

**Social-Communication  
Treatment Goals & Strategies for  
Individuals with  
Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

Julie E. Cleary, PhD, CCC-SLP  
University of Memphis  
jcleary@memphis.edu



**What we will cover today...**

- Social-communication skills definition
- Why social-communication skills are important skills to target in intervention
- Identifying social-communication skills to target in intervention
- Ways in which to target social-communication skills in intervention

**What are social-communication skills?**

- Contributions to social-communication competence in young children begins with:
  - Joint attention
    - Sharing attention
    - Sharing affect
    - Sharing intentions
  - Symbol use
    - Shared meaning of conventional gestures and words



**What are social-communication skills?**

- Developmental interaction of joint attention and symbol use form foundation for engagement in conversation
  - What to say
  - How to say it
  - How to interpret what others say
  - How to participate in social exchange



**What are social-communication skills?**

- As children become teenagers and adults social interaction skills can be characterized by:
  - Demonstrating reciprocity in conversations, interactions, friendships, and work relationships
  - Sharing of common interests
  - Showing empathy and understanding of others' perspectives
  - Identifying and attempting to resolve potential conflicts without hurting others



### **Why be concerned about social-communication skills in ASD?**

- Predictor of positive, long-term outcomes
- Serve as foundation for learning other skills
- Major defining characteristic for many children with ASD as well as other DDs
- Often first priority for families
- Having 1-2 close friends is predictive of later adjustment
- Buffers impact of stressful life events

### **Why be concerned about social-communication skills in ASD?**

- Positively correlates with self esteem
- Increases independence
- Negatively correlates with depression and anxiety
- Peer rejection is strong predictor of:
  - Mental health problems
  - Juvenile delinquency
  - Early withdrawal from school

### **How are impairments in social-communication characterized?**

- Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
- Deficits in non-verbal & verbal communicative behaviors
- Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships

(APA, 2000; www.dsm5.org)

### **What social-communication skills are a priority to teach?**

- Socially and ecologically valid behaviors that lead to
  - Friendships
  - Successful academic encounters
  - Successful work relationships
  - Positive first impressions



### **Goals for intentional communication**

- Understanding cause and effect
- Having a desire to communicate
- Having someone with whom to communicate and establish reciprocity
- Having something to communicate about
- Having conventional means to request, protest, and gain attention
- Expand range of communicative functions
- Develop use of an augmentative and alternative communication system
- Follow simple directions accompanied by visual cues

### **Goals for emerging & early communication**

- Increase conventional means to include distal gestures and complex vocalizations
- Direct attention to self before communicating
- Increase intelligible and unambiguous acts
- Expand functional expressive vocabulary
- Increase flexibility across people, places, and things
- Follow verbal 1-2 step directions (related steps, minimal visual cues)

### Goals for verbal communication

- Develop cohesive narratives
- Establish critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Demonstrate flexibility in conversation
- Use and understanding of literal and non-literal language
- Improve expression and interpretation of emotions
- Follow multi-step directions

### Goals for social interaction “Social Rules”

- Accepting and giving positive touch
- Accepting and staying in proximity
- Eye gaze shifts with others
- Use of social smile and gestures
- Responding to others
- Participating in group action
- Turn taking in activities and conversation
- Showing and giving in play

### Goals for social interaction “Relationship Skills”

- Make and maintain friendships
- Understanding facial expressions and responding with empathy
- Mistake management and problem solving
- Collaboration
- Reciprocal conversations
- Handling peer rejection, rumors, and gossip
- Hosting and attending play dates and get together

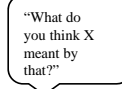
### Ways in which to prompt appropriate use of social skills

- Cues should be age appropriate and acceptable to the individual

Visual Cues



Verbal Cues



Hand Gestures



Environmental Supports



### Joint Action Routines

- Select routines that are enjoyable for child and adult and that occur frequently
- Obvious unifying theme or purpose
- Requirement for joint focus and interaction
- Clearly delineated roles
- Exchangeable roles
- Turn-taking
- Logical, nonarbitrary sequence
- Clear beginning and end
- Planned repetition
- Plan for controlled variation



### Incidental Teaching

- Arrange environment to create communication opportunities
- Follow the child's lead and establish joint focus on activities or objects of interest
- Following child's communicative attempt,
  - Model new skills
  - Request a response (mand) when targeting functional use of skills
  - Use time-delay (wait) to target spontaneous use of skills

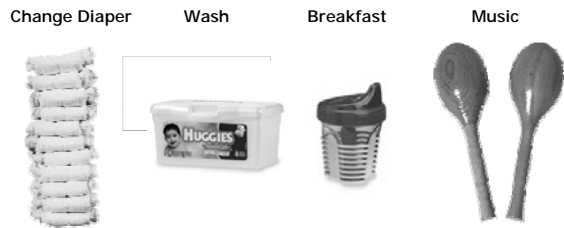
## Why use a visual system?

- Helps others to understand what child is trying to communicate
- Helps child initiate choice making, have a way to say no, and maintain self-control
- Helps child to understand the meaning of what others are saying
- Provides information for children to actively participate, function effectively, and independently
- Help child make sense of his or her world

## Visual Schedules

- Help child get better perspective of order of events and how they relate to one another
  - Sequence of events
  - New, different, and unusual activities
  - What is not happening
  - When it is time to stop one activity and move on to another activity
- Review schedules frequently
- Incorporate choice making
- Gradually introduce variability
- Avoid specific times if activity may occur in time range
- Range from task-specific to calendars

## Visual Object Schedule

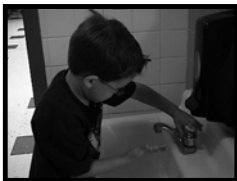


(Hanline et al., 2004)

## Visual Photo Schedule



(Hanline et al., 2004)



## Visual Schedule



(Hanline et al., 2004)

### Activity Turn-Taking



(Hanline et al., 2004)

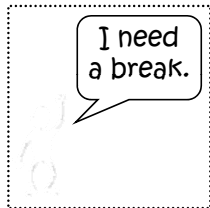
### Cue Cards



(Hanline et al., 2004)

### Cue Cards

- Recall a word or phrase
- Recall a new or difficult step to complete a routine
- Clarify a solution to a problem



### Replacement Skills Cue Cards



(Hanline et al., 2004)

### Saying "Please" and "Thank You"

When I want something, I ask someone for it.



I say, "I want the \_\_\_\_\_ please."



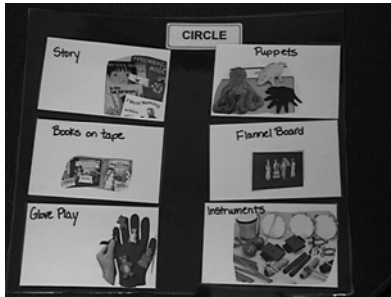
When I get what I ask for, I say, "Thank you."



### Communication Device



### Choice Board



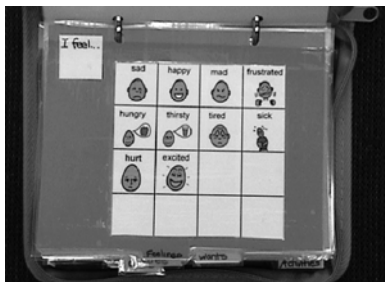
(Hanline et al., 2004)

### First/Then Photo Schedule



(Hanline et al., 2004)

### Feelings Board



(Hanline et al., 2004)

### How are social-communication skills taught during intervention?

- Direct instruction of targeted skills
  - Structured lesson
  - Provide template for appropriate behavior
- Role-play/Modeling
  - Clinician demonstration of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors
  - Typically developing peer models
  - Discuss what went well and what went wrong in the interaction then “fix it”
  - Identify appropriate behaviors in clinicians and other clients during natural interactions

### How are social-communication skills taught during intervention?

- Behavioral rehearsal
  - Role-play/practice with peers or clinicians
  - Play activities
  - Social games
  - Group problem solving activities
  - Coaching provided by clinician/caregiver to encourage appropriate use of targeted skills
- Real-life practice
  - Homework assignments
    - Start with peers who are members of the group/class or family members
    - Gradually move to implementing skills with peers who are not members of the group/class
  - Homework review

### Challenges encountered when teaching social-communication skills

- Creating appropriate and meaningful opportunities to practice
- Providing opportunities to practice rather than discussing the rules
- Data collection
  - Validity of probe data
  - Intervention participants
  - Location of intervention
  - Identifying opportunities for trials
  - Room arrangement

### Challenges encountered when teaching social-communication skills

- Assisting the individuals with ASD to identify the importance of successful social interactions
- Providing enough information to caregivers to help them understand the expectations for change

### Conversation is an art form...



### Selected References

- Adams, L. (2006). *Group treatment for Asperger syndrome: A social skill curriculum*. San Diego, CA: Plural.
- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Bricker, D., & Cripe, J. W. (1992). *An activity-based approach to early intervention*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Charman, T., & Stone, W. (2006). *Social & communication development in autism spectrum disorders: Early identification, diagnosis, & intervention*. New York: Guilford.
- Hanline, M. F., Wetherby, A., Woods, J., Fox, L., & Lentini, R. (2004). *Positive Beginnings: Supporting Young Children with Challenging Behavior* [CD-ROM]. Tallahassee, FL: Author.
- Janzen, J. E. (1996). *Understanding the nature of autism*. San Antonio: Therapy Skill Builders.
- Laugeson, E. A., & Frankel, F. (2010). *Social skills for teenagers with developmental and autism spectrum disorders: The PEERS treatment manual*. New York: Routledge.
- National Research Council. (2001). *Educating young children with autism*. Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Quill, K. A. (1995). *Teaching children with autism: Strategies to enhance communication and socialization*. New York: Delmar.
- Quill, K. A. (2000). *Do-watch-listen-say: Social and communication intervention for children with autism*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Wetherby, A. M., & Prizant, B. M. (Eds.). (2000). *Autism spectrum disorders: A transactional developmental perspective*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.