

Social Competence and Individuals with ASD

An OCALE Parent Package

Objectives

- Participants will be able to define social competence
- Participants will be able to identify why social competence is important for success and satisfaction in the lives of all persons
- Participants will recognize how the underlying characteristics of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) effect the development of social competence

Social Competence

The ability to interact successfully with peers and adults; social effectiveness

Assumes a certain set of expectations:

- Knowing the rules
- Reading facial expressions and body language of other people
- Reacting consistently to your own and others' emotions
- Communicating appropriately with different groups

What Is Social Competence?

"Social [competence] means one is able to adapt to an ever-changing landscape that takes into consideration the environment, the people in it, the thoughts, beliefs and needs of the individual and others who share the environment-whether or not they are in direct communication-as well as individual and collective history of knowledge and experience."

Winner, 2002, p. 21



Social Skills

Need to know how and when to use them to be successful

- Asking for help
- Using names
- Listening
- Sharing ideas
- Helping others
- Communicating clearly
- Following directions
- Taking turns
- Greeting others
- Using good manners
- Using friendship skills
- Showing empathy
- Showing a sense of humor
- Knowing how to share
- Initiating a conversation



Differences

Social Competence

- Overall ability to interact appropriately in a variety of social situations
- Learn to read social environments

Social Skills

- Ability to perform a list of discrete interactions appropriate to one social situation
- Each skill learned separately

Social Skills are part of learning Social Competence.



Need for Social Competence



Success in School

Top 10 Skills as identified by a survey of 8,000 teachers

- Listen to others
- Follow the steps
- Follow the rules
- Ignore distractions
- Take turns when you talk
- Ask for help
- Get along with others
- Stay calm with others
- Be responsible for your behavior
- Do nice things for others

(Elliott & Grisham, 2006)

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How Does Social Competence Help School Success?

“If we increase social skills, we see commensurate increases in academic learning. That doesn’t mean that social skills make you smarter; it means that these skills make you more amenable to learning.”

Elliott, 2008

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Prepares Young People for Success in Adulthood

Common list of soft skills employers want:

- Social skills/interests/involvement
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal abilities
- Problem solving
- Teamwork
- Adaptability/flexibility



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Necessity of Friendship

- Although work is rewarding, most humans are fulfilled by social time
- Individuals with autism struggle with social competence, especially friendship skills
- Persons with autism want to have friends
- To help individuals with autism develop social competence, we need to understand the characteristics of autism

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Social Competence Considerations

Classic Autism



High Functioning Autism/Aspergers

Just as there is a spectrum of autism. There is a spectrum of social competence impacted by the following:

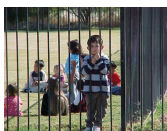
Age
Ability levels
Situation

Audience
Environment
History

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Underlying Characteristics

- Social
- Communication
- Restricted patterns of behavior
- Sensory differences
- Cognitive differences
- Motor differences
- Emotional vulnerability
- Medical or biological differences



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(Aspy & Grossman, 2007)

Characteristic: Social



Difficulty with:

- Eye contact
- Taking turns
- Understanding emotion
- Understanding facial expressions and body language
- Unaware of how they are perceived
- Beginning, ending conversations difficult
- Don't know hidden curriculum
- Seems uninterested in interactions

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Social: Effect on Social Competence Development

"Social interactions that come naturally to most people can be daunting for people with autism. As a child, I was like an animal that had no instincts to guide me; I just had to learn by trial and error. I was always observing, trying to work out the best way to behave, but I never fit in. I had to think about every social interaction...I was a scientist trying to figure out the ways of the natives."

Thinking in Pictures, Grandin, 2006

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Characteristic: Restricted Patterns of Behavior, Interests, and Activities

- Routines and rituals
- Repetitive motor behaviors (physical, vocal)
- Need for sameness
- May not have interest in a variety of objects/toys/games/books
- Possible special interest areas
- Difficulty transitioning



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Restricted Behavior: Effect on Social Competence Development

"One day I went out into the road. In the back of my mind I sensed that a car was coming, but it didn't mean danger to me. My obsession was too strong and I felt invincible. I had to see the speedometer! The man driving the car stopped, grabbed hold of me, and took me to the house. I couldn't imagine what I had done—why was he so angry with me when all I wanted was to look inside his car? At this age I lacked an imagination..."

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Effect on Social Competence Development

...I simply could not picture things in my mind. It was many years before I could do so. I wasn't afraid of moving cars because I couldn't imagine that they could hit me—to me, a moving car was the same as a parked car, just an object without potential."

[There's A Boy in Here](#), Barron & Barron, 2002



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Characteristic: Communication



- Verbal/non-verbal
- Difficulty with expressive language
- Echolalia: immediate/delayed/scripts
- May babble, hum, make repetitive sounds
- Eye contact
- Expressive and receptive language levels may not match

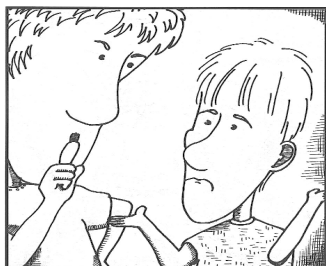
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Characteristic: Communication (Continued)

- May be very literal
- Trouble reading non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, body language, or body space
- Difficulty understanding that other people may have a different perspective; interests
- May communicate with behaviors

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Communication: Effect on Social Competence Development



My teacher says I'm rude. I think I'm honest. I don't understand why I can't tell someone that they have bad breath, ugly hair, or to go away because I'm busy.
This is Asperger Syndrome.
Gagnon, E., & Myles, B. S. (1999). This is Asperger syndrome. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC.

Characteristic: Sensory Differences

- Responds in an unusual manner to sounds, pain, taste, light or color, temperature, smells
- Seeks or avoids activities that provide touch, pressure, or movement
- Makes noises such as humming or singing frequently
- Reacts with a fight or flight reaction due to anxiety



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Sensory: Effect on Social Competence Development



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Characteristic: Cognitive Differences

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classic: Usually delayed intellectual abilities • HFA/Asperger: Usually typical to gifted abilities • Strong rote memory; knows facts • Special interests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor organizational skills • Literal understanding • Difficulty with abstract • Inability to generalize • Attention problems |
|--|--|



Cognitive: Effect on Social Competence Development



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Characteristic: Motor Differences

- Balance difficulties
- Poor fine motor skills; may write slowly or refuse to write
- Poor gross motor coordination; athletics can be difficult
- Awkward gait
- Unusual body postures, movements or facial expressions
- Trouble starting/finishing actions



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Motor: Effect on Social Competence Development



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Characteristic: Emotional Vulnerability

- Difficulty identifying and understanding feelings
- May become stressed in novel situations
- Doesn't want to make mistakes
- Anxiety/depression
- Low self-esteem
- Rages/aggression/self-injury



Emotional Vulnerability: Effect on Social Competence Development



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Medical/Biological

- Examples may include: mood instability; eating/digestive issues; sleep challenges; attention difficulties; neurological disorders
- Learn what issues exist and what supports are needed
- Communicate between home, school, and medical personnel
- Research medical/biological issues

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Medical/Biological: Effect on Social Competence Development



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