

TEACHING NATURAL SOCIAL SKILLS

Our ability to socially interact is the most complex system that we have. Social interaction is a skill with wide variation (whether the person has a disability or not). It is also the most complex and difficult thing to teach due to the intricate perceptions that need to occur in order to pick up a message, interpret it correctly, and give appropriate feedback.

Teaching social skills is NOT something you can do via rote or behavior based teaching. At Milestones, Inc. we believe that using behavior based methodologies is not an effective method to teach social skills.

If you teach social skills using rote teaching or behavior based methods you can teach a person a single skill. Such as when someone walks in the room, turn towards the person, look in their eyes and say, "Hello". We all know children who have been taught to do this. But does it look natural? For most children the answer is, not really. For many children the timing is off, causing them to stare too long or give fleeting eye gaze, have a blank expression when they say, "hello", or use the wrong tone of voice. The problem with teaching social skills using rote or behavior based methodologies is that a critical stage of social interaction is missing, interpretation.

There are four distinct stages of social interactions:

1. Initiating a conversation
2. Monitoring a conversation (reading verbal and nonverbal cues is the most important stage as this is what gives the listener information about the conversation and helps the conversation continue)
3. Interpreting the information
4. responding to the information

It is impossible (not to mention not practical due to time constraints) to have a person memorize every social nuance and put it into a complex algorithm to determine what the appropriate response is. Social interactions happen so fast that in order for interactions to look natural – they need to be natural.

Bateson therapy takes students back through developmental stages that effect social skills and teach them a complete and complex foundation for learning. Below is my teaching complex social skills outline. These are the stages that we've identified as critical in assisting students with learning social skills that appear natural.

Theory of Mind Complex Social Skills Curriculum © 2001

Outline created by Alex Michaels

- 1. Eye contact and/or Attending (first for preferred, then non preferred as a request)**
 - a. To objects
 - b. To people
 - c. For period of time (appropriate to age)
 - d. What to look at
 - e. How long to look for
 - f. Advanced
 - i. Inhibiting Responses
 - ii. Continuing attention to task even when not interested
- 2. Switching Attention**
 - a. Between sensory modalities
 - b. Between sensory and outside object
 - c. Between two objects
 - d. Between two thoughts (can the student think of something, have another thought interrupt, then return to the original thought)
 - e. Between object and person
 - f. Between two people
 - g. Person is engaged in activity and becomes interrupted attending to new stimuli – then returns to original stimuli
- 3. Understanding basic cause and effect**
 - a. Within self – I can move my body parts
 - b. Within controlling objects
 - c. That my hands can communicate (pointing / gesturing)
 - d. That my words can communicate
 - e. Having an emotional effect on people
- 4. Joint Attention**
 - a. Basic
 - i. Looking at person
 - b. Complex
 - i. “What am I pointing to?” (I see that he sees that we see the same thing)
 - ii. Altering response or asking questions based upon what one is pointing to
- 5. Coping Skills**
 - a. When I feel upset I can:
 - i. Count
 - ii. Ask for a hug (if age appropriate)
 - iii. Take a walk
 - iv. Breathe

6. Prioritizing

- a. What's important, what's not

7. Representation

- a. 3D objects to 2D photos
- b. 2D photos to representational drawings
- c. Abstract drawings

8. Sorting Objects

- a. By color
- b. By size
- c. By shape
- d. By texture
- e. By object function
- f. Complex:
 - i. Sort by two functions (color and shape)
 - ii. Re-categorize objects after previously assigned a category (i.e., if working with shapes that are different colors first sorting by the color red (red triangle, red circle, red square), next sorting by squares (red square, green square, yellow square). This teaches the child flexibility – objects can have multiple meanings (leading to the comprehension of jokes and complex social skills)

9. Categorizes

- a. Categorizing by objects
- b. Categorizing by size
- c. Categorizing by function
- d. Categorizing by texture
- e. Categorizing by function

10. Sequencing

- a. Basic motor steps
- b. One part directions involving related things (i.e., stand up)
- c. Two part directions involving related things (i.e., stand up and get your jacket)
- d. Three part directions involving related things (i.e., stand up, get your jacket, and wait at the door)
- e. Two part unrelated directions (i.e., stand up and brush your teeth)
- f. Sequencing photos of familiar activities (i.e., take photos of kid doing step b and c)
- g. Sequencing photos of non-familiar activities
- h. Sequencing abstract pictures of familiar activities
- i. Sequencing abstract pictures of non-familiar activities

11. Associations – what goes with

12. Forming a prototype with fill-in the blanks (crazy pictures)

- a. Change existing pictures (collages)
- b. Put together pictures of unfamiliar and unrelated objects
- c. Change familiar objects
- d. Predicting future events
 - i. Basic cause and effect – if I push this pen off the table it will _____

- ii. Predicting future outcomes for one's own self (physical)
- iii. Predicting future outcomes for others (physical)
- iv. Predicting emotions in non-emotionally charged situations (i.e., if I eat this cupcake I will feel happy)
- v. Predicting emotions in emotionally charged situations (i.e., once child is already upset saying what will happen – i.e., making good choices vs. bad choices)
- vi. Predicting emotions in others – what will s/he feel if I?

13. Understanding that other's have emotions which are different then one's own

14. Predicting / Fill-in-the blanks

- a. Receptive
 - i. For familiar sequences (i.e., "...and next we will _____" or even using a phonemes prompt "...and next we will J_____")
 - ii. Fill in the blanks for non-familiar tasks
 - iii. Generating multiple possibilities for responses (What could happen? – doing puzzles with more then one right answer)
 - iv. Complex predicting (Brain Quest 20 questions)
- b. Expressive
 - i. Have person create a sequence and only give you clues ("I spy" game, I'm thinking of a number between...")

15. Tolerating Ambiguity

- a. Understanding there is a range of everything – nothing is black or white
- b. Tolerating one piece of small change within normal routine and not for non-preferred activity
 - i. With warning
 - ii. Without warning
- c. Tolerating one piece of small change within normal routine and not for preferred activity
 - i. With warning
 - ii. Without warning
- d. Tolerating change in all routine
- e. Stating preferences and not getting 1st choice, but being happy anyway
- f. Tolerating someone else's choice

FOR TEACHING NON-VERBAL SKILLS

READING NONVERBAL CUES

1. **Eye contact**
2. **Gesturing**
 - a. Expressive Pointing
 - b. Receptive Pointing
3. **Tone of Voice**
 - a. How to make different intonations (low, medium, and high)
 - b. What does a question sound like? (i.e., raising your tone at the end)
 - c. When do you use different tones (low, medium, and high)
 - d. What does tone of voice mean in various situations:
 - i. What does a sad tone sound like? Angry tone? Happy tone? Afraid tone?, etc.
4. **Facial Expressions**

Expressive

 - a. Recognizing that internal states are different (feel something)
 - b. Labeling what those emotions are based upon what it feels like (this is a happy feeling – my body feels good, this is an unhappy feeling my body feels bad)
 - c. Isolating out different body parts and manipulating them to match different expressions
 - i. What does [BODY PART] look like when I feel [EMOTION]
 1. Body Part-Nose (scrunched up a little, a lot)
 2. Body Part-Mouth (turned up, turned down, pursed, smile, open, etc.)
 3. Body Part-Eyes (normal, widely open, squinting, red and puffy, etc.)
 4. Body Part-Head Position (straight up, tilted sideways, looking down)
 5. Emotions-Happy, sad, angry, scared, anxious, etc.
 - d. Recognizing that different facial expressions mean different things (self-awareness) and that these expressions communicate meaning
 - e. Altering facial expressions to match internal states (if you feel happy what should your face be doing? – making a smile)
 - f. Knowing when facial expressions are appropriate and when they are not

Receptive

 - a. Awareness that people's faces change
 - b. Labeling the changes
 - c. Recognizing that the changes have meaning
 - d. Altering one's Non-Verbal cues based upon other person's facial expression (huh? What did you say? I don't understand? That's gross? Too much information? Please continue! That's great! I'm pleased! That's embarrassing. I'm ashamed. I'm afraid.)
5. **Related Skills**
 - a. Joining a conversation already in progress
 - b. Introducing your friends (introducing other people)

- c. How to Interrupt a conversation
- d. Identifying when someone is busy
- e. Identifying when someone is bored
- f. How to stall appropriately (i.e., “one minute please”, “can you repeat that?”, putting up the 1 minute finger. “I’m thinking”, “hold on”)
- g. How to show attentive listening skills
- h. Listening to other people’s opinions and tolerating this ambiguity (I have a good point, but the person has a good point, too)

HAVING CONVERSATIONS

1. Initiating a Conversation

- a. Knowing people’s names
- b. If you don’t know someone’s name, how do you ask?
- c. If you’re supposed to know someone’s name, how to say I forgot your name – what is it again?
- d. How to initiate based upon who the person is:
 - i. With peers
 - ii. With family
 - iii. With friends
 - iv. With adults
 - v. With strangers
 - vi. With person of authority
 - vii. With acquaintances

2. Monitoring a Conversation

- a. Understanding what another person is trying to convey by reading nonverbal cues (see nonverbal curriculum)
- b. Switching attention back and forth between the listene’s agenda and the speaker’s agenda

3. Maintaining a Conversation

- a. Understanding the algorithm
 - i. Someone says something and the listener has two choices:
 - 1. Ask a relevant question
 - 2. Share relevant information
- b. What encourages conversation and what doesn’t

4. Disengaging from a Conversation

- a. To understand that when one needs to end a conversation, one must let the other person (people) know s/he is leaving.
- b. How to end a conversation and how to read a social situation to know which ending to pick
 - i. Conversation that naturally ends (“bye, see you later”)
 - ii. Conversations that end abruptly (“got to go”)
 - iii. How to interrupt another conversation in progress to say goodbye