

Growing Up Social:
Exploring How Social
Communication and language
develop over time ...and
strategies to help!

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Today's Message

1. Darn, teaching social stuff is more complicated than we have accepted as a field.
2. If we respect the complexity we can better respect our student's learning challenges.
3. Let's teach the honest truth about social behavior and not the social world according to how adults want children to behave. So go teach your children to do the "social fake!".

What is meant by having “good social skills”?

- Sharing space and adapting effectively to the different people in different contexts within the same environments and across environments.

Exploring Early Social Development

- First week of life babies start matching other's facial expression.
- 9-12 months old: Joint attention
- Along with joint attention babies start to read other people's plans (physical intentions)
- Use gestural communication (pointing) as baby moves towards the abstract.
- Language then emerges to request, comment and question.

However, some babies do not switch into an abstract mode.

- Rather than point, they take people to what they are thinking about and then bang on it.
- Difficulties in shifting into abstract social thought are related to why these children have significant language disorders. E.g. pronoun shifts, etc.

Development of Perspective Taking



Play concepts that emerge for typical toddlers in the preschool years which also help them learn to

- Pretending and abstracting
- Imitation
- Synchronicity of body movement/body presence.
- Making guesses about other people in play.
- Sharing an imagination rather than a singular imagination.
- Listening to and expressing related ideas.
- Cooperating and negotiating through actions and language.

By 4 years old...

- Children are engaged in group, imaginative cooperative play. These play skills are critical for the later development of conversation, reading comprehension, class relations, personal problem solving, etc...

It is assumed all students enter elementary school with this “social software.

social skill production

Social skill challenges often
come
from poor social
knowledge.

Social skills are the tip
of the iceberg.

Social information is at the
base of the iceberg
supporting our demonstration
of appropriate social skills.
e.g. Eye contact

Social knowledge supports our social skill behavior

Teaching for students with AS and HFA means exploring social thinking as it leads to social skill development

- Eye contact

Social Thinking is the Infrastructure for many Educational standards

- Teaching social thinking and related skills is not an extra bonus to education **IT INCLUDES the ESSENTIAL** elements of education both for academics and life skills.

Select Reading Standards

- K.2.2 predictions with pictures and context.
- 4.3.5 Define figurative language and identify its use in literary works.
- 7.3.1 Identify events that advance the plot...and foreshadow future actions.

Weak ability to relate to other people's perspectives impacts academic development.

- Reading Comprehension
- Written Expression
- Working as part of a group in a classroom.

Weak social development also impacts skills as adults.

- Self-advocating
- Getting, keeping and advancing in a job.
- Developing independent social relations.
- Organizing one's home, coursework and recreational time.

What can we do to help students with severe social communication challenges?

- FOCUS ON FUNCTION at school!
- Make learning in the 1st person; make it real by applying learning in real settings!
- Teach all skills for functional application: reading decoding, basic math, following sequences, etc.

What can we do to help verbal higher functioning students?

- Continue to teach social learning by explicitly teaching how to “think socially” and the related and evolving social skills. We call it “teaching social thinking and related skills”
- Exploring “social thinking” helps to demystify the complexity of social.

Show video of Treatment Session

Core Concepts for Teaching Social Thinking

www.socialthinking.com

Articles, information, products..

Language only makes sense
when the communicative
partners are thinking about
each other!

Social thinking is part of our emotional processing.

- Your friends are people that make you feel good about you.
- The goal is to learn to adapt our social skills to keep people feeling ok in our presence. We all appear to want to avoid other's "weird thoughts" about us.

Social Rules Change with Age

- Social Skills increase significantly in nuance and sophistication with age.
- Some of our students errors are due to the fact that they don't recognize the "rules have changed". Again, we never teach this explicitly.
- Ex: Interruptions, apologizes.

Social contexts are filled with hidden rules, called “The Hidden Curriculum”

- Ex: Barnes and Noble

4 Steps of Communication

1. Think about the person(s) you are talking to.
2. Physical presence: body space, gestures, expressions, voice, etc..
3. Eyes to think
4. Language to relate to others.

Perspective Taking has four immediate steps

1. I think about you.
2. I think about WHY you are near me.
What is your intent?
3. You think about what I am thinking about you.
4. I monitor you and modify my behavior to keep you thinking about me the way I want you to think about me!

Today we have reviewed the concept of thought as it contributes to social.

- But the good news is...we all continue to learn to get better at social across our lives...
- There is no end to when and what to teach. Appreciate the complexity of how the process works, how to teach it and apply it to many more kids than those “diagnosed”!