participate in group). The chart is based on "The Incredible 5-Point Scale" (see bibliography).
- 3) Students check the visual schedule on the board, and are ready for group.

- 4) Group is started with taking turns greeting each other and sharing one thing about what is happening, and determining how many chips need to be earned for a reward at the end of group.
- 5) We talk about the Feelings Chart, how each student feels and why, and label how their body feels. This is put on a post-it note on the chart to help the students learn the 5-point scale.
- 6) Review/practice skill using steps on an interactive poster by using activities such as worksheets, role plays, and games. We talk about where, how the skills can be used. Practicing a skill may take several meetings.
- 7) New skill is presented using an age-appropriate visual story or video. We talk about why this skill is important to kids. We do activities with the new skills by outlining each step using the interactive poster, and practice the skill by using the Velcro-ed pieces from the poster to see if the pieces can be put in the correct order for each step.
- 8) Then we spend five minutes on some type of sensory integration activity (using therapy ball, scooter, trampoline, swing, trapeze, caterpillar tunnel, dancing, yoga, relaxation exercises). The teacher can determine which activity would best suit the students for that day.

The last 5 minutes is spent on reviewing the meeting, counting chips, putting away equipment, and getting rewards.

Typical Social Skills Group for Grades 4-6

Generally our group for grades 4-6 lasts for 40 minutes. The list of elements below is only one of many possibilities for structuring group time. Groups can be structured in many different ways and facilitators should use a variety of techniques to teach skills. However, while instructional methods may vary, facilitators should work to develop a sequence for activities that will remain consistent across sessions.

- 1) Check In Conversation: Group time starts with this check-in strategy which is described on page 24.
- 2) Idiom-of-the-Day: When students have learning idioms / figurative language as an objective on their IEP, a book on idioms by Scholastic Books has been used. There are several books / resources about idioms available on the market. One student opens the book to any page and picks an idiom that interests them. Another student writes the idiom on our Idiom-of-the-Day poster (a list of all the idioms we've reviewed).

Someone reads the definition of the idiom, the history of where it came from, and each person tries using the idiom in a sentence. The facilitator also takes a turn in choosing the idiom for the day so that the most common ones can be introduced. One of the idioms previously listed on the poster is also reviewed.

- 3) Review Skill (specific skill is listed on the schedule for that day's group): If the students have finished learning a new skill, it's reviewed. This can happen through discussion, quizzing the students on the steps for the skill, and / or role playing the skill. If only part of a new skill has been learned, those parts / steps are reviewed. The facilitator also reviews why the skill is important, to help the students understand why we're taking the time to learn it.
- 4) New Skill: The facilitator leads a discussion about the new skill (which is listed on the group schedule). The students share / guess what they think the skill is about and why it would be an important skill to know. A poster lists the steps of the skill. An example of a poster is on page 25. (Responding to Teasing). The facilitator covers up the steps on the poster with another piece of paper and leaves only the title showing. Students guess what the first step might be. The facilitator shows each step, one at a time, giving the students a chance to guess what the step is before it is shown on the poster. If available, a worksheet that shows the steps of the skill is also reviewed with students. Students use highlighters to mark important sentences or phrases as directed by the facilitator. Sometimes the students are asked what they think is the most important part to highlight for each step. Once students are quite familiar with the steps for the new skill, they role play to practice using the skill. Ideas about role-playing are found on page 18. Learning a new skill usually takes more than one session.
- 5) Sometimes the group has to end at different times on different days due to scheduling issues, so the ending time / good bye time is listed on the group schedule. The group ends by counting how many points have been earned (using the 30 Point Party system) and the facilitator reminds the students of which day the group will meet again.

Materials to Support Group Activities

In planning individual lesson activities, facilitators should recognize the importance of providing interactive experiences within the group. Materials should be chosen that support social interaction as a context for teaching and practicing specific social skills. Verbal instruction and worksheets can be useful to introduce concepts and skills, but facilitators should move quickly to other methods. Additional strategies include using Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations, art activities, field trips, assignments around the school to observe social skills in action, videotaping the student interaction, role playing, read-aloud fiction, Power Cards and interactive posters.

Role Plays

Often the facilitator will role play the skill first. Then students are asked to volunteer demonstrating the skills during a role play. If no one volunteers, one student is chosen and encouraged to go first. The student who will be demonstrating the skill asks for volunteers to “act” with him / her. Another student can volunteer to be the assistant and say “action” when the students are ready to begin as if they are shooting a movie. It’s important for the facilitator to keep feedback from students positive toward each other. Students can name the correct steps they saw. Rather than only telling what the student did wrong, the facilitator can first give a compliment of some kind on the skill then ask, “Did you forget any steps?” to see if the student knows what they forgot or did wrong. The facilitator can offer a suggestion of a way to correct the role play. For example the facilitator might say “How about step 3? Let’s try it again with that step.”

Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations

Details on these teaching strategies can be found at Carol Gray’s website www.thegraycenter.org and in her books on these topics.

Power Cards

Eliza Gagnon has published a book, *Power Cards*, telling how to use this strategy (see bibliography for complete reference.)