

Observation and Reflection Guide

Identifying social skills to be prioritized for individuals with ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized, among other things, by persistent difficulties in communication and social interaction. Teaching social skills is often necessary to promote authentic and positive social interactions. This resource may serve as a guide when identifying priorities for teaching social skills to your child.

Please note that this guide is not exhaustive and does not replace a comprehensive clinical assessment by a professional. It may, however, provide you with clues as to the social skills that happen to be a barrier for your child in many contexts (in the family, at daycare, at school, with peers, in the workplace, in the community, etc.).

In order to identify your child's strengths and challenges, try to observe your child as they interact with others. Indicate whether or not they demonstrate the skills on the list. You can also gather information by asking individuals who are in frequent contact with your child and who know them well. The skills are divided into four categories: non-verbal communication, conversational skills, social and emotional reciprocity and social relationships. Once you have clearly identified your child's strengths and challenges, here are some tips to help you identify which social skills to prioritize.

Tips to identify social skills to be prioritized

- Conduct more than one observation session if you feel that your child would demonstrate some skills in a specific context and not in another.
- The lists of skills are organized in order of difficulty. It is therefore recommended that you prioritize the prerequisite skills (i.e., the first skills in each of the four lists).
- Keep in mind your child's strengths. How might their strengths contribute to the teaching of other skills?
- Think about a typical day. What skills would greatly improve the flow of a day for your child and those around them?
- Try to identify skills to work on in more than one category to target more than one aspect of social interactions (e.g., choose a skill related to social and emotional reciprocity and a skill related to non-verbal communication).

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication refers to any aspect of communication that is not verbalized (gestures, facial expressions, posture).

Does your child?	Yes	No
Maintain visual contact with others		
Attend to others and what they are doing		
Smile in response to smiles from others		
React appropriately to others' gestures and facial expressions		
Use gestures and facial expressions to communicate with others		
Identify statements, tone of voice and facial expressions indicating anger, disapproval, sadness, disappointment or fear		

Conversation Skills

A conversation is an interactive communication between two or more people. The development of conversation skills is one of the first steps in socialization.

Does your child?	Yes	No
Greet people		
Identify peers and friends by name		
Initiate a conversation		
Join a conversation		
Make comments related to objects or activities present or not in the environment		
Answer who, why, when, where, and how questions		
Say "I don't know" when they do not know the answer to a question		
Stay on topic during an exchange with someone		
Hold a conversation for a sustained period of time		
End a conversation appropriately		

Change the subject or suggest a new activity when someone seems bored, disinterested or uncomfortable		
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Social and Emotional Reciprocity

Social and emotional reciprocity involves a two-way exchange of words, ideas, needs or desires between two people. It makes it possible to build ongoing relationships and exchanges.

Does your child?	Yes	No
Know when and how to initiate a social interaction		
Share their emotions		
Identify and react to others' emotions appropriately		
Understand others' points of view		
Share interests with others		
Choose a topic of conversation appropriate to the group and context		
Discuss others' interests		
Recognize sensitive topics and change subject when needed		
Adapt their behaviour and communication to their relationship with the other person (e.g. friend, family member, peer, authority figure)		
Maintain conversational exchanges by balancing comments and requests for information		
Maintain communicative interactions by taking turns to speak		

Social Relationships

Social relationships are the interactions and emotional ties that people form with each other.

Does your child?	Yes	No
Respect the personal space of others (i.e. standing at an appropriate distance from each other, refraining from touching others when inappropriate, etc.).		
Agree to share their material and do so in an appropriate manner		
Wait their turn during games or activities with others		
Use humour appropriately		

Acknowledge when they have acted improperly and apologize		
Compliment others		
Accept a compliment		
Adjust behaviour to the social context		
Ask what others want or need		
State a friend's likes and dislikes		
Cooperate		
Initiate and maintain conversations that are sensitive to the social context and interests of others		
Use various electronic means positively and mutually (e.g., instant messaging, video chat, telephone, etc.)		