

PUPILS WITH AUTISM

UNIT 14

THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CURRICULUM: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE PUPIL ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/social-emotional/intro

BRIEFING 1 – DEVELOPING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

A priority for pupils with autism is the development of social and emotional understanding and their ability to relate to adults and peers. They will need these skills to succeed in later life in relationships, further and higher education and employment.

For pupils with autism their future quality of life is more ...likely to depend on the degree to which they can learn to live with and understand others than solely on any academic skills they may possess.¹

Alongside the academic curriculum it will be important for teachers to plan opportunities for the provision of social 'coaching'. This may involve the embedding of a social commentary within lesson to inform pupils what is expected in terms of **how** they engage with learning. It may also require the careful planning of opportunities to provide social support and explanations about why people behave in a particular way or adhere to certain accepted conventions. As Temple Grandin has pointed out:

Figuring out how to be socially competent is a slow process of continuous improvement. There are no sudden break-throughs, and there is no single 'social skills program' that will make a child become socially aware. It's a team effort and that team changes as children become adults.

Grandin, T. and Barron, S. (2005) *Unwritten rules of social relationships USA*; Future Horizons (p. 36)

It is of particular importance that teachers do not underestimate the daily impact for pupils on the autism spectrum of trying to navigate an environment which may operate on unspoken, implicitly agreed social conventions.

TASK 1 – IDENTIFYING SOCIAL DEMANDS

Identify the social demands for a particular pupil on the autism spectrum across the course of a school day.

Make a note of any successful social encounters he or she has and identify what you believe contributed to the success in each case.

Are there some principles that you could derive from these observations to support the pupil to extend their social understanding?

¹ Jordan, R., and Powell, S. (1995) *Understanding and Teaching Children with Autism*, Oxford: John Wiley and Son, Little, 2002

BRIEFING 2 – SUPPORTING THE PUPIL WITH AUTISM TO IMPROVE THEIR SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

There are many useful books that suggest strategies and, in some cases, whole programmes devoted to developing social behaviours which may increase the possibility of pupils with autism building contact with others that is meaningful and successful. It is likely that those that focus on developing social understanding, rather than the rote teaching of a number of social skills will be most useful.

By providing the pupil with social information we enhance the likelihood that they may be able to have some choice in their social behaviour. This briefing focuses on three strategies that attempt to address social understanding:

- Comic strip conversations
- Social Stories
- Storyboarding.

Comic strip Conversations

Comic strip conversations² are a useful and visual way of exploring social situations. For a full description of the process see Gray's guidance. A brief overview is given here.

A comic strip conversation is a drawn representation of a social situation using stick figures and a number of 'symbols' such as speech and thought bubbles. The adult and the pupil take turns to draw elements of the conversation. There are a number of key questions that may be asked to support the pupil in understanding the nature of the social situation, for example:

1. Where are you? (Draw person)
2. Who else is here? (Draw person)
3. What are you doing? (Draw relevant items, actions)
4. What happened? What did others do? (Draw relevant items, actions)
5. What did you say? (Use talk symbol)
6. What did other say? (Use talk symbol)
7. What did you think when you said that? (Use think symbol)
8. What did the other think when they said/did that? (Use think symbol)

Once the conversation is drawn in this way, there are some other elements that can be incorporated. For example, the adult may contribute some social information by

² Gray, C (1994) Comic Strip Conversations

accepting the pupil's view of the situation and then pointing out some possible alternatives by adding different comments or thoughts:

- 'So they may have been thinking....' (whatever the pupil suggested), or
- '...or maybe they were thinking....' (additional ideas from the adult and drawn in a separate think bubble).

As the discussion is recorded pictorially, it becomes a static reference that the pupil can refer to for guidance in managing similar social interactions in the future.

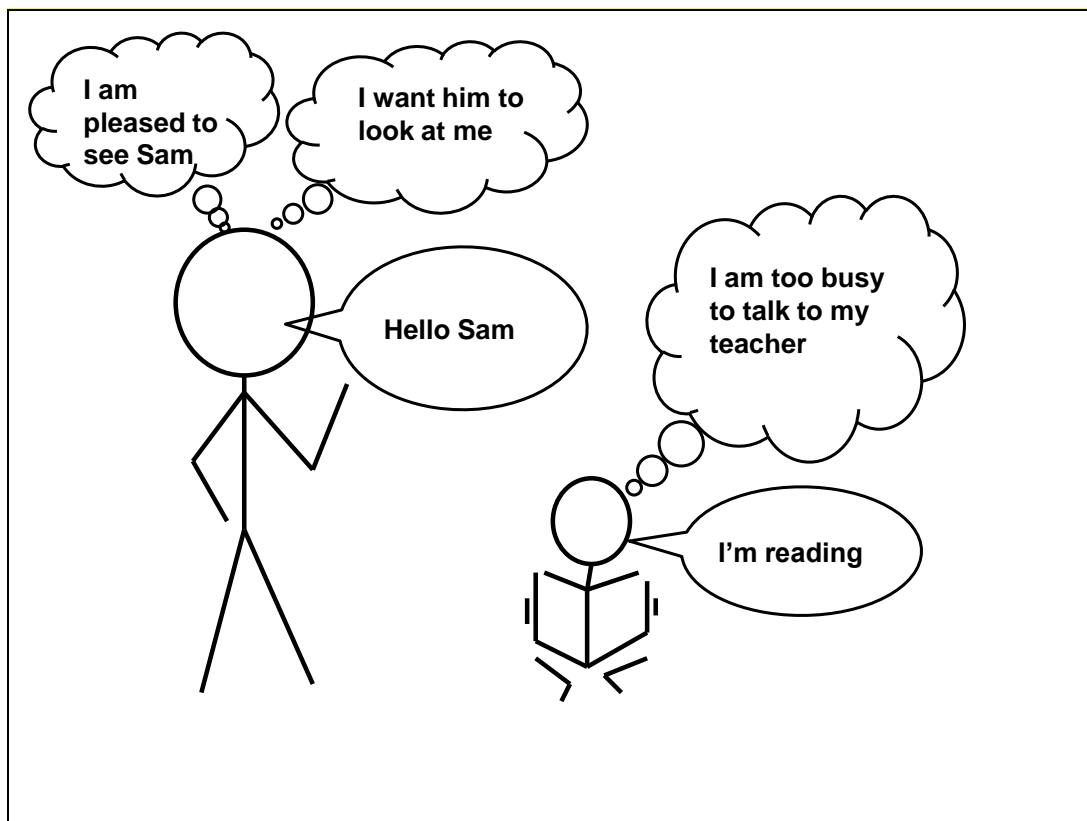
See online resource:

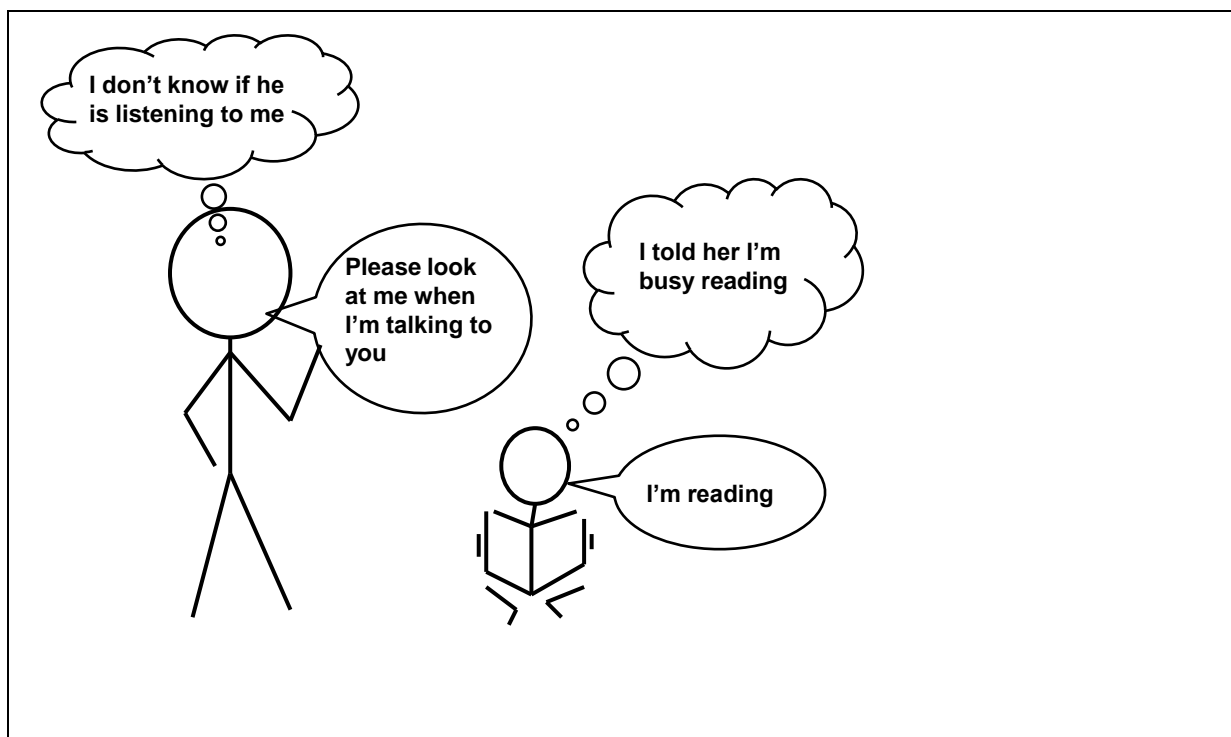
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/social-emotional/comic-strip

In the example of a Comic Strip Conversation below, the two pictures illustrate the mid-point in the process.

Sam did not turn to his teacher when she greeted him. The speech bubbles reflect what was said. In Sam's think bubbles is a record of what he said he thought, whilst in the teacher's think bubbles is what the adult suggested the teacher might be thinking (Sam was not able to suggest anything for this).

Drawing 1: Sample Comic Strip Conversation - Sam





As a next step, the adult helped Sam to think of some other options for what he could say (and potentially think) and these were included next in the drawing under the '...or maybe....' option.

In an interesting investigation into the use of Comic Strip Conversations to improve the social relating of three pupils on the autism spectrum, Pierson and Glaeser³ found this to be an effective strategy.

The drawn conversations were used with three pupils (aged 6, 7, and 8 years) in an attempt to address issues relating to social interaction in the playground, but each concerning quite different aspects of behaviour.

The first pupil, who reported that he had no friends, would try to engage others by hitting and kicking (although he would also do this when he was angry with the other pupils). The intention was to increase the appropriate use of his hands and feet in various games in the playground (with a desired outcome that other pupils may then be more willing to engage with him in play activities).

The second pupil was described as socially awkward and shy and this was most marked at the start of a social exchange. He would tend to look away and speak in a

³ Pierson, M.R., and Glaeser, B. (2007) Using comic strip conversations to increase social satisfaction and decrease loneliness in students with autism spectrum disorders *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 42, 460-466.

loud voice. The aim for this pupil was to increase eye contact and reduce voice volume in order to increase his acceptance by other pupils.

The third pupil had already developed some positive playground behaviours. He could play successfully with peers for about five minutes but then he would get involved in arguments, which he blamed on the others and which made them less willing to initiate play with him. The target for this pupil was to accept responsibility and apologise when he had made a mistake so that the other pupils may be more willing to initiate play with him again.

Following a two-week observation period (during which time the target behaviours were identified), Comic Strip Conversations were used for a six-week period as part of the study. They were used naturally, i.e. in response to an observed incident relating to the target behaviour, and several times a day. By the end of the six-week period, all three pupils demonstrated a significant improvement in their target areas.

The researchers also noted:

Students improved their abilities to be included in classroom activities and playground games, increased appropriate skills for social greetings, and were able to learn the importance of taking responsibility and apologizing when necessary in social situations. All of these skills led to improved peer relationships and fewer signs of loneliness.⁴

TASK 2 – COMIC STRIP CONVERSATIONS

Identify a social activity which is problematic for a pupil with autism. Explore the situation with the pupil using the comic strip conversation approach. Refer to, review or update the comic strip conversation as often as necessary to reflect the needs and understanding of the pupil.

Social Stories

This is another approach developed by Carol Gray. The purpose of a Social Story is to provide relevant social information in a positive and developmentally appropriate manner. A Social Story may follow on from a Comic Strip Conversation which has identified areas of social confusion for the pupil or may be a response to observed areas of social challenge for the individual. Gray provides clear guidelines for writing a Social Story. An overview is provided here but it is recommended that further

⁴ Pierson, M.R., and Glaeser, B. (2007) Using comic strip conversations to increase social satisfaction and decrease loneliness in students with autism spectrum disorders *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 42, 460-466.

information^{5, 6} and training is sought. Gray's website will also provide useful information on this. (<http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories>)

Having identified a social issue for a pupil, if it is felt that a Social Story will be a helpful way of providing the missing or unknown social information, it will be necessary to consider the following:

- Consider the perspective of the pupil on the autism spectrum: what is it that they need to know in order to make sense of a situation?
- Remember that the purpose of the story is to address social understanding rather than rote compliance, therefore the story will **describe** rather than direct
- In writing, therefore, it will be important to describe a situation, a skill, or a concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives and common responses.
- Use means that are most accessible for the student (e.g. symbols, photos to support text, if necessary).
- Stories need to be literally accurate so include a vocabulary that will support this (for example, rather than 'always' use 'usually' or 'often')
- Stories are written using positive language and statements and many are written to celebrate the pupil's success in a particular social area.
- Stories will have a title which identifies and reinforces the most important information in the social story; it may be written as a question but will capture the main point or 'gist of the story.'

A basic Social Story will have the following characteristics:

- An introduction, body and conclusion
- Answers to 'who' questions (who, where, what, when)
- Usually written from a first person perspective
- Occasionally written from a third person perspective
- Positive language and positively stated responses and behaviours
- Uses up to four basic sentence types in the agreed ratio

Basic Social Stories will use:

- Descriptive sentences: whole stories can be written using only these types of sentences which provide an accurate, factual description of social information
- Perspective sentences: describe the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, motivations and physical state of other people (often providing information about why people do certain things)
- Affirmative sentences: often describe a commonly held view and may stress an important [point or serve to reassure or feedback success to the pupil

⁵ Howley, M and Arnold, E. (2005) *Revealing the hidden social code*. London; Jessica Kingsley

⁶ Gray, C. (2010) *The new social story book*. USA; Future Horizons

- Directive sentences: must be used sparingly and may not appear at all in a Social Story or may appear only once in relation to about 5 of the other types of sentence. It is important to remember that the purpose of the story is to provide accurate social information rather than to change behaviour. Directive sentences may describe a suggested response or choice of responses to a situation or concept.

A sample Social Story, written for Sam following the Comic Strip Conversation is included here.

Example 1: Sample Social Story for Sam

What to do when my teacher says 'Hello' to me

My name is Sam.

I am 6 years old.

I am in Mrs Golding's class.

When it is choosing time I sometimes choose a book to read in the reading corner.

Sometimes, when my teacher comes into the room she says 'Hello'.

Usually, she likes to say 'Hello' when she has been away from the classroom for a little while. It is a way of being friendly.

When my teacher says, 'Hello, Sam', she is usually talking to me.

My teacher likes it when I look at her and say, 'Hello' back to her.

When I look at her and say 'Hello', she knows that I am listening to her.

My teacher is happy when she knows I am listening to her. Many people like to know when someone is listening to them.

This story has focused on providing Sam with information about how to respond when people greet him. It could also have focused on how to let someone know if he is busy or on why it is important to stop doing something (reading) to respond to his teacher. It could include a picture of Sam and one of his teachers.

TASK 3: SOCIAL STORIES

Read the sample Social Story for Sam and:

- identify any words that make the story more literally accurate
- identify any descriptive sentences
- identify any perspective sentences
- identify any affirmative sentences
- identify any directive sentences

Check your responses:

- Words that support literal accuracy: sometimes; usually, many

Descriptive sentences:

- My name is Sam.
- I am 6 years old.
- I am in Mrs Golding's class.
- When it is choosing time I sometimes choose a book to read in the reading corner.
- Sometimes, when my teacher comes into the room she says 'Hello'
- When my teacher says, 'Hello, Sam', she is usually talking to me.

Perspective sentences:

- Usually, she likes to say 'Hello' when she has been away from the classroom for a little while. It is a way of being friendly.
- When I look at her and say 'Hello', she knows that I am listening to her.

Affirmative sentences:

- My teacher is happy when she knows I am listening to her.
- Many people like to know when someone is listening to them.

Directive sentences

- There are no directives sentences in this story. An example of one that could be added could be:
- I will try to look at my teacher and say 'Hello' when she says 'Hello' to me.

TASK 4: SOCIAL STORIES

Either:

- Visit Carol Gray's website (<http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories>) and read the information about Social Stories

And/or

- Read one of the following texts which will give you detailed information about writing Social Stories:
- Howley, M and Arnold, E. (2005) *Revealing the hidden social code*. London; Jessica Kingsley
- Gray, C. (2010) *The new social story book*. USA; Future Horizons

There has been some research into the effectiveness of Social Stories for pupils on the autism Spectrum. Between 1999 and 2007, 20 different studies reported significant improvements with a further ten more recent studies still to be evaluated (See Research Autism website for further details on: http://www.researchautism.net/autism_treatments_therapies_intervention.ikml?ra=46)

Storyboarding

Another very flexible and personalised approach is to be found in the storyboarding technique. It is possible to find prepared photographic storyboards which can be useful for general reference, e.g. the work of Jed Baker⁷. However, creating bespoke storyboards with an individual pupil or, preferably, with a group or whole class of pupils can be an effective way of teaching some social conventions in a structured and appealing way.

At a simple level, storyboards can be created to provide simple instructions on how to engage with a social activity, such as the rules for playing leap frog, or how to follow agreed social rules, e.g. how to line up in the lunch queue. However, they can also be used to convey more complex social information, such as how and when to ask for help in the classroom or how to share a piece of equipment. There are no hard and fast rules about how to use storyboards but there are some guidelines which may be helpful:

1. Decide on the social information that pupils need, e.g. how to share and take turns

⁷ Baker, J. (2001) *Social Skills Picture Book*. Bauminger and Kasari

2. Decide if this is a topic that requires pupils to work 1:1 with an adult or could it be a topic for a small group or even the whole class
3. Let pupils decide on the important information that they need to have in the story and draw up a rough storyboard. It is helpful if pupils working together can decide on the roles for the project, who are the actors, who is the photographer, who is the director and so on.
4. Get pupils to act out the key elements of the storyboard and photograph them
5. Assemble the photographs and write a narration explaining what is happening for each photograph
6. Put the story and photographs into a PowerPoint presentation. Be aware that pupils may take far more photographs than can be used. Deciding on which are the crucial elements of the social information needed is an important part of the learning process
7. Add speech and thought bubbles, as required, using the shapes/callout insert facility
8. Either print the storyboard as an information book and/or use it as a presentation on the interactive whiteboard for the whole class

9. It is helpful if pupils working together can decide on the roles for the project (who are the actors, who is the photographer, who is the director and so on)

TASK 5 - STORYBOARDING

Identify an important aspect of social information that you feel a pupil on the autism spectrum needs. Work with an individual pupil with autism or a group and support them to create a storyboard to address this issue.

Watch the video "Peer support" and listen to the MP3 file "Peer support".

See online resources:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/social-emotional/peer-support

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/social-emotional/peer-support-insight

How far could you use peer support to further some of the ideas in this unit and combine the above approaches into with some of the training needed for peer support? (This task links to units 15, 16 and 17.) How could this be organised in your school? What safe guards would you need to put in place?