



# SOCIAL SKILLS GROUPS

**SOCIAL INTUITION** helps us navigate the world, as we come to understand the stated and unstated rules of communicating with others. A child who has Social Communication Learning Challenges (SCLC) may struggle with attending to the thoughts, emotions and needs of other people. Children with SCLC may have many and different diagnoses. Parents can become confused and frustrated when searching for therapy and/or treatment for their children with challenges in social communication. Social skills groups, social training, and/or social thinking groups can vary and so it may be difficult to choose the most appropriate types and/or setting for a child, adolescent and/or adult –as social learning disabilities present lifelong challenges.

The intent of this sheet is not to recommend any type of treatment or therapy in particular, but rather to shed some light on what is available and some of the considerations you might want to take into account when making decisions.

## What are “Social Skills” and why are they important?

Social skills are the foundation for getting along with others. They include:

- Accepting differences
- Being a friend
- Being patient
- Being polite and courteous
- Being respectful
- Cooperation
- Following directions
- Helping others
- Listening
- Participation
- Remaining on task
- Praising others and refraining from put downs
- Positive communication and interactions
- Respecting ourselves, others and items
- Sharing and taking turns
- Using good manners

A lack of social skills can lead to behavioral difficulties in school, delinquency, inattentiveness, peer rejection, emotional difficulties, bullying, difficulty in making friends, aggressiveness, problems in interpersonal relationships, poor self-concept, academic failures, concentration difficulties, isolation from peers, and depression.

## What are some strategies for teaching social skills and types of socialization groups?

Some groups focus on cognitive behavioral therapy, social pragmatics, and psycho-therapy, while others are sensory-based, activity-based, or drama-based groups. Social skills training often uses methods such as modeling the skills to be learned, shaping or approximating the skills through reinforcement, and rehearsal and practice. You may recognize these related terms: Incidental Teaching; Cognitive Picture Rehearsal; Social Stories; Structured Learning; Social Thinking; and Social Skills Picture Stories.

## What to look for when choosing a social skills group?

- ❖ Time and Place: Timing is very important. Does the group meet after school, at dinner time, on the weekend, during school hours? In general, it is best to choose those times when children are calm and rested. The place where the group meets should be carefully considered, in relation to the challenges and goals. Should it be a clinical setting (office), classroom, or natural setting (playground, teen center, the mall, etc.)? Is the environment sensory stimulating, and does that pose an attention concern?
- ❖ Training of the Coordinator of the Activities: Is the trainer a Speech and Language Pathologist, a Social Worker, a Psychologist, a Counselor? What type of training in social skills has the coordinator received?
- ❖ Engaging Activities: Children can learn if they want to, so the activities must make the children understand what they are learning and make them want to learn. Fun activities are helpful, but it is more important to offer engaging activities that will make children *want* to participate.
- ❖ Parent Training and Involvement: Parents need to be trained for the skills to be generalized and used in all social communication opportunities, and not just occasionally and in the group setting.
- ❖ Frequency of the Meetings: If the group meets sporadically and for short periods of time, it is likely that the children will forget and not have an incentive to practice the skills.
- ❖ Age of the Participants in the Group and Gender: Children must be grouped according to their ages and developmental levels. Coed groups can be helpful, especially for adolescents as they learn about relationships, but every child should be carefully assessed and placed in a group where they are most likely to succeed.
- ❖ Opportunities to Practice Acquired Skills: Does the program offer the opportunity to practice the learned skills in spontaneous social situations outside of the group?

Some books for more reading on the subject:

Baker, J. The Social Skills Picture Book. Teaching Play, Emotion, And Communication To Children With Autism.  
Garcia Winner, M. Inside Out: What Makes A Person With Social Cognitive Deficits Tick?  
Garcia Winner, M. Thinking About You Thinking About Me  
Gray, C. The New Social Story Book- illustrated edition.  
McGinnis, E. & Goldstein, A. Skillstreaming The Elementary School Child: New Strategies And Perspectives For Teaching Prosocial Skills.  
Myles, B. et al. The Hidden Curriculum

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