

SOCIAL SKILLS GOALS

GOAL

Choose goals specific to social skills that benefit your child in a meaningful way without changing the behaviors that make him unique and allow him to cope with the world around him.

BACKGROUND

The first step in helping your child develop social skills is to identify which skills you should teach. Choosing goals that are meaningful for your child requires viewing social interactions from his perspective.

As Laurence Peter said, "If you don't know where you're going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

While there are many different commercially available social skills assessments and curriculums on the market, the best way to begin to assess your child's need for intervention is by simply observing him. Observe how he responds in different social situations. During your observations, consider each of the main areas of social skills and make a list of your child's strengths and weaknesses in each area.

CHOOSING GOALS

Before you get started teaching skills, you must know which skills to teach. Make a list from your observations of the skills your child needs to learn in each main area:

- Self-regulation and awareness
- Social communication
- Perspective taking
- Problem solving
- Social play
- Work-related social skills

From this list, consider which skills lead to more complex skills or will have the biggest impact on his life.

Avoid trying to teach eye contact or reduce stereotypies as your child regulates sensory input through minimizing eye contact and engaging in stereotypies.

ASSESSING SOCIAL SKILLS

SELF-REGULATION AND AWARENESS

Determine how your child self-regulates. Make note of how he responds to different or difficult situations. Is he able to adapt his behavior to be appropriate to the situation? How does he handle frustration? Can he adapt to changes in his routine or schedule without engaging in challenging behavior? Does he demonstrate impulse control when there's something he really wants or something he really wants to avoid?

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

During your child's everyday interactions, observe how he communicates with others. Does your child use spoken words, sign language, a communication app or other alternative methods of communicating? Can he adjust his communication to the person he's speaking to or the situation? Does he follow the basic rules of communication such as taking turns, staying on topic or using gestures?

PERSPECTIVE TAKING

When observing your child, notice how he responds to the reactions of others. Does he demonstrate an understanding that even if he can't see you, you might be able to see him? Can he identify the emotions of others and respond with understanding and empathy? Does he predict what others will do based on how they have responded in similar situations in the past or based on his understanding of that person's experiences?

PROBLEM SOLVING

Take note of how your child responds when he encounters a problem. Is he able to identify the problem and look for alternatives? Can he choose one of the alternatives and implement it to solve the problem? He doesn't need to explain what he's doing. You can watch his behavior to see how he responds when encountering a problem. For example, if he tries to turn the iPad on but it doesn't come on, does he try to plug it in or find another way to solve the problem?

SOCIAL PLAY AND WORK-RELATED SOCIAL SKILLS

Social play includes at least 2 people. How does your child play with his peers? Does he take turns when needed? Can he join peers that are already engaged in play without disrupting the activity? Watch your child to see how he responds in situations he might encounter in a job. How does he respond to feedback? Does he ask for specific help when needed? Can he ask you to clarify instructions if he doesn't understand what you want him to do?

CHOOSING GOALS

Make a list from your observations of the skills your child needs to learn. From this list, consider which skills lead to more complex skills or will have the biggest impact on his life.

Next consider which of these skills you're likely to be most effective in teaching. If your child communicates well, ask him to help decide which skills he thinks are most important to him. Which skills does he want to learn?

Your child likely doesn't know which skills are important, but you can offer choices. For example, if your child is likely to be able to participate in a conversation about social skills, you can say something like "the other day you said you wished Johnny would play with you. I want to help you make friends. Do you want to practice talking to other kids or understanding how Johnny sees things?"

WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD NEED TO LEARN?

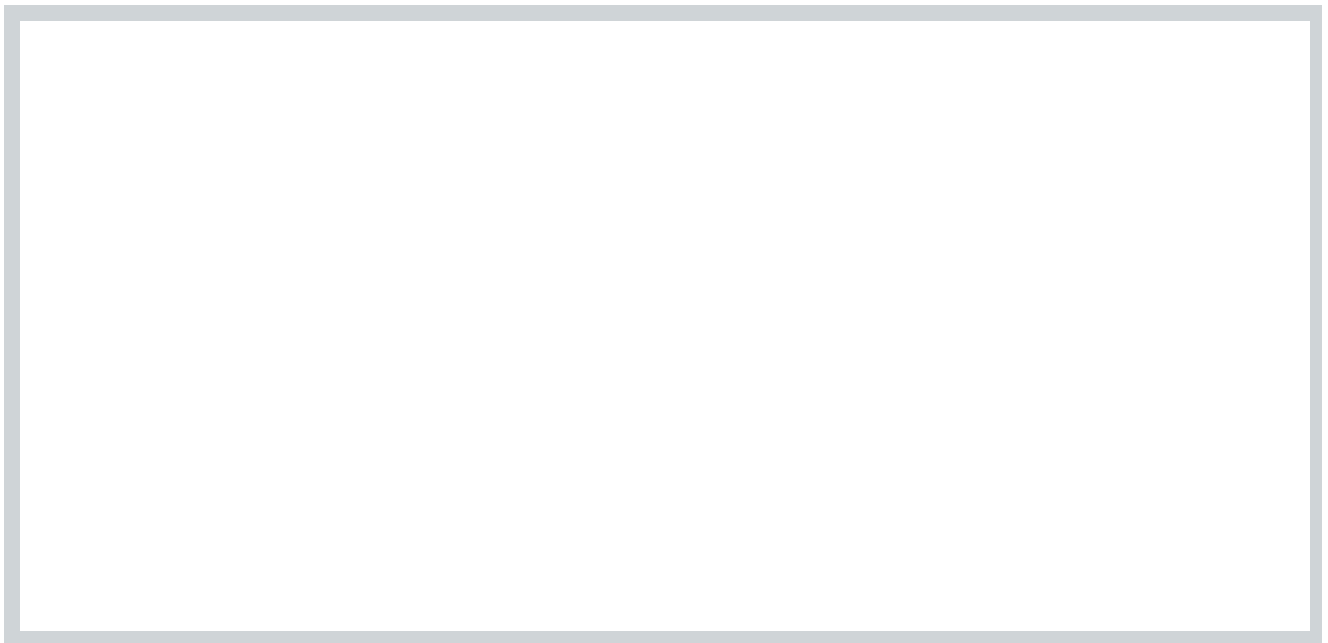


SOCIAL SKILLS GOAL IDEAS

Below are some ideas for social goals that address common areas of challenges for many autistic children. Not all children have the same challenges so make sure to choose goals that are specific for your child and use this list to brainstorm relevant goals.

- uses on topic language
- responds to peer initiations
- initiates conversations with peers
- initiates activities with peers
- keeps conversations with peers going
- joins group activities
- terminates interactions appropriately
- compliments others
- provides assistance to peers
- follows rules when playing games with others
- compromises with peers
- responds to teasing
- accepts constructive criticism/correction from others
- appropriately stands up for rights/expresses feelings
- appropriately questions rules that may be unfair

WHAT SOCIAL SKILLS DO YOU WANT TO TARGET?



GOALS SHOULD BENEFIT YOUR CHILD

Avoid targeting eye contact and stereotypies

Whatever goals you choose, make sure they benefit your child, not anyone else. There are several behaviors that parents and professionals have routinely attempted to change in the past that we now recognize as simply a part of the individual and not actually a problem. As we are learning more about autism, we need to make sure the goals we choose are in the child's best interests. Early on, social skills training focused on eye contact. Now, many autistic adults speak out against teaching autistics to maintain eye contact.

Many autistic children and adults engage in stereotypies as a means of self-regulation. Stereotypies are the repetitive movements or vocalizations that are commonly associated with autism. This might include hand flapping, rocking, humming or a wide variety of other behaviors.

Avoid targeting these behaviors as part of teaching social skills. Remember that your child may avoid eye contact and engage in stereotypies as a way of managing sensory input from the world around him. If his peers don't understand or are bothered by this, educate them about why they are important. Most children, once they understand the behavior are quite accepting and will even join the autistic child as a part of play.



SOCIAL SKILLS GOALS

Choose meaningful goals for your child.

Whenever possible, have him help choose the goals he wants to work on. This helps him feel empowered to learn new skills.

Images are of models for demonstration purposes and do not depict children with autism.