Tip Sheet: Social Skills Training (SST)

Definition
There are multiple definitions of social skills. One commonly supported idea is that social skills are skills that will result in socially important outcomes. Specially, Gresham and colleagues (2006) stated, "Social skills represent a set of competencies that (1) facilitate initiating and maintaining positive social relationships, (2) contribute to peer acceptance and friendship development, (3) result in satisfactory school adjustment, and (4) allow individuals to cope with and adapt to the demands of the social environment" (p. 364).

Other Terminology (Gresham, 1981; Walker et al., 2004)
- Social skills versus social competence: Social skills refer to specific behaviors while social competence refers to judgments from others of one's social effectiveness
- Social skill acquisition deficits: The student either does not know how to perform the skill or understand the situation in which to use the skill. This deficit is also called "can't do" deficit.
- Social skill performance deficits: The student knows how to perform a skill but does not do so at acceptable levels. This type of deficit is also called "won't do" deficit
- Social skills have been categorized around the following five domains (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997):
  1. Peer relationships (e.g., offering help; inviting play)
  2. Self-management (e.g. controlling temper; compromising)
  3. Academic (e.g., completing work independently; listening to teacher)
  4. Compliance (e.g., following directions; following rules)
  5. Assertion (e.g. initiating conversation; acknowledge compliments)
  Many social skills curricula are organized around these skill domains.

Rationale
Social skills have been considered an "academic enabler, "which means that students with more developed social skills are more successful in the classroom (e.g., pay better attention, ask questions, consider the view points of others; DiPerna & Elliott, 1999)

Many positive outcomes are associated with social competence including academic achievement, and teacher and peer acceptance. Conversely, poor social competence has the potential to lead to many negative outcomes, including academic failure and rejection by teachers and peers (Walker et al., 2004)

Implementation (adapted from Elliott & Gresham, 1991; Kerr & Nelson, 2010)
1. Assess to determine student social skills deficits (see below for screening tools).
2. Determine if the deficit is one related to skill or performance (see below for instruction and intervention tips):
   - Skill deficit is an "I can't" deficit:
     - When addressing "I can't" deficits, social skills training should incorporate:
       - Direct Instruction
       - Modeling
       - Behavior Rehearsal
       - Coaching
   - Performance deficit is an "I won't" deficit:
     - When addressing "I won't" deficits, social skills intervention should incorporate:
       - Prompt and cue social skills

- ▪ Reinforce use of social skills
- ▪ Incorporate group contingencies (see Tip Sheet for Positive Reinforcement Strategies)
- ▪ Teach peers to initiate and maintain social interactions (best not to use this with children who are aggressive

3. Make sure social skills that are taught to the student also help the student to get his/her needs met (to gain something or to avoid something). Consider this when a functional behavior assessment is being conducted.
4. Teach social skills in natural settings where they would typically be used.
5. In the social skills' lessons, integrate strategies to promote generalization and maintenance of the skills being taught.
6. If students demonstrate behaviors that compete with the acquisition or performance of social skills, (e.g., defiance, noncompliance, whining), incorporate additional strategies to decrease the occurrence of these competing behaviors:
   a. Differential Reinforcement Strategies
   b. Response cost
   c. Time-out
   d. Positive Practice Overcorrection
7. Remember to consider the student's background, and select social skills that are respectful of that child's culture.

Teachers can use commercial social skills curriculum or design their own lessons. Because social skills training must meet the specific skill or performance deficits of a student, an ideal curriculum does not exist. However a set of preferred practices does exist for teaching social skills as indicated below (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001).

Social Skills Lesson Outline: 30 minute Lesson (Elliott & Gresham, 2007)

Time		Lesson Components
	GREET	
Approx 4 minutes	**TELL**	- State learning objective - Ask questions to introduce skill - Define skill, emphasizing key words - Discuss why this skill is important - Outline steps for skill
Approx 4 minutes	**SHOW**	- Model positive examples of the skill - Model negative examples of skill - Model each step of the skill - Can use video models too - With a student helper, role play the skill embedded in a typical situation - Lead discussion about related social skills that could meet same objective
Approx 8 minutes	**DO**	As a class: - Students define skill - Students state discrete steps - Teacher repeats critical steps - Students model skill in role play - Students provide feedback to each other
Approx 5 minutes	**PRACTICE**	Students work in pairs to continue to practice and give each other feedback Teacher encourages students to practice outside of class Students can keep checklist or documentation of practice that teacher reviews

Approx 4 minutes	**MONITOR**	Students report on how well they are currently exhibiting this skill
		    "Think how often you …."
		    "If you need more practice, then …"

Approx 5	**GENERALIZE**	Talk about different places/people where the skill can be used

minutes		Give homework to use skill in other places & with other people

Social Skills Screening Tools

SSIS (Social Skills Improvement System)
- Pearson, Psych Corp.
- Teacher, Parent, Student Rating Scales
- Assesses 3 domains (a) social skills, (b) problem behaviors, (c) academic competence

Walker-McConnell Scales of Social Competence and School Adjustment (SSCSA)
- Wadsworth Publishing
- Elementary subscales: (a) Teacher-preferred Social Skills, (b) Peer-preferred social skills (c) School Adjustment
- Adolescent subscales: (a) Empathy, (b) Self-control, (c) School adjustment, (d) peer relations

School Social Behavior Scales 2nd Ed. (SSBS2)
- Brookes Publishing
- Ages 5 - 18
- Assesses 2 domains: (a) social competence, (b) antisocial behavior.

Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS)
- Pro-Ed
- Two Scales: (a) social skills and (b) problem behavior
- Ages 3 – 6
- School and Home ratings
- Social Skill subscales: Social Cooperation, Social Interaction, and Social Independence; Problem Behavior subscales: Externalizing Problems and Internalizing Problems.

Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders, 2nd Edition (SSBD)
- Sopris-West
- Grades K-6
- Multiple gating procedures

Commercial Social Skills Curriculum

First Step to Success

https://firststeptosuccess.sri.com/
- Grades 1-3; students with externalizing concerns
- Screening, school intervention, parent training

Incredible Years

http://www.incredibleyears.com/
- Early elementary
- Parent, teacher & child programs

Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)

http://www.pearsonassessments.com/pai/ca/RelatedInfo/SSISOverview.htm
- Early elementary; Upper elementary/middle
- Screening (student/parent/teacher), integrity measures, student booklets, video clips, skill step cue cards, parent communication forms
- Classwide Social Skills, Small Group

Second Step (Committee for Children)

http://www.cfchildren.org/programs/ssp/overview/
- Pre-K through middle school
- Self-regulation and problem solving. Pre-teach in small group before teaching to whole class.

Skillstreaming

http://www.skillstreaming.com/
- Early Childhood – Adolescent
- Five skill groups: Classroom Survival Skills, Friendship-Making Skills, Dealing with Feelings, Alternatives to Aggression, and Dealing with Stress

Strong Teens (Brookes)

http://strongkids.uoregon.edu/strongteens.html
- Secondary
- Scripts, sample scenarios and examples, creative activities, and "booster" lessons

Evidence

There are mixed reviews in terms of the outcome of social skills training. Some literature reviews suggest that social skill training does not have strong outcomes (for example see Kavale et al., 1999) while some reviews indicate stronger student outcomes (e.g., Gresham et al., 2004). However, Gresham and colleagues suggested that better social skills training outcomes can be obtained if the following issues are addressed (Gresham 1998; Gresham et al., 2006):
- Assess and design the intervention to the type of social skills deficit ("can't" or "won't") and to decrease competing behaviors (see above for intervention strategies).

- Implement social skill interventions within natural contexts using informal and incidental teaching strategies in order to facilitate generalization and maintenance
- Design social skills interventions that make the positive social skills more effective and efficient than the inappropriate behaviors
    - For example: teaching a student to raise hand and ask for help appropriately versus yelling out; teachers must ensure that hand raising works more efficiently and effectively than yelling out to get attention.
- Increase the intensity of social skill training

There is limited evidence for social skills training as a targeted intervention (Kerr & Nelson, 2010). There is evidence of decreases in disruption and increases in academic skills when social skills instruction was designed to meet individual student needs (Lane et al., 2003).

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