Teaching functional core social skills through motivating shared experiences: a structured approach for students in mainstream secondary school settings

attention autism

CENTRE FOR AUTISM

MIDDLETOWN

The problems

- core deficit in social skills /lack of intuitive social ability
- as the child gets older so the problems and secondary effects become more noticeable/increase
- significant difficulties become a barrier to mainstream inclusion. Secondary schools are difficulty places to be.
- increased risk of mental health issues

The complexities

There are many skill areas to work on, including:

- Maintaining appropriate eye contact
- Maintaining appropriate body space
- Developing a sense of empathy for others
- Giving and receiving complements
- Sharing interests and other strategies for making friends
- Decoding facial expressions and body language
- Using facial expressions and body language
- Learning conversational techniques, including openers and closers
- Determining whether a topic is appropriate for discussion
- Learning table manners
- Understanding rules for community activities, such as riding the bus or going to a movie
- Understanding dating and sexual etiquette
- Learning grooming techniques and expectations
- Interacting with authority figures
- Using observation to determine appropriate behaviour, dress, and manners in a new social situation

... to name but a few

The drive to DO something... to FIX it!

Social skills groups are a very common request but there is a difference between being able to identify the problem and being able to change it.

Do you really think people haven't tried?

'He's 17 now but really its just the same sh** different day, we've been doing this since he was a toddler'

Jon's Mum

An uncomfortable truth...

Social skills programmes for children with autism are largely ineffective

Science daily June 5th 2007

Skills taught in an integrated classroom setting are more successful.

Kamps, Leonard, Vernon, Dugan, Delquadin ,Gershon, Wade, Folk. 1992

The importance of peers

- As children enter adolescence friends take on a more prominent role

  Wong and Taylor 1996

- Peer influence is +ve as well as -ve

  Clasen and Brown 1986

What motivates the 'key players'?

1. Students

2. Teachers

3. Parents

People are human and schools are busy places, people want a quick fix no mess solution...

...this is not it!

The siren call of our default position....

The basic idea…

- Create a highly motivating activity to provide shared experiences to underpin friendship development and a functional social grouping
- Create the experience of and the engagement in social skills development by adapting the adults interaction and social communication
- To target a core social skills set based on developmental progression

The early days and results

A group of asd plus socially vulnerable peers once a week for the academic year, based on attention autism group strategies

SENCO and TA very enthusiastic reported that group now solid friends and more positive overall.

Positive outcomes e.g. students less isolated and coping better, attending group enthusiastically for both students and staff

...thought we could improve it...

Pupils view on the group

- A means of getting out of class
- Something that was fun

It's no good being precious about it!

Basic framework for the session

- Intro.
- The box
- Getting in the zone
- Activity e.g. explosions
- Going solo
- The finisher
- The review

Short video clip

We apologise, but for legal reasons we are unable to make this clip available for our online viewers. There will be a short silence for a few minutes before the talk resumes.

Please bear with us; we are very sorry for the inconvenience.

Core guidelines for the lead adult and supporting adult

E.g.

- The activities must be engaging first and foremost
- Change the typical teacher style e.g. reduce predominance of question and answer based interactions
- Supporting adults to act as models throughout and participate in activities rather than observe and prompt

Target social skills.

- The ability to follow the adult lead
- Able to work in a group
- Listen and follow instructions
- Comment and share ideas
- Problem solving in a group setting
- Coping skills and the ability to get back on track when upset etc
- Managing emotions
- Building shared experiences and good times in a group as a positive set of experiences and good memories

A set of core self help strategies are embedded in the intervention

Step 1 - try again

Step2 - look at others and guess

Step 3 - ask for help

- Term1 - adults model
- Term 2 - students prompt each other
- Term 3 - spontaneous use in the group

The practicalities and blips

- When schools have seen it in action they are enthusiastic
- Need staff with a sense of humour and fun
- Modelling and training for staff is essential
- Bank of activities
- The siren call!

The results so far…

- Groups are running
- The students are enthusiastic
- Early stages of friendships are developing
- Staff model core social skills interactions well
- The core self help strategies are logical and work most of the time
- Social skills are tricky but practical in this context
- Engagement wins tolerance

…watch this space!

Working in partnership to keep things practical and workable!

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