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Workshops:

Anna is available for workshops, inservices and professional development

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Hello everyone,
Welcome to the social skills newsletter!
Teaching social skills is an easy task when armed with the correct information. This newsletter will provide you with some tips and ideas on the hows and whys of teaching

these skills to our children and students.
Don't forget to use your own ideas as well and I would like to hear your feedback on strategies that work for you. Good luck.

Anna Tullemans

About Social Skills

Children with ASD have problems in many areas which are the foundation of successful relationships: joint attention, sharing and co-operating, and, using and understanding body language and facial expressions. In addition they are often unable to understand and empathise with the feelings or perspectives of others; sometimes referred to as a deficit in theory of mind.

Social skills training is always going to be an inexact science, because social encounters never follow an exact script. However it is possible to teach your ASD individual many social conventions that will help them fit in.

Teaching social skills using naturalistic behavioural techniques has been shown to be very effective. Evidence suggests that social skills training is most effective if it takes place in natural settings and within regular routines and activities. This may mean that you need to teach the individual a whole different set of social skills for home, school, shops, the peer group etc

At the moment there are many programmes available to teach social skills and you will need to pull from and modify several of these to meet the individual skills and needs of your child/student. Remember that to know someone with ASD is NOT to know ASD. Use your creativity and have lots of fun. It's important that you make learning an interesting platform for all involved, not just the learner.

Don't forget to give **entry and exit** phrases when teaching conversation skills. The individual must learn that he just can't leave the conversation when he has finished his monologue. Also teach about people's expectations in a conversation (they need to know why they must learn conversation skills)

- Why do people have a conversation?
- Not just for information
- To be friendly and to pass the time when waiting in line etc

Teaching social skills

When teaching social skills:

It is not enough to just get the students to copy 'normal' behaviour; we must give them understanding of what they are doing. They have similar learning patterns to adult learners. Adults need to know the hows and whys before they will attempt a learning experience.

Some difficulties we may encounter when teaching social skills

- The range of social behaviour and ability in ASD is vast
- Behaviours are not just a reflection of inborn characteristics but how the individual has compensated for any initial difficulties
- The initial difficulty may have led to further social difficulties and other compensating behaviours

Teaching Social Skills (© Anna Tullemans 2009)

Many people are very concerned when it comes to teaching social skills. They feel they are not well equipped. I would like to reassure you that teaching social skills is relatively easy. It just takes some patience and perseverance. We can teach these skills incidentally, one-on-one or in group sessions.

Begin by teaching the micro skills. Do this one on one and in group sessions. It is always best to teach social skills in the context that they are going to be used: ie when playing board games, waiting in line, having conversations with peers etc. Use the peers that the student normally interacts with on any given day at school. In this group we also need to choose at least one peer who has very good social skills and is high in the hierarchy of the class. In this group also choose at least two other students who are in the middle of this hierarchy. This way the student is able to model from peers who can do the skill well. We can use each social contact that the individual makes and turn it into a teaching moment.

Remember to tell the individual when they are doing “it” right; as teachers, we constantly remind them when they have it wrong and then try to show them the correct way. The best way is to bring their attention to what made this encounter ‘fruitful’ eg; “James, that was great the way you asked John to join in your game”, thus using positive reinforcement.

Always praise in an intellectual rather than emotional way, using words that are concrete and have meaning to the individual. ASD individuals will usually respond to and process information better when concrete and intellectual wording is used.

When planning a social skills programme it is beneficial to integrate modules on emotions and feelings. Remember that all interactions have an emotional component and the individual needs to understand the underlying emotions that come with these situations. Don’t forget to teach double meanings of words. This can be made into a game with a number of students participating. The book “Double dip meanings” is an excellent place to start.

In conjunction with social skilling we must also teach problem solving skills. This will help with:

- Identifying alternatives
- Considering consequences (pros and cons)
- Determining and engaging in thinking about the “means to the end”
- Perspective taking

Steps for Teaching Social Skills

- Define the skill
 - What is the skill,
 - When do I need to use it?
 - Why do I need to use?
- Model the skill
 - Use video
 - Use role play
- Establish the need for this skill
 - Why is this going to be useful
 - When would I ever need to use it?
- Set up role play situation for practice
 - Choose appropriate students who have good social skills
- Set up role play situation in real life
 - Create opportunities for the skill to be used
- Provide performance feedback

IDEAS to try

A great way to teach social skills is teach the student to **TEACH** others. If the student has a special interest that others may share in, show him how to teach others about it. This is a skill that is highly prized in the adult workforce. If we begin now it will be a skill that is honed to near perfection by the time the student leaves school.

Teach the student to “Read” social situations

We need to teach each individual the set of skills to “read” social situations. So we need to teach:

- The setting of the interaction and its associated rules and norms
- The purpose of the interaction and its goals
- Teach about the participants
 - Their expectations of the student with ASD etc.

A letter to anyone who considers me hurtful or uncaring

Quote from Daniel, an adult with Aspergers

To anyone who has the idea that I have at any point actively engaged in hurting your feelings:

I didn't, I'm not, nor will I ever.

Before you call me a liar, allow me to explain. I don't see myself as malicious, and although I am prone to the occasional outburst, I work very hard on keeping my emotions under control. My point is: so should you.

If I'm calling you irrational, it's because that's what I'm seeing.

If I'm saying you're overreacting, it's because that's what it looks like.

If I'm trying, albeit poorly, to give you some perspective on a matter, it's because I'm genuinely trying to help.

Why do I do this? Because...

...I would expect nothing less from you.

If I'm doing something stupid I expect you to try your best to stop me.

If I'm overreacting, I expect you to explain why.

If I'm missing the point, I expect you to deliver it to me and not water it down, sugar-coat it or otherwise beat around the bush.

To do anything less would be to deny your fellow humans the truth.

Reminder:

The danger in teaching social skills to the student **without the necessary understanding of the underlying meaning** may result in an increase in vulnerability in the child with ASD eg. Teaching a child to look someone in the eye, they may end up staring unblinkingly into peoples eyes. This may be interpreted as being provocative of either a sexual advance or aggression. These situations could place the ASD person in a vulnerable position. Teach appropriately all the skills that are needed!

Resources

Asperger Social Guide – How to relate with confidence – *Genevieve Edmonds and Dean Worton*

People Skills for Young Adults – *Marianne Csoti*

Preparing for Life – The complete guide for transitioning... - *Jed Baker*

Space Travellers – An interactive program for developing social.. – *Margaret Carter & Josie Santomauro*

Social Awareness Skills for Children – *Marianna Csoti*

Pirates – An early years group program for developing social... - *Margaret Carter & Josie Santomauro*

Social Skills Picture Book 2 – High School – *Jed Baker*

Navigating the Social World – DVD – *Jeanette McAfee*

Hidden Curriculum – Practical solutions for understanding unstated rules... - *Brenda Smith Myles*

Games for Social and Life Skills – *Tim Bond*

Double Dip Feelings – Stories to help children understand emotions –

How to Stop Your Words from Bumping into Someone Else's – *Anna Tullemans & Rhonda Dixon*

Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships – *Temple Grandin & Sean Barron*

Cool Comics – Social Functions – *Margaret Carter & Josie Santomauro*

Teaching Social Behaviour – Classroom activities to foster children's interpersonal... - *David Warden*

Relationship Development Intervention with Children – *Steven Gutstein*

Feet are not for Kicking (and other titles) – *Elizabeth Verdick*

All these books and DVDs are available from <book in hand> at Redcliffe. There are many other titles to choose from. Please call Mary Jane and the "Lorraines" on ph: 3885 8525 and they will offer to help with other titles that are available or more appropriate for your needs

Create opportunities to practice social skills

Students with ASD will vary in the extent to which they wish to make friends and mix with others. This will also vary over time. However we can't assume that the person is making a meaningful choice to be on his own until we are sure that the individual has the necessary skills to form and maintain friendships. He also needs to have some direct experiences to give meaning to the notion of what a friend is, and the possibilities that may arise from friendships. There will be days when they do not want to interact with others and we must respect that decision. We all have days when we feel we need some time alone. Our ASD individuals may need these days more often than we do.

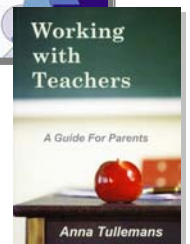
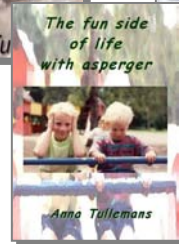
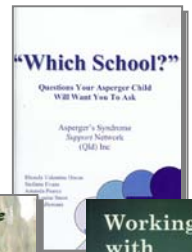
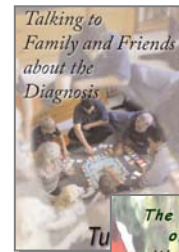
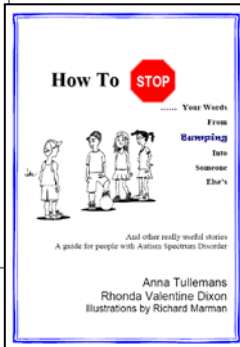
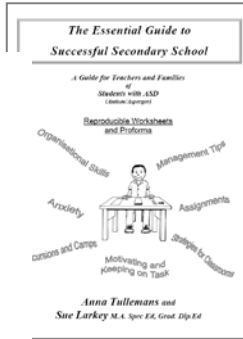
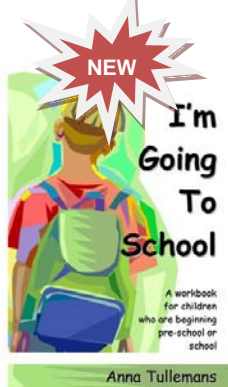
The Fun Side of Life with Asperger

Christmas holidays are coming quickly. If you would like some pointers on how to survive these coming weeks, read my book: *The Fun Side of Life with Asperger*. There are hints and tips on travelling in cars and planes and staying at hotels etc.

There is also some great information on clothes shopping and how to negotiate what is allowed to come on holidays and what is not!

Have fun planning.

Books authored by Anna Tullemans – see www.annatullemans.com



To order books please email Anna on: annatullemans@gmail.com

If you would like to receive the newsletter via email:

Email

- \$50 The Essential Guide to Successful Secondary School
- \$45 Teacher Assistants Big Red Book of Ideas
- \$30 How To stop Your Words From Bumping
- \$25 Talking to Family and Friends
- \$25 Working with Teachers
- \$20 I'm Going to School (workbook for students entering school or transitioning)
- \$12 Fun Side of Asperger
- \$18 Which School

Prices include postage in Australia only (October 2009)

\$.....Total

Please make cheques payable to
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