

5. Scheduling / Length of Group Meetings

It is important to note here that Autism Spectrum Disorders has been described as a social disability and in order to provide direct teaching of social skills, groups should meet frequently. If we meet with our students only once a week for social skills group, will that provide enough direct service to make appropriate progress on their IEP? If you compare this to an LD student who needs reading instruction: would meeting once a week for 30 minutes meet his/her reading needs?

The teacher needs to decide on how long each meeting will last. Scheduling groups can be challenging, especially when students are in different grades, but have the same needs. One way that we have found to be successful is to:

- 1) Call a meeting of all the mainstream teachers of the students
- 2) Have a list of groups with student names and grade ready on the chalkboard.
- 3) Discuss how much time will be needed for group (i.e. how many sessions per week and length of sessions.)
- 4) Have cross-grade teachers brainstorm the schedule (what time / what days the groups meet).

This is a collaborative way to involve mainstream teachers in the process and foster their support.

Schedules for groups can be tailored to meet your time constraints. Groups can meet 2-5 times per week for 20-40 minutes a session. We found that a group of 4-5 students is a manageable size. The following options are suggestions of schedules:

Group meets 4-5 times / week for 20 minutes each

- Social skills lesson (possible sensory integration lesson once a week) (15 minutes)
- Reinforcement / practice time (practice skill from lesson)
- Activity or game (5 minutes)

Group meets 2 times / week for 40 minutes each

- Social skills lesson
- Students also meet in pairs with Speech / Language Clinician for 20 minutes twice weekly.

Group meets 3 times / week for 40 minutes each

- Social skills lesson / practice (30 minutes)
- Activity or game (10 minutes)

Group meets 4-5 times / week for 40 minutes each

- (5th meeting could be a sensory integration lesson)
- Sensory integration activity (10 minutes)
- Social skills lesson (15 minutes)
- Reinforcement/activity/game (10 minutes)
- Assignment (mainstream homework) organization time (5 minutes)