

1. Rationale For Social Skills Training

For many students with Asperger's Syndrome/High Functioning Autism, social skills learning does not happen incidentally. Rather, social skills must be taught, practiced and sometimes even over-learned. Some educators may not fully understand the need for deliberate teaching of social skills, or the severity of challenges faced by students with social skills deficits. They may envision "social skills" training as simply teaching the basic concepts underlying accepted manners and etiquette. However, students with AS/HFA need very basic and direct assistance in learning specific skill sets, rather than concepts of social grace. For example, they need to be directly taught how to begin a conversation, how to handle conversational changes of topic, how to ask for assistance, or how to deal with teasing.

Simply being around typical peers for all or part of the day will not be sufficient to build social skills; students with AS/HFA require direct teaching of social skills. Students with AS/HFA have difficulties learning by observation - either they fail to observe, or fail to understand and generalize the significance of what they have observed.

Once skills are mastered, though, students with AS/HFA benefit from access to typical peers in order to practice these skills and generalize their use beyond the social skills group setting. However, practice in general education settings needs to be deliberately and continuously programmed with monitoring and supports in place.