



Pupils with Learning Difficulties

Social Skills Deficits



Social Skills Deficits



Classroom-based tips (focus on instructional methods)

- 1. Use a natural interaction with pupils to practice a certain skill (Elksnin and Elksnin, 2000).** Naturalistic interventions involve structuring the environment to create numerous opportunities for desired pupil responses (e.g., holding up a toy and asking, “What do you want?”) and structuring adult responses to a pupil’s communication (e.g., the pupil points outside and says, “Go with me,” and the teacher says, “Okay, I’ll go with you”). Kaiser and Grim (2006: 455-456) make the following recommendations about naturalistic interventions:
 - Teach when the pupil is interested
 - Teach what is functional for the pupil at the moment.
 - Stop while both the pupil and the teacher are still enjoying the interaction.
- 2. Read and discuss literature related to stories on social skills** which involve topics such as dealing with new situations, dealing with bullying and making new friends (DeGeorge, 1998)
- 3. Discuss what the pupil did after a social interaction:** what happened, whether the outcome was positive or negative and what the pupil will do in the same situation in the future (Elksnin and Elksnin, 2000; Lavoie, 2005)
- 4. Use multimedia resources to teach social skills.** A lot of pupils with learning disabilities tend to be visual learners; thus videos, simulations, virtual environments and other multimedia can be effective teaching tools (Mitchell et al, 2007; Parsons, Leonard and Mitchell, 2006). Additionally, 1-3 (above) can also be taught by utilising multimedia resources, as well as inclusion of auditory learners.
- 5. Create your own social skills tools and adapt them to your pupils’ needs.** For instance, you can audio/video-record your pupils in class (with parental permission in advance) and then use the video to initiate a discussion of your pupils’ social interactions. For example, record an event that takes place in the classroom – the event could be less positive and it might be related to pupils’ behaviour in the class. By recording it, the pupils will be able to reflect on their behaviour.

Set your expectations appropriately according to pupils’ developmental levels. Consider your pupils’ understanding in terms of social skills; some pupils might not be able to process and may not have developed their social skills to the same degree as their peers.

(NCTI, CITED – Centre for Integrating Technology in Education)

- 6. Ask pupils to create their own stories about social behaviour and discuss and provide immediate feedback about these stories (NCTI, CITED)**
- 7. Use still images from the video as ‘reminders of social behaviour’ for your pupils.** Photographs can be used as well for this purpose. (NCTI, CITED)

Multimedia resources

- **Choices, Choices (K-5)** <http://www.tomsnyder.com/products/product.asp?SKU=CHOCHO>
Choices, Choices uses real-world scenarios to help pupils learn problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- **Right Choices: A Multimedia Social Skills Training Program for Adolescents (6-12)**
<http://store.cambiumlearning.com/ProductPage.aspx?parentId=019000986&functionID=009000008&site=sw>
Right Choices is a 34-week program that uses video to help pupils learn problem-solving and decision-making skills; modules focus on topics such as conflict resolution, negotiating, and dealing with peer pressure.



School-based practical tips (focus on instructional methods)

Announcement / Sign at School

Equip the school with posters that demonstrate appropriate social skills.

Community

1. Involve parents and other caregivers, as well as other adults that have an important role in pupils' lives. Arranging meetings between parents/caregivers and staff can build a rapport on how to support the pupils at school in order to develop their social skills further.
2. **Arrange regular meetings between the parents and the staff to discuss pupils' progress and to enhance the home-school collaboration.** This will help to monitor progress and to discuss other issues related to the social-emotional needs of the pupil, such as, social skills, social interactions with peers and adults within the school setting, marginalisation, behaviour at home, special areas of interest, and self-esteem.
3. **Organise events at your school related to social skills.** For instance, involve teachers, parents and pupils to form collaborative groups including the pupils with social skills' deficits and prepare an agenda to work in groups.

Develop pre-teaching and/or modeling of certain skills within the school setting prior to implementing them at a school event.

4. **Establish an inclusive culture within your school.** Arrange workshops and seminars that raise awareness of how to create an inclusive ethos in your school and help teachers to understand aspects of inclusion, diversity, diverse abilities and needs and finally to apply inclusive practices which will contribute in enhancing pupils' social skills. Help teachers to apply inclusive practices and differentiation strategies, which will contribute in enhancing all pupils' social and academic skills (Hoppey, & McLeskey, 2013).

Curricular Adaptations

1. **Establish an inclusive culture within your school.** Arrange workshops and seminars that raise awareness of how to create an inclusive ethos in your school and help teachers to understand aspects of inclusion, diversity, diverse abilities and needs and finally to apply inclusive practices which will contribute in enhancing pupils' social skills. Help teachers to apply inclusive practices and differentiation strategies, which will contribute in enhancing all pupils' social and academic skills (Hoppey, & McLeskey, 2013).
2. **Include the pupils in school events by differentiating their role and contribution.** For example if they do not want to dance or recite a poem, provide them with an alternative such as helping with the costumes. Make sure they feel that they are part of a group and that their contribution is important. If they feel that they are being marginalised they may exhibit problem behavior such as throwing tantrums, becoming uncooperative, or being oppositional and defiant.

Discipline

1. **Introduce evidence-based social skills programs, such as:**
 - **The EQUIP Program** (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995) Offers a three-part intervention method for working with antisocial or behavior disordered adolescents. The approach includes training in moral judgment, anger management/correction of thinking errors, and prosocial skills.
<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyr101c/equip.htm>
 - **The ACCEPTS Program** (Walker et al, 1994) Offers a complete curriculum for teaching effective social skills to pupils at middle and high school levels. The program teaches peer-to-peer skills, skills for relating to adults, and self-management skills.
2. **Conduct multidisciplinary team meetings in order to:** (i) Gain a better understanding of pupils' behaviours and needs and (ii) Determine the potential need for referral to the appropriate professionals. Remember that some pupils with social skills deficits might be overreacting in some situations or be extremely shy and not want to speak in others situations. Allow them space to relax and take the time to discuss issues with them and actively listen to what they have to say.
 - Approach the pupil in a non-confrontational manner, being aware both of the nonverbal and verbal language that you will use.

Educational Visits / Field Trips / Camps / School Exchanges / Trips Abroad

Ensure that you take the necessary measures both within the school setting and on school excursions if you have pupils who have exhibited behaviors that put them or others in danger. First decide based on the individual needs of the pupil, whether it would be safe for

him/her to engage in the specific activity. Assign an assistant to accompany the pupil, and ensure his/her and others' safety and well-being. Work with the assistant or special education teacher to prepare the pupil in advance. This is especially important when dealing with adolescents in secondary schools; some pupils at this age would rather not be 'accompanied' by an assistant. Give specific instructions to the assistant to ensure potential interventions will be positive.

Other (External Expertise)

Provide training on drama therapy/experiential learning so teachers can use role playing with their pupils to teach social skills (Jennings, 2013; Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton, 2003; De la Cruz, Lian & Morreau, 1998). Through theatre, for example, pupils with social skills deficits can be taught how to react in certain real life situations. Involve the speech therapist, special education teacher and educational psychologist, depending on your country's educational system and the involvement that they have within the school setting. Work with them to set specific lesson plans with the classroom teacher to address social skills needs.

Other (Pupils' Involvement)

Organise events at your school related to social skills. For instance, involve teachers, parents and pupils to form collaborative groups including the pupils with social skills' deficits and prepare an agenda to work in groups. Develop pre-teaching and/or modeling of certain skills within the school setting prior to implementing them at a school event.

Parents / Parents' Associations

1. Involve parents and other caregivers, as well as other adults that have an important role in pupils' lives. Arranging meetings between parents/caregivers and staff can build a rapport on how to support the pupils at school in order to develop their social skills further.
2. **Arrange regular meetings between the parents and the staff to discuss pupils' progress and to enhance the home-school collaboration.** This will help to monitor progress and to discuss other issues related to the social-emotional needs of the pupil, such as, social skills, social interactions with peers and adults within the school setting, marginalisation, behaviour at home, special areas of interest, and self-esteem.

Safety

Ensure that you take the necessary measures both within the school setting and on school excursions if you have pupils who have exhibited behaviors that put them or others in danger. First decide based on the individual needs of the pupil, whether it would be safe for him/her to engage in the specific activity. Assign an assistant to accompany the pupil, and ensure his/her and others' safety and well-being. Work with the assistant or special education teacher to prepare the pupil in advance. This is especially important when dealing with adolescents in secondary schools; some pupils at this age would rather not be 'accompanied' by an assistant. Give specific instructions to the assistant to ensure potential interventions will be positive.

Scheduling Events

Organise events at your school related to social skills. For instance, involve teachers, parents and pupils to form collaborative groups including the pupils with social skills' deficits and prepare an agenda to work in groups. Develop pre-teaching and/or modeling of certain skills within the school setting prior to implementing them at a school event.

School Celebrations

Include the pupils in school events by differentiating their role and contribution. For example if they do not want to dance or recite a poem, provide them with an alternative such as helping with the costumes. Make sure they feel that they are part of a group and that their contribution is important. If they feel that they are being marginalised they may exhibit problem behavior such as throwing tantrums, becoming uncooperative, or being oppositional and defiant.

School Purchases

Equip the school with tablets and personal computers so as teachers and pupils can use technology for teaching/learning social skills (Mitchell et al, 2007; Parsons, Leonard and Mitchell, 2006). Useful applications that can be used on pupils' and teachers' tablets include:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-emotional-apps-special-ed-jayne-clare>

Pupil Support

1. **Provide training on drama therapy/experiential learning so teachers can use role playing with their pupils to teach social skills (Jennings, 2013; Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton, 2003; De la Cruz, Lian & Morreau, 1998).** Through theatre, for example, pupils with social skills deficits can be taught how to react in certain real life situations. Involve the speech therapist, special education teacher and educational psychologist, depending on your country's educational system and the involvement that they have within the school setting. Work with them to set specific lesson plans with the classroom teacher to address social skills needs.
2. **Where possible, ensure that further provision is provided for those pupils such as additional support in the class** through the presence of a teaching assistant, or even appropriate peers who could assist without feeling burdened.
3. **Conduct multidisciplinary team meetings in order to:** (i) Gain a better understanding of pupils' behaviours and needs and (ii) Determine the potential need for referral to the appropriate professionals. Remember that some pupils with social skills deficits might be overreacting in some situations or be extremely shy and not want to speak in others situations. Allow them space to relax and take the time to discuss issues with them and actively listen to what they have to say.

4. Approach the pupil in a non-confrontational manner, being aware both of the nonverbal and verbal language that you will use.

Teacher Professional Development

1. **Provide training on drama therapy/experiential learning so teachers can use role playing with their pupils to teach social skills (Jennings, 2013; Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton, 2003; De la Cruz, Lian & Morreau, 1998).** Through theatre, for example, pupils with social skills deficits can be taught how to react in certain real life situations. Involve the speech therapist, special education teacher and educational psychologist, depending on your country's educational system and the involvement that they have within the school setting. Work with them to set specific lesson plans with the classroom teacher to address social skills needs.
2. **Introduce evidence-based social skills programs, such as:**
 - **"Stop and Think" Social Skills Program:** Part of Project ACHIEVE (Knoff and Batsche, 1995). Has demonstrated success in reducing pupil discipline referrals to the principal's office, school suspensions, and expulsions; fostering positive school climates and prosocial interactions; increasing pupils' on-task behavior; and improving academic performance.
 - **Primary Mental Health Project** (Cowen et al, 1996.) Targets children K-3 and addresses social and emotional problems that interfere with effective learning. It has been shown to improve learning and social skills, reduce acting, shyness and anxious behaviors, and increase frustration tolerance.
<http://php.scripts.psu.edu/dept/prevention/CMHS.html#toc>
(Primary Mental Health Project, p.124)
 - **The EQUIP Program** (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995) Offers a three-part intervention method for working with antisocial or behavior disordered adolescents. The approach includes training in moral judgment, anger management/correction of thinking errors, and pro-social skills.
<http://www.cyc-net.org/cyr101c/equip.htm>
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3. **Establish an inclusive culture within your school.** Arrange workshops and seminars that raise awareness of how to create an inclusive ethos in your school and help teachers to understand aspects of inclusion, diversity, diverse abilities and needs and finally to apply inclusive practices which will contribute in enhancing pupils' social skills. Help teachers to apply inclusive practices and differentiation strategies, which will contribute in enhancing all pupils' social and academic skills (Hoppey, & McLeskey, 2013).

Technology

1. **Equip the school with tablets and personal computers** so as teachers and pupils can use technology for teaching/learning social skills (Mitchell et al, 2007; Parsons, Leonard and Mitchell, 2006). Useful applications that can be used on pupils’ and teachers’ tablets include:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-emotional-apps-special-ed-jayne-clare>
<https://glenwood.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Social-Skills-and-Autism-Spectrum-Disorders-Application-List.pdf>

Supportive Literature

Definition: Pupils with learning disabilities are also more prone to social problems. The poor social skills of pupils with learning disabilities may be due to the ways they interpret social situations relative to their own experiences and their inability to perceive the nonverbal affective expressions of others (Meadan & Halle, 2004; Most & Greenbank, 2000).

Teachers should be very observant of behaviours related to difficulties with social skills and bring them to the attention of the school multi-disciplinary team. This will determine whether further assessment is necessary for the child so as to provide a clearer understanding of their needs and diagnosis.

Social situations that present difficulties for disabled pupils can be simple or more complex (De Bildt et al., 2005):

- engaging in a conversation with a peer
- deciding if someone who appears friendly wants to harm you

According to Kavale and Forness (1996) 75% of pupils with learning disabilities demonstrate deficits in social skills. In addition, as Estell, Jones, Pearl & Van Acker (2009) and Wiener (2004) have pointed out social skills deficits result in negative consequences such as:

- low social status
- scarcer interactions with teachers
- struggling in making friendships
- loneliness

Social skills are often broken down into categories, or types of skill according to the level of complexity and interaction, for example:

Skill Set	Used for	Examples
Foundation Skills	Basic social interaction	Ability to maintain eye contact and appropriate personal space, understand gestures and facial expressions

Interaction Skills	Skills needed to interact with others	Resolving conflicts, taking turns, learning how to begin and end conversations, determining appropriate topics for conversation, interacting with authority figures
Affective Skills	Skills needed for understanding oneself and others	Identifying one's feelings, recognising the feelings of others, demonstrating empathy, decoding body language and facial expressions, determining whether someone is trustworthy
Cognitive Skills	Skills needed to maintain more complex social interactions	Social perception, making choices, self-monitoring, understanding community norms, determining appropriate behavior for different social situations.
<i>(Canney and Byrne, 2006; Waltz, 1999)</i>		

Source: Heward, W. L. (2013). *Exceptional children: An introduction to special education*. Pearson College Div

Websites and EU Reports

British Dyslexia Association <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

<http://www.projectachieve.info>

[http://www.disabilityeurope.net/content/aned/media/ANED%202010%20Task%205%20Education%20final%20report%20-%20FINAL%20\(2\)_0.pdf](http://www.disabilityeurope.net/content/aned/media/ANED%202010%20Task%205%20Education%20final%20report%20-%20FINAL%20(2)_0.pdf)

<http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/EE%20social%20inclusion%20report.pdf>

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