

Preface

Like many school districts, the Forest Lake Area School district has seen a dramatic increase in the number of students with Asperger's Syndrome/High Functioning Autism (AS/HFA) in the past decade. As the district identified more and more students on the Autism Spectrum, special education staff worked collaboratively to address the needs of the growing number of students in this category first in elementary then at secondary levels.

This collaboration has yielded a number of positive results.

First, staff agreed that the educational focus for students with AS/HFA must go beyond direct instruction of academic tasks to include skills that underlie both academic and "real world" success. Adopting such a philosophy meant that student's educational plans needed to include more deliberate and direct instruction of social skills.

In the late spring of 2001 a Learning Disabilities Teacher volunteered to become the case manager for all 12 of the students with Asperger's / High Functioning Autism at her elementary school.

That summer, writing monies were allocated for social skills curriculum planning & development for those students. Two staff worked to build a curriculum for teaching social skills. They reviewed Individual Education Plans of the students whom the Learning Disabilities teacher would case manage that fall. This generated a "List of Skills" that needed direct teaching. All of the IEP objectives were listed and divided into four areas:

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills
- Functional/Organizational Skills
- Sensory Skills

Over the next two years, students progressed in the areas addressed, but staff recognized the need to do curriculum planning/writing for additional skills. Two additional staff wanted to create a group of resources to teach social skills to their elementary level students. This team of four completed a

second summer writing project which expanded on the original “List of Skills” to include:

- Friendship Skills
- Conflict/Problem Solving Skills
- Work Habits
- Perspective Taking

In the summer of 2004 five staff from the secondary schools in Forest Lake completed a similar summer writing project, which included a list of skills and resources for teaching social skills to secondary students with AS/HFA.

This resource manual is based on our direct experience and review of available resources. The “List of Skills” and resources reflect the individual needs of specific students in our school district. It was not a comprehensive list of recommended skills for programming for all students with AS/HFA; however, it does include a broad range of skills that will apply to many students.

Much of the content of the manual was previously shared at the state autism conference sponsored by the Autism Society of Minnesota. We presented the workshop “ABCs of Creating Social Skill Groups” in 2003 and 2004.

Written for educators who work with students with AS/HFA, this manual includes: practical information on how to create social skills groups, a list of possible skills to teach with an outline containing specific skills and resources to help teach those skills. Also included is a bibliography, a list of selected videos, games, and children’s books that teach or highlight social skills. Although this resource manual was written for elementary level skills, the techniques are easily modified for the secondary level.

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