



Approaches and Strategies to Develop Social Skills for Individuals With ASD

This is a summary of a webinar offered by Autism Learning Partnership. Follow the link to watch the webinar.
<https://alp-paa.com/en/resources>

Tina Cole, M.Ed. and Stephanie Melanson, M.Ed., BCBA
Learning Specialists, Autism Learning Partnership
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

One of the fundamental characteristics of ASD is the presence of persistent deficits in communication and social interaction. Social skills training is a difficult, ongoing process. Because it is impossible to teach every skill in every situation, it is important to strategically plan social skills training so that individuals with ASD can be given the tools and resources they need to continue their learning.

During the first part of this webinar, we talked about four important steps for teaching social skills:

- target a priority;
- set a goal;
- choose a teaching strategy; and
- provide ongoing support.

An Observation and Reflection Guide could help you target a social skill to prioritize and Behavioural Skills Training (BST) is a teaching strategy that can be used.

During this second part of the webinar, we will talk about other teaching strategies as well as strategies that can be implemented with learners who present great challenges with communication and social interactions.

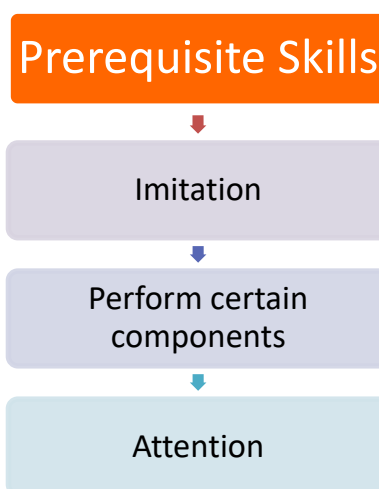
Modeling

Basically, modeling involves the learner observing another person performing the targeted behaviour correctly. Modeling serves as an example for the learner of what is expected of them.

However, before opting for the modeling strategy to teach social or other skills, we must first make sure that the learner has basic imitation skills, that they can perform certain components of the target behaviour and that they are able to maintain their attention to the model long enough to observe the modeling from beginning to end.

To ensure the effectiveness of modeling, here are other factors to consider:

- get the learner's attention before you start modeling;
- if possible, choose a model who is the same age and shares similar characteristics with the learner;
- offer reinforcement to the model following the target behaviour so that the learner is more motivated to engage in the behaviour themselves;



- make sure the target behaviour is appropriate and suited to the learner's abilities;
- perform the modeling in the context where the skill would normally be demonstrated;
- repeat the modeling as many times as necessary.

Video Modeling

Video modeling is an intervention where the learner watches a video in which a model demonstrates the targeted behaviour. The learner must then imitate the behaviour. Video modeling can take different forms:

- basic modeling takes place when a third person (a peer, parent, adult, etc.) performs the target behaviour or skill;
- in self-modeling, the learner performing the target behaviour or skill is filmed;
- point of view modeling, on the other hand, shows the perception of the model as they perform the skill;
- video prompting can be used with a skill that can be divided into several steps. The video shows an example of each part of the skill.



To best prepare for a video modeling intervention, you must sometimes prepare a script and train the model. During filming, it is better to use locations where the learner will be expected to use the skill. When editing the video, it is possible to add titles, subtitles or even captions. The video should last between two and three minutes.

Significant Challenges in Terms of Communication and Social Interactions

First, it is important to remember that just because a learner has important communication challenges, it does not mean that they cannot develop social skills. Although language contributes greatly to social interaction, it is possible to socialize without speaking. It is important to choose relevant goals related to social skills, even if learners present great language deficits. Here are some strategies that can be implemented with all learners, but that could be effective with learners that present significant challenges in terms of communication and social interactions.

Choose relevant and attainable goals

Certain skills are essential and contribute to the development of other skills or may be prerequisites for the development of other skills. Often, when they are not mastered, their absence creates significant barriers in the development of social skills. It may also be necessary to break down a goal into several small achievable goals so that the learner can master small targets and experience success on an ongoing basis.

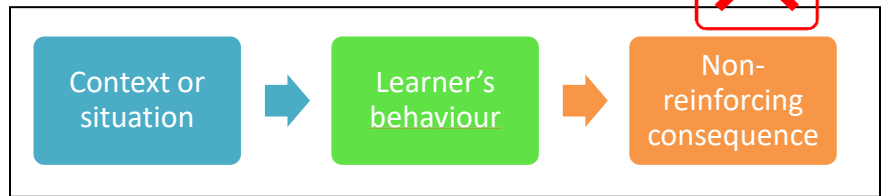
Consider the learner's motivation

It is important to consider the elements that might encourage the learner to engage in a particular behaviour. Some learners may be highly motivated by social interactions, even if they have great challenges in this area. Simply being able to interact with others can be motivating. We can therefore plan activities with peers and take advantage of these opportunities to work on certain skills.

On the other hand, some learners are not motivated by social interactions. In fact, some would like to avoid them at all costs. For these learners, it will generally be necessary to use tangible and motivating objects to encourage them to engage in some behaviours.

Eliminate non-reinforcing consequences

A consequence is an event, object or action that occurs immediately after a behaviour and that affects the likelihood that the behaviour will or will not occur in the future. For some, social interactions lead to non-reinforcing consequences. When it is noticed that



a learner appears to avoid certain situations or is simply not motivated by certain situations, it is likely that the consequences that follow the learner's behaviour are not reinforcing for them.

In such cases, it is possible to make some small modifications to the environment to ensure that the consequences are reinforcing for the learner, thus motivating them to demonstrate the targeted behaviours related to communication and social interactions. If it is not possible to completely eliminate certain non-reinforcing consequences that occur naturally, one could try and include very reinforcing consequences to minimize the negative effects of the non-reinforcing consequences.

Pairing

Pairing is a strategy that involves pairing two or more objects, activities or events in order to increase their value. For example, if it is difficult for a learner to approach their peers, but they like playing with a ball, we could encourage peers to play with the ball and thus increase the value of interacting with them. The more pairing is repeated, the more efficient it is.

Naturalistic Interventions

Naturalistic interventions are behavioural interventions that are implemented during the learner's daily routines or activities. In other words, these interventions are naturally integrated into activities that the learner is already doing, which promotes the generalization of skills in a real context. They must be based on the learner's interests and can be planned, but it is also possible to take advantage of opportunities that arise spontaneously to work on certain skills with the learner.

For example, naturalistic interventions can take place during meals of snacks, during play time, when the learner is getting ready to go out or during community outings. Although these interventions take place in the natural environment, some planning is required to ensure that the desired result is achieved. Here are certain steps to follow to ensure an effective intervention:

- identify the target behaviour;
- collect data on the learner's current level;
- identify possible contexts for intervention;
- offer training to those involved;
- organize the environment;
- interact with the learner;
- use different strategies to support the learner;
- collect data.

Modeling, video modeling and naturalistic interventions are strategies that can be used to develop social skills with learners with ASD. For learners who present great challenges in terms of communication and social interactions, it is important to choose relevant and attainable goals that will have the most impact on

the quality of life of the learner and those around them. Then, we must consider the learner's motivation and analyze the consequences that follow social behaviour. By minimizing non-reinforcing consequences, it is more likely that the learner will be motivated to engage in the targeted behaviours.

About Us

Autism Learning Partnership (ALP), a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agencies and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.