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“GBL for soft skills development” Curriculum for primary school teachers

**GAMESS: Games for students with Autism as an effective
Methodology in Education for the development of Social Skills**

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1. SOCIAL SKILLS CURRICULUM (IO1)

1.1. Introduction

The mission of the project is to develop a GBL package for Social Skills specially designed for autistic students. An integrated approach used to accomplish this task starts with creating of the Social Skills Curriculum intended for primary school teachers and it is complemented by two types of games - **VR Game** and **Group Classroom Games** as an educational package that will set up the pathway for teachers to effectively teach important social skills to autistic students. The Curriculum is aimed to increase the teachers' skills and competencies taking into consideration:

- a) The challenges autistic children face in the mainstream classroom and in the school environment in general
- b) The social skills autistic children usually struggle with
- c) The absence of comprehensive training curricula that will focus on the professional development of teachers in social skills.

The modules of the Social Skills Curriculum will be the main source on which the games will be developed. This training curriculum could bridge the gap between theory and praxis since practically it familiarises the teachers with the GAMESS package (VR Game & Group games Booklet) and is an invaluable source that will support teachers when teaching social skills to their autistic students and will result in students' improved school life and integration into the wider community.

Innovative elements of curriculum:

*Trans-European dimension (curriculum will be elaborated and designed by the transnational team, consisting of researchers and field specialists representing each engaged institution and country)

*Curriculum is considered to be a real response to teachers' need to be trained on how to teach autistic children social skills

*Except for gaining theoretical knowledge, teachers will improve and practice new social skills, interact with field professionals (specialists) from other countries, practice and improve English language skills and digital competencies

THE CURRICULUM CONTENT:

- Understanding Autism
- Issues and difficulties faced by autistic children in the classroom related to social skills
- Teaching strategies

2. UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

2.1. Overview

Different research studies (Courtenay y Perera, 2020; Amaral, de Vries, 2020; Ameis et al., 2020) show the negative effects COVID19 is bringing up for autistic people (in areas such as physical and emotional health, employment, family context) and the risk of loss of social skills and development setbacks.

Therefore, it is urgent to address the need of designing/reinventing educational services delivery using online/virtual tools. First observations (Narzisi, 2020) on already developed online attention initiatives, showed up that communication and cognitive difficulties of people with greater support needs are an extra barrier to effective online support implementation.

These barriers to accessing digital technologies are mainly caused by a lack of accessible tools; a lack of competencies (teachers, people with disabilities, and their families); poorly adapted educational methodologies; and few technological resources. More specifically, digital tools are often designed for the general population without taking into account the needs of autistic people with lower cognitive levels (levels 1 and 2, according to the American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

2.2. Autism

Autism is a lifelong disability and symptoms are usually apparent from early childhood. Autism can be diagnosed by appropriately qualified professionals according to international criteria for diagnosis (DSM-5 Autism Diagnostic Criteria from 2013, Grzadzinski, et al., 2013).

The main symptoms of autism are:

- Deficits in social communication and social interaction;
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities.

Autistic people often also experience sensory difficulties, such as increased or reduced sensitivity to light, sound, colour, smell, taste, or touch.

Autism is a 'spectrum' condition, which means that the symptoms vary between individuals, ranging from mild to severe. Because of that teachers can expect to teach and support children and young people with a wide range of needs, differences, difficulties, and strengths. It is important to consider each child and young person as an individual and to guard against expectations based on preconceived stereotypes. Children and young autistic people will all be different in the ways in which they interact and communicate and all will exhibit unusual

patterns of behaviour and thinking, but they are all individuals and not just the sum total of their particular characteristics of autism (Howley and Preece, 2013).

The same authors say that social interaction differences lie at the heart of the autism spectrum. The range of difficulties with social interaction is diverse and each individual will present differently in how he or she interacts with others: some children and young people are isolated and 'socially aloof', finding interaction stressful; some are socially passive in a way they interact if others initiate the interaction but may not initiate interaction themselves; some will actively interact, but will make 'social mistakes' and some could be described as overly formal and awkward in their interactions.

Children and young autistic people have problems understanding both verbal and non-verbal communication; and while some have good, sometimes advanced, expressive language, this often masks difficulties they have with comprehension. This can be misleading and may result in communication partners assuming they understand when actually they may not.

Often some of the first visible signs of autism are repetitive behaviours, motor mannerisms, and rigid reliance:

- Repetitive behaviours: gross motor movements (hand flapping, rocking, spinning), subtle movements (finger flicking; facial tics and grimacing, shoulder shrugging, repetitive tapping)
- Rigid reliance on behaviour routines: touching surfaces repeatedly before settling to a task, lining up toys in play, lining up equipment on the table and becoming distressed if items are moved, insistence on finishing all activities within one lesson, even though a piece of work should be carried over a series of lessons
- Inflexibility in adapting behaviours to different contexts, particularly social behaviours (Howley and Preece, 2013).

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Repetitive behaviours and motor mannerisms may appear to be non-functional but, if we view these behaviours from an autism perspective, they may serve an important purpose. Some repetitive behaviours are self-management or self-calming strategies (Howley and Preece, 2013).

Autistic children and people often have favourite activities and special interests that often dominate their thinking and create barriers between the individual and the teacher or peers.

For a better understanding of autistic children and people, we need to know cognitive theories. Cognitive theories can help develop a deeper understanding of how an individual may experience the world and respond the way they do when they have autism or related support needs. They can help us to think about 'why' challenges may occur and how we can make the

best adaptations for autistic individuals, in order to reduce anxiety and support participation and learning. All of the 'behaviours' in the diagnostic criteria can also occur in individuals without autism. The theories overlap and are not mutually exclusive but each of them has a useful contribution to understanding autistic people (Silberman, 2015).

Table 1. Cognitive Theories of Autism Spectrum Disorders (Rutherford & Johnston, 2019):

Theory of Mind	<p>Develops from joint attention.</p> <p>Understanding other people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences</p> <p>Taking account of this understanding in your own actions.</p>
Executive Function	<p>The ability to plan, organise, and sequence thoughts and actions.</p> <p>The ability to control impulses.</p>
Weak Central Coherence	<p>The tendency to focus on details, rather than the 'big picture' affects the person's ability to consider the context.</p>
Context blindness	<p>A challenge in processing or using all of the information from visual, auditory, historical, and social contexts to make sense of experiences at the moment.</p> <p>Missing the 'obvious'.</p>
Double Empathy Problem	<p>A mutual challenge of misunderstanding intentions, motivations, or communication between neurotypical people and autistic people.</p>
Monotropism	<p>A tendency to focus attention on one thing at a time, with difficulty shifting attention and processing multiple stimuli which might support understanding.</p>

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Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind (ToM) is based on the theory of cognitive processes that are used to understand other people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences. It was first described by Uta Frith in 1989. and since then, our understanding of it has developed considerably. This skill is

underpinned by early joint attention (two people focusing on the same thing for the purpose of interacting with one another). ToM continues to develop into adulthood, as we continue to try to understand other people's perspectives and actions in social settings. Typically developing children develop an awareness of ToM around the age of 5 and can understand and use words that show they recognise that other people have thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences that are different from their own. As children get older, they realise that people can think one thing but say another and that there are non-literal interpretations of things people say. This can be conveyed verbally and non-verbally and through prosody (or intonation, pitch, and stress in the voice), sarcasm, white lies, and jokes. In autistic people, ToM may not develop in the same way, which can lead to difficulties in using and understanding social communication, being over-literal, misinterpretations of what others think and say, appearing rude or saying and doing things unexpected to others, and having difficulty imagining how else they could do things in future (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014). Rather than focusing on teaching the theory of mind – current research (Holt et al., 2021) suggests this is something we should take into account in understanding autistic people and in designing relevant support strategies.

Executive Function

Executive function is the cognitive theory behind our ability to plan, organise, and sequence thoughts and actions and to control impulses. It can affect our ability to be aware of and understand the passage of time. Working memory is an important aspect of executive function. This allows us to hold one piece of information in our mind as we think about another. What we might see in autistic learners related to challenges with the executive function is: inconsistency in learning – they can do it one day but not the next; clumsiness – walking over things or not seeming to notice people and things around them, or being 'in a rush'; difficulty moving from one activity to another; reluctance to try new things; particular difficulty sequencing tasks (e.g., dressing, organizing their school bag); and impulsive behaviour that they may later regret (Meltzer, 2018).

Weak Central Coherence

Central coherence is the cognitive theory behind our ability to see 'the big picture', understand the context, and use context to draw meaning. Autistic people may tend to focus on the details rather than the whole picture. Challenges in this area may manifest as: avoiding making choices; appearing to misunderstand everything you say; appearing to miss the point; focusing on 'irrelevant' details; reading fluently without comprehension; and rote learning maths but struggling as it gets more complicated (Happé & Frith, 2006).

Context Blindness

Context blindness described by Peter Vermeulen is the cognitive theory where there is a challenge in using visual, auditory, historical, and social context in making sense of experiences at the moment. It is thought that people with this difficulty cannot respond to more than one stimulus at a time, therefore sometimes missing ‘the obvious. Challenges in this area may manifest as: performing well in tests (e.g., of social skills or emotion recognition) but not in real life; not using seemingly obvious contextual information (e.g., knowing that the toilets in a bathroom showroom are not real toilets and should not be used!); demonstrations of ‘over literal’ or ‘concrete’ thinking; being overly formal or over-familiar; being overwhelmed by new people or places; oversharing of personal information; difficulty processing ambiguity (e.g., when someone says one thing but means another); finding it hard to see things from other people’s perspectives; and difficulty adapting rules to changing social contexts – might ‘police’ others or just act unexpectedly (Vermeulen, 2015).

Double Empathy Problem

The cognitive theory of the double empathy problem, described by Damian Milton, suggests that when people with very different experiences of the world interact with one another, they will struggle to empathize with each other. Through this theory, we recognise that as well as autistic people having social communication challenges, neurotypical people can equally have difficulties understanding the intentions and communication of the autistic person and that the problem is a dynamic one, which does not lie solely with the autistic person. What we might see is miscommunication between both groups of individuals (Milton, 2017).

Monotropism

Monotropism is the cognitive theory describing the challenge of ‘being in an attention tunnel’. It is the tendency to focus on one thing at a time and therefore misses contextual information. To perform a task, any individual needs to: See the point of the task – understand the goal; Value the point of the task – be motivated by it; See how to perform that task – understand precisely what task it is, know what steps must be taken to carry it out, and know how to take the identified steps. Monotropic individuals are likely to have problems with each of these. Challenges in this area that we might see in autistic children are: preference for sameness; restricted, repetitive and stereotypic behaviours (e.g., repeatedly spinning the wheels on a car; talking about the same topic repetitively; having a specific interest in washing machines or only eating beige food); difficulty shifting attention from one thing to another; strong attention focus for some things and not others; a lack of preparedness for change - feeling like things that



happen are unexpected because they have not focussed attention on signs others use for predictability; focusing on detail rather than the whole picture; uneven skills profile – related to areas of attention focus or areas not focussed on; being ‘unable to move on’ or getting stuck – and becoming prompt dependent (e.g., only putting their jacket on when the adult tells them to); reduced initiation; a need for order, familiarity and reassurance; reduced awareness of others difficulty when people change their minds (inflexibility); if something doesn’t work out as expected – they don’t see any alternatives (Murray et al., 2005).

Autistic people include those who have significant intellectual disabilities and require a high level of support in their daily lives, as well as those who are of average to high intelligence and require a lower level of support.

In the last diagnostic classification of autism (DSM-5), the level of severity in social communication and restrictive and repetitive behaviour is considered, where the child may belong to:

Level 3 - "Requiring very substantial support"

Social communication: Severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills cause severe impairments in functioning, very limited initiation of social interactions, and minimal response to social overtures from others. For example, a person with few words of intelligible speech who rarely initiates interaction and, when he or she does, makes unusual approaches to meet needs only and responds to only very direct social approaches;

Restricted, repetitive behaviours: Inflexibility of behaviour, extreme difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviours markedly interfere with functioning in all spheres. Great distress/difficulty changing focus or action (APA, 2013).

Level 2 - "Requiring substantial support"

Social communication: Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills; social impairments apparent even with support in place; limited initiation of social interactions; and reduced or abnormal responses to social overtures from others. For example, a person who speaks simple sentences, whose interaction is limited to narrow special interests, and who has markedly odd nonverbal communication.

Restricted, repetitive behaviour: Inflexibility of behaviour, difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviours appear frequently enough to be obvious to the casual observer and interfere with functioning in a variety of contexts. Distress and/or difficulty changing focus or action (APA, 2013).



Level 1 - "Requiring support"

Social communication: Without support in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments. Difficulty initiating social interactions, and clear examples of atypical or unsuccessful responses to social overtures of others. May appear to have decreased interest in social interactions. For example, a person who can speak in full sentences and engages in communication but whose reciprocal conversation with others fails, and whose attempts to make friends are odd and typically unsuccessful.

Restricted, repetitive behaviour: Inflexibility of behaviour causes significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts. Difficulty switching between activities. Problems of organization and planning that hamper independence (APA, 2013).

3. ISSUES AND DIFFICULTIES FACED BY AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM RELATED TO SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are the skills people use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, using gestures, body language, and personal appearance. Many authors recognise that social skills appear as appropriate behaviour according to the specific situation - the ability to interact, communicate, and collaborate with others effectively. These skills include communication, flexibility, empathy, active listening, reading and managing emotions, collaborating with others, and showing responsibility for others and the social environment. People are social beings who need inclusion and acceptance of their environment, on which they depend, in which they learn and develop and shape at the same time. Social skills are demonstrated in a large variety of interpersonal interactions and they help us start, build, and sustain relationships i.e. they help us navigate social settings.

Common social interaction skills include:

- Play skills – like taking turns, sharing, and cooperating
- Conversation skills – including body language and knowing what to say
- Emotional skills – like managing one’s feelings and understanding how others feel
- Problem-solving skills – such as understanding the context, dealing with disagreements, or making decisions in a social situation.

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Canney and Byrne (2006, according to Jurevičienė, Kaffemanienė, and Ruškus, 2012) classify social skills according to the area of their expression, and each area is represented by certain abilities:

- ◆ **Foundation skills** - manifesting in social interactions as basic abilities (eye contact, keeping an adequate personal space, gestures, mimicking);
- ♣ **Interaction skills** - they consist of the following abilities: solving conflicts, waiting for one’s turn, initiating and closing the conversation; interacting with authorities;
- ♥ **Emotional skills** - necessary for personal and other’s awareness, manifest as abilities to recognise and acknowledge the feelings of others, the ability of empathy, understand body language and mimic, ability to determine whether another person can be trusted;
- ♠ **Cognitive skills** - necessary for more complex situations of social interaction (social perception, self-observation, understanding of social norms, and the choice of adequate behaviour in different situations.



A socially competent individual is one who has adequate social skills and uses them to achieve personal goals (Markuš, 2009). In children with neurotypical development, social skills typically develop over time during the process of socialization – children learn from models in their environment and in interaction with them. However, for people on the autism spectrum, the development of play skills or other skills used in social interaction, often develop differently.

3.1. Impact of autism on social interaction or What social skills are affected by autism?

One of the characteristics of children with ASD, ADHD, learning disabilities, and other neurodevelopmental disorders are social skills challenges manifested as a lack or delay in social and communication skills. For autistic people, a common theme is having difficulties with social interaction and interpreting other people's behaviour, as well as knowing what to say or how to behave around others.

Key symptoms of autism spectrum disorder that affect a child's social skills are:

- Delays in speech development
- Difficulty in reading non-verbal cues
- Difficulties in understanding one's own or other people's feelings
- Difficulty in understanding jokes, sarcasm, or teasing
- Giving unrelated answers to questions or difficulty to carry on a conversation
- Repeating words and phrases over and over (echolalia) or preoccupation with certain topics

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Looking at these symptoms, it is understandable how an autistic child can have difficulty interacting with others, playing with their siblings at home, or making friends in the playground.

All these difficulties come to the fore in the school environment. Autistic students will have varying skills and desires when it comes to social interaction in the classroom and outside. And, although autistic students often have the desire to interact with their peers and people around them (sometimes only to get their needs met, such as an item that is out of reach), often do not have the skills to engage appropriately or may be overwhelmed by the process. Social interaction causes high levels of anxiety so autistic children may avoid interaction even though they actually want to connect with others. Some autistic students who are aware of their social deficits may engage in attention-seeking behaviours that result in social exclusion and loneliness.

As autistic students find social interaction difficult and challenging, it can impact their ability (or motivation) to:

- Start or hold a reciprocal conversation
- Understand and use non-verbal communication cues including body language and facial expressions that give context to what is being said
- Make and maintain eye contact
- Talk about something that is outside of their interest
- Follow the teacher's instructions and teaching content
- Understand non-literally languages such as sarcasm, idioms, and metaphors
- Understand when people use language to hide their feelings or words in a way that doesn't make their meaning clear
- Accept touch, therefore they may find hand-shaking or big groups and crowds confronting
- Filter out less important information such as background noise, e.g., some people on the spectrum hyper-focus on minute details, hearing every leaf rustle in the wind, or making connections that others don't
- See others' points of view
- Alter interactions to suit environmental or social contexts e.g., changing behaviour when interacting with teachers, compared to peers, or family members

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(Autism social interaction strategies, <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/social-interaction/>).

For some autistic people, challenges with social interaction can lead to anxiety or a feeling of being isolated. Unfortunately, according to some studies, people on the autism spectrum are more likely to experience bullying than any other type of disability. For others, while having social interactions is important, they may enjoy their own company and not care about others so much.

3.2. What social skills does an autistic child need?

As social beings, people need other people around and, in their lives, to help them grow and develop, to be healthy and happy. Autistic children often need the same level or type of social skills as their neurotypical peers. Social skills are essential for a child to develop confidence, form friendships, co-regulate, and get along with people around them.

Having good social skills improves students' positive behaviour and reduces negative behaviour. While effectively preventing a variety of problems such as isolation, substance abuse, violence, truancy, and bullying, good social skills improve students':



- Social-emotional skills
- Social interactions
- Attitudes about self and others
- Conduct in school, at home, and in the community
- Academic Achievement

At the same time, it decreases their levels of emotional distress and improves their quality of life because improved relations increase social acceptance and desire to participate in social interactions and consequently decrease anxiety, stress, depression, and overall mental health problems.

Author and autism advocate Temple Grandin, who was diagnosed with autism as a toddler, strongly believes children should be taught social skills to help them become more independent. In an Autism Parenting Magazine interview, Grandin explains that social skills are important for building relationships and developing life skills that kids need as adults (An Exclusive Talk with Temple Grandin on the Benefits of ASD Conferences, <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-social-skills/>).

Social skills learning improves students' communication with peers and adults, improves cooperative teamwork, and helps them become effective, caring, and concerned members of their communities. At the same time, it teaches them how to set and achieve individual goals and persistence, skills that are important for their successful development into adulthood, work, and life.

Given the idiosyncratic difficulties in the social and emotional understanding of autistic students, teachers may face considerable difficulties in managing their needs, thereby affecting the quality of the teachers' relationship with these students (Emam and Farrell, 2009). Within this context, and considering how important learning social skills from an early age is, and the challenges teachers can face, teaching social skills in school today is considered as important as teaching academic skills, since the school environment provides the possibility to interact in an appropriate manner.

Good social skills are not only important for the persons to be accepted in the school environment but, also as they progress through life. Research has shown that social skills deficits persist into adulthood, where they continue to negatively impact social and occupational functioning (Rao, Beidel, and Murray, 2008). It is very important that social skills training begins as early in life as possible. Newschaffer and Curran (2003) say that "Interventions started early in life can curtail problematic behaviour and foster communication and social skill growth"

(Fuller and Kaiser, 2020, p 394). Gresham (1982) adds to this notion and asserts that social skills may be conceptualised as part of a broader construct known as social competence.

A significant part of a person's social competence is determined by the quality of social skills. Consequently, the quality of social skills is important in all areas of human activity and thus social skills can be considered one of the main measures of social competence.

Social skills can be taught, practiced, and learned just like reading, maths, and writing skills. Some people can learn social interaction skills just by watching what others are doing and how they interact. Many other people learn by focusing on one skill at a time, practicing it, and using it in different situations. Children on the autism spectrum need the same social skills during their development as their neurotypical peers and the main difference is in the way they learn and acquire new skills. Autistic people often need explicit instruction to learn appropriate social skills and to manage interactions successfully. That is why autistic children need additional support from adults and teachers in social skills development, compared to their neurotypical peers.

Students seem to learn social skills best when they are taught in authentic situations using a variety of mediums. "Children don't learn social skills in a bubble," says behavioural therapist Colleen Muhvic, (<https://consultqd.clevelandclinic.org/coaching-parents-on-the-importance-of-practicing-social-skills-in-nontherapeutic-situations/>). There are many social skills that can be learned in different settings and with different people, so direct and explicit instruction needs to be combined with opportunities to practice and generalise these skills in more natural settings. That means real-life practice with peers and in everyday situations. Practicing in natural settings (e.g., the playground) will help the student to use the social skills at the right place and time. One avenue to ensure the generalization of skills is through programmed practice in naturalistic settings, allowing practice with unfamiliar adults and children (Krasny et al., 2003). Ultimately, it is important to continue social skills training in a range of different contexts to help the students learn how to use their skills.

Also, it is essential that social skills and social understanding are taught together, providing information regarding when to use skills, when not to, who to use them with and who not to use them with, when to stop using a specific skill, and so on. Teaching social skills in the absence of social understanding leaves an individual vulnerable – for example, prolonged eye gaze may be interpreted as a threat in some contexts (Howley and Preece, 2013).

Teaching an autistic child social skills can be a challenge sometimes. That is why it is important to strengthen general teachers' teaching skills and key competencies and enable them to work on autistic children's social skill growth in the mainstream classroom, which according to

research should start early in life as part of a broader construct known as social competence, improving at the same time the mainstream classroom's social environment for all.

4. TEACHING STRATEGIES

Schools are often relied upon to shoulder the responsibility of delivering social skills programming to children with social skills deficits, because the presence of these deficits significantly interferes with social relationships and has a deleterious impact on academic performance (Welsh et al., 2001). The school setting provides a fertile ground for delivering effective social skills programming, but it also presents formidable obstacles. The school day is filled with abundant opportunities to interact with peers in a natural social environment. Also, schools are equipped with trained professionals who are qualified to teach social skills. However, implementing social skills programming in schools can be challenging for school personnel, who often are presented with limited time, resources, and training (Bellini et al., 2007). Also, for autistic students, attending school itself is a challenge they face every day. In addition to academic challenges, they also deal with other children in their class and sensory issues.

The inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, and inclusive education in general, has been part of the EU's agenda in the field of equality in education for some time, but it is also a global trend.

A variety of social skills interventions, strategies, and programs are developed to help schools in teaching children and adolescents social and interpersonal behaviours. Social skills interventions that incorporate social and emotional learning skills have proved to be particularly effective in helping students to know and manage themselves, understand the perspectives of others, relate effectively with them, and make sound choices about personal and social decisions. Therefore, all students involved in social skills learning programs can benefit from them.

Baker (2003) states that Key Components of Effective Social Skills Training include:

1. Assessment: Prioritise relevant skill goals based on input from key stakeholders (e.g., the student, parents, and teachers).
2. Motivation: Establish motivation to learn and use skills across settings.
3. Skill acquisition: Teach skills using strategies that match the student's language, cognitive, and attention abilities.
4. Generalization: Coach students to use the skills in natural settings and involve those who surround the targeted student.



5. Peer sensitivity: Train typical peers as necessary to increase generalization of skills with peers, reduce isolation, increase opportunities for friendship, and decrease bullying.

Additionally, some general recommendations when choosing and implementing a social skills program in schools are:

- Allow flexibility when choosing to teach through a combination of large group instructions, small skill groups, and individual social skills instruction,
- Include direct instruction, modelling, playing skills, practicing skills in different environments, and performance feedback,
- Identify the performance deficits, skill deficits, and fluency gaps and offer strategies to address each,
- Foster independence without any or minimal cues and prompts as the eventual goal of social skills teaching.

Considering the specifics of learning and adopting the rules of social interactions in autistic people, the development of a social skills learning program for autistic people should include:

- Expanding understanding of language
- Recognizing and understanding their own emotions, facial expressions, and body language
- Better understanding of unwritten social rules
- Adjusting to new social situations
- Learning problem solving skills
- Sharing interests with others
- Learning self-advocacy

Autistic people can learn social skills, and they can get better at these skills with practice. Some additional recommendations to support social skill development in autistic students are listed on the Autism Speaks website (<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/autism-and-social-skills-development>):

- Reinforce what the student does well socially - use behaviour-specific praise (and concrete reinforcement if needed) to shape pro-social behaviour.
- Model social interaction, turn-taking, and reciprocity.
- Teach imitation, motor as well as verbal.
- Teach context clues and referencing those around you (for example, 'if everyone else is standing, you should be too!').



- Break social skills into small component parts, and teach these skills through supported interactions. Use visuals as appropriate.
- Celebrate strengths and use these to your advantage. Many autistic students have a good sense of humor, a love of or affinity for music, strong rote memorization skills, or a heightened sense of color or visual perspective. Use these to motivate interest in social interactions or give a student a chance to shine and be viewed as competent and interesting.
- Identify peers who model strong social skills and pair the student with them. Provide peers with strategies for eliciting communication or other targeted objectives, but be careful not to turn the peer into a teacher and strive to keep peer interactions as natural as possible.
- Create small lunch groups, perhaps with structured activities or topic boxes. (The group pulls a topic out of a box and discusses things related to this topic, such as ‘The most recent movie I saw was...’ This can be helpful for students who tend to talk about the same things all the time since it provides support and motivation and the benefit of a visual reminder of what the topic is.)
- Focus on social learning during activities that are not otherwise challenging for the child (for example, conversational turn-taking may not occur if a child with poor fine motor skills is being asked to converse while cutting.)
- Support peers and students with structured social situations. Define expectations of behaviour in advance. (For example, first teach the necessary skill, such as how to play Uno, in isolation, and then introduce it in a social setting with peers.)
- Teach empathy and reciprocity. To engage in social interaction, a person needs to be able to take another’s perspective and adjust the interaction accordingly. While their challenges may distort their expressions of empathy, autistic people often do have a capacity for empathy. This can be taught by making a student aware - and providing appropriate vocabulary - through commentary and awareness of feelings, emotional states, recognition of others’ facial expressions, and non-verbal cues.

4.1. Major approaches to social skills training

Some of the major approaches to skills training can be categorised based on their underlying assumptions of what leads to behaviour change (Baker, 2013).

The behavioural approaches (ABBA approaches, Video Modelling and Video Selfmodelling and Augmentative Communication and Visual Supports used in the Context of ABA) focus on

altering observable events in the environment (antecedents and consequences) in order to increase certain behaviours and decrease undesirable behaviours (for example, an instructor might model and prompt a student to greet his peers and then reward the student for doing so).

Cognitive behavioural approaches (**Social Thinking Model, Social Stories, Structured Learning, and Visual Supports to Expand Understanding of Events and Tasks** like the TEACCH model) share some of these assumptions about manipulating the environment to change behaviour, but they extend the notion to consider how an individual interprets or perceives what happens in the environment. To this end, individuals' thoughts and perceptions become a primary focus in understanding how someone will behave (for example, an instructor might explain to a student how others would think and feel if he did not greet his peers). Trying to alter the child's perceptions or interpretations of events can be accomplished with verbal explanations for high-functioning youngsters, or through certain visual supports that make the abstract more concrete for youngsters with more language challenges (Baker, 2013).

Relationship-based approaches (e.g., **Floortime** and **Son-Rise**) posit that developing a trusting relationship is a primary factor in influencing the development of new skills. Through following the lead of the child, respecting his or her preferences, and sharing control of activities with the child, trust and motivation develop so that learning can occur. Some of the approaches combine ideas from several categories.

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Some of the most common approaches to teaching social skills to autistic students are:

- Social narratives like Social stories and Comic strip conversations describe social situations in some detail by highlighting relevant cues and offering examples of appropriate responses. Social narratives are individualised according to an individual's needs and typically are quite short, perhaps including pictures or other visual aids. They work by breaking down information in a literal, basic way. They can be useful in explaining 'sequencing' (what comes next in a series of activities or steps), and 'executive functioning' (planning and organizing).
- Video-modelling - footage of the skill being modeled is recorded on video, so that the learner can review the video at a time that suits them, and repetitively to develop fluency in learning the skill.
- Hidden Curriculum - these strategies involve directly teaching "unspoken" social rules that most people understand intuitively. A child who does not intuit or know these rules is at risk for social isolation. In the book *The Hidden Curriculum*, the authors outline possible teaching strategies and list numerous unwritten social rules ranging from the somewhat simple, such as only the birthday girl or boy opens the presents, to the more subtle, such

as just because a person is nice to you one time doesn't mean he or she is your "best friend" (Foden and Anderson, 2011).

- Social skills groups and Peer-mediated strategies - these groups offer an opportunity for autistic students to practice social skills with each other and/or typical peers on a regular basis. Some social skills groups consist solely of autistic students while other groups have a mix of participants, autistic students along with typically developing children. Often these groups use a variety of techniques and tools.
- Virtual games and other multimedia technologies involve using videos, software, or virtual-reality programs to teach complex social skills. Many types of multimedia technologies can be an excellent match for the specific learning styles and preferences of students who are visual learners (virtual environments, simulations, videos, etc.). Additionally, many of the teaching and generalization strategies mesh nicely with a variety of multimedia tools. Students learn social skills best when they are taught in authentic situations using a variety of mediums. Activities such as role-playing, listening to social stories, and observing peer behaviour can all be augmented with the use of multimedia tools. There are commercially available software programs to teach social skills, and, with some basic technology tools, it is also possible to create your own social skills tools; these tools can then be tailored to the specific needs of your students. For example, students videotape other students in class or around the school and then use the video to conduct a discussion of the social interactions.

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It is important to carefully choose curriculum and programs that are successful, and research-based whenever possible. Here are some examples of curriculum and programs that can be used to teach social skills to individuals on the autism spectrum:

- The PATHS Curriculum <https://pathsprogram.com/>
- PEERS® Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) <https://www.routledge.com/>
- Social Skills Training <https://fhautism.com>
- Social Skills Picture Book e Horizons, Inc. <https://fhautism.com>
- Social Competence Curricula (SCI) <https://education.missouri.edu/sci/>
- Super Skills <https://aapcautismbooks.com/>
- The ACCEPTS Program (A Curriculum for Children's Effective Peer and Teacher Skills),
- Quest Program Social Skills Curriculum <https://fhautism.com>
- Social Thinking® <https://www.socialthinking.com>
- You are a Social Detective <https://www.socialthinking.com>
- Why Didn't They Just Say That? PEERspective – A Complete Curriculum <https://aapcautismbooks.com/>
- Stop and Think Social Skills Program - "Project Achieve" <http://projectachieve.us/home.html>
- The Zones of Regulation® <https://www.socialthinking.com>
- The Incredible-5 Point Scale <https://www.amazon.com>

4.2. How Teachers Can Work on Social Skills

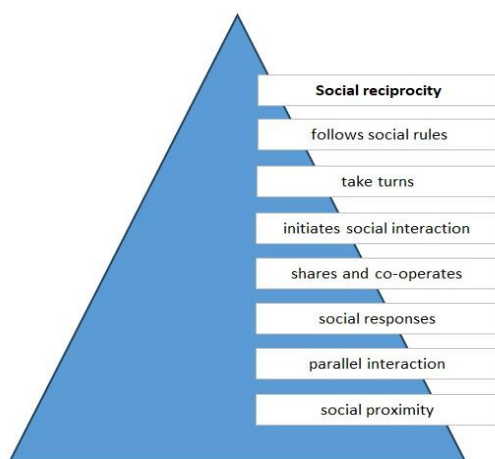
Autism is a spectrum which means every autistic person is unique and has different abilities and interests. When teaching social skills to autistic students, it is critical to consider each student's unique set of strengths and difficulties in order to achieve optimal results. The teaching should be adapted to the specific requirements of each individual student. Also, before starting to teach social skills, it is important to conduct an assessment to identify specific skills that need to be worked on. Teachers can observe students in the classroom, and around school to note any attempts to interact, problems with their interactions, and consequences of their interaction attempts. To understand the social differences of an individual on the spectrum, look for signs including students:

- Socially withdrawn and isolated
- On the periphery of activities and the playground
- Unable to share space with others/poor awareness of personal space
- Unable to share, take turns, and cooperate with peers
- Unable to wait for their turn, calling out, wanting to be first and to win
- Making inappropriate social responses to peers and adults
- Making 'rude' comments – stating facts with no awareness of the impact on another person
- Having a lack of, or limited understanding of, friendships
- Unaware of social codes of conduct in different social contexts (Howley and Preece, 2013).

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Observations should identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to social skills and awareness, taking into account the social skills hierarchy (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Social skills hierarchy



In addition to problems with developing social skills, autistic students may have problems with social understanding which may account for some of the inappropriate social responses and social mistakes observed regularly in children and young people on the spectrum (Howley and Preece, 2013). As mentioned before, it is essential that social skills and social understanding are taught together since both,



strengths in social skills and social skills teaching are limited without sufficient understanding. Individual goals should target to improve social skills and social understanding and every opportunity taken to plan for this important aspect of development.

Teachers can help autistic students with their social skills by making the classroom comfortable (no loud noise or bright lights), encouraging students to take part in activities, and picking topics that they might have a great interest in.

For autistic students, it is crucial to adjust the environment and create a climate that respects their sensory sensitivities and need for a clear structure of space, activities, and time, to plan and announce transitions, prepare developmentally appropriate tasks, enable peace and their own place, and opportunities to participate in decision-making. Visual aids can support autistic students with skill development, communication, and increased independence. When teachers set the environment for success, it gives them the opportunities to reinforce positive behaviour, practice the desired behaviour, and celebrate individual strengths.

These ideas and strategies can help teachers in building autistic child's social skills:

- Praise, reinforce positive behaviour, and celebrate individual strengths.
- Model and practice desired behaviours - demonstration of a desired behaviour by either a teacher or peer that can result in the imitation of that behaviour by the learner. This can lead to the development of new skills.
- Provide structured social interactions – autistic people appreciate structure and stability. Routines are important for them and changes can be difficult. As a result, it can be easier to teach new skills and enhance social skills when working within a structure that is expected.
- Talk through possible social scenarios from everyday life situations and role-play real or imagined scenarios. You can discuss the impact of someone's choices on their environment as well as possible alternative solutions.
- Set the environment for success - during teaching moments, keep outside distractions to a minimum. Choose times when your students are most relaxed and willing to work.

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Teachers with good socio-emotional competencies can contribute to the social development of students not only through direct instructions but also by modelling the behaviour and influencing the general climate in the classroom and at school. Teachers are key role models, who can influence the attitudes, values, and behaviours of their pupils (Early Career Framework, 2021). Teachers can use natural situations to practice social skills or incorporate social skills

practice into the school curriculum giving students more opportunities to practice desired behaviours and receive feedback.

Play is one of the best ways to help children learn and develop skills, including social skills. When children play together, it gives them the chance to practice turn-taking, joint attention and sharing interests, cooperation, coping with winning and losing, following rules, and more. Practicing a skill in different play situations will help children learn to use the skill more broadly. For example, they can practise taking turns while throwing a ball to one another, putting pieces of a puzzle together, or playing a game like Jenga or various cards games.

Teachers also can use effective *peer support* to support autistic students because it has a number of benefits: peers are easily available and can be very powerful role models. People are more likely to imitate behaviour displayed by individuals similar to themselves (e.g., age and gender), this is especially noticeable in children. Peers enhance social learning and can improve levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They also provide opportunities to learn about how other people feel and how they express their feelings.

Peers are indispensable in practicing play and teachers can practice play using games that are age- and interest-appropriate for students. Group games can be played using Cooperative or Social Play or Structured Social Skill Groups. Cooperative or Social Play is when children play together with others and have an interest in both the activity and other children involved.

Strategies for cooperative and social play include:

- Encouraging participation at one own's choice with respecting individual differences and needs.
- Breaking tasks down so that they have a clear start and finish point.
- Providing structure such as visual supports but also increasing participation in group activities such as e.g., music time and silent work time.
- Encouraging choice-making skills in 'free time'.
- Teachers and parents can model what to say to other children during play e.g., "Can I play?", "Will you play with me?", "Can I please have the next turn?"
- Encouraging and modelling turn-taking skills "John's turn", and "your turn".
- Encouraging joint attention "What are they doing?"
- Developing skills to cope with change and transition.
- Increasing the size of social groups slowly.
- Increasing the length of social interaction slowly.



- Including a schedule of structured and unstructured play times so they can practice choice-making. (Autism social interaction strategies)

<https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/social-interaction/>

Structured Social Skills Groups are often implemented in small groups with a professional trained in developing social interaction skills leading the group. They may be offered in schools, in pre-schools, or in the wider community. They typically are structured and use prompting, or scaffolding as needed to support students' performance related to the goals of the activity. Some have an interest focus such as Lego, while others focus on skill development.

It is also important to *respect individual learning styles*. Personal accounts (e.g., Temple Grandin) tell us that many individuals on the autism spectrum often 'think in pictures', and research results indicate that autistic individuals process visual information more easily than verbal information. The use of visual aids supports their learning style, promoting independence and using individual strengths (Howley and Preece, 2013). There are many types of visual support, visual supports encompass picture cards, tactile cards, photos, short videos, coloured cards or stickers, scales, and line drawings. Visual cards can also be used as prompts, like teaching someone how to have a conversation or learn a new skill. The use of visual teaching styles consists of:

- Use of visual prompts and messages
- Using written instructions
- Use of a highlighter pen – to highlight important information, e.g., on a worksheet
- Labelled diagrams/flowcharts/mind-maps
- Use of visual cue cards
- Use writing frames to structure answers
- Visually structured tasks (Howley and Preece, 2013).

Visual teaching strategies include: interactive whiteboard, showing artefacts and photographs, showing information in diagrammatic form, mind-maps, flowcharts, providing text rather than just reading it out, visual cue cards to highlight and clarify concepts, written/symbol/picture vocabulary, visual modelling and demonstrations (Howley and Preece, 2013).

Conclusion

Supporting social interaction in schools is an important piece of the student's educational plan. After the family, the school has the greatest influence on the social and emotional development of a child, therefore, it is not surprising that recently there has been an increasing interest in strategies in which the school could support the development of social skills in students and thus

prevent potential difficulties (Vranjican et al., 2019). The school environment offers numerous opportunities to make friends, develop empathy, prosocial behaviour, and self-confidence, to encourage play, cooperation, and curiosity, but also to acquire a sense of responsibility, adopt rules of behaviour and react appropriately in different challenging situations. Also, the educational setting of the school offers unique opportunities to teach typical peers to become sensitive and helpful toward neurodivergent peers, such as autistic students (Kasari et al., 2012). These results support the view that working with peers may be the most effective and ecologically valid approach for improving the social outcomes of autistic children. Overall, results indicate that peer-mediated treatments are superior to non-peer-mediated treatments on several outcomes and these treatment gains persisted to follow-up (Kasari, et al., 2012). Thus, in this way, the other involved students can also benefit from participating in social skills learning programs by improving their social competencies including their neurotypical and neurodivergent peers, and raising awareness of the importance of accepting diversity. Social competence is also about the role of social partners; social competence is linked to peer acceptance, teacher acceptance, inclusion success, and beyond-school success, and if all we do is concentrate on changing the autistic individual, we are unlikely to succeed (Howley and Preece, 2013).

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As the Meta-Analysis of School-Based Social Skills Interventions for Children With ASD (Bellini et al., 2007) suggests that social skills interventions have been minimally effective for autistic children, the researchers concluded that social skills programs must be designed to fit the individual needs of the child, as opposed to forcing the child to “fit” into the chosen social skills strategy or strategies.

The results support the recommendations offered by Gresham et al., (2001), which include increasing the dosage of social skills interventions, providing instruction in the child’s natural setting, matching the intervention strategy with the type of skill deficit, and ensuring intervention fidelity (Bellini et al., 2007).

The aim of social skills learning and interventions shouldn’t be the message that it is wrong to be different, or that autistic people have to mask or camouflage themselves or behave in a way that is unnatural to them. The aim is to help autistic students navigate their social environment more easily, therefore the focus should be on learning skills that help autistic students communicate their wants and needs in a way that works for them, to teach them self-advocacy skills, to expand their understanding of language, to recognise and understand their own emotions, and develop self-regulating strategies and problem-solving skills.

Autistic children can experience significant gains in social skills, but they don't happen immediately. Be consistent with therapy and the lessons you reinforce at home!!!

4.3. The modules of the curriculum

The modules of the Social skills curriculum are determined by the results of the needs assessment through a small survey that included teachers from all partner countries (Denmark, Finland, Croatia, Spain, Cyprus). The modules are the main source on which the games will be developed.

FOUNDATION SKILLS
INTERACTION SKILLS
AFFECTIVE SKILLS
COGNITIVE SKILLS

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Foundation Skills - Basic social interaction (nonverbal skills)

Foundation skills refer to the ways in which we communicate without using words and involves the way we present ourselves to others. They are manifesting in social interactions as basic abilities: body movement and body posture (facial expressions and eye contact, posture, gestures, mimic, keeping an adequate personal space), imitation, and joint attention. Approximately 93 percent of communication is nonverbal (tone of voice makes up 38 percent of communication, and body language and facial expressions constitute 55 percent).

- appropriate use of body language (eye contact, facial expressions, posture, gestures, mimic) and voice quality (tone and altitude of voice, speech pace, clarity)
- respect and maintain appropriate personal space, appropriate touch
- understand non-verbal signs

Interaction Skills - Skills needed to interact with others (verbal skills)

Interaction skills consist of management and control abilities of mutual interactions which include the management of one's own behaviour, and the abilities to manage and control the interaction of other with him/her (Jureviciene et al., 2012). They are often impossible to separate from the communication skills to which they are closely related. *Communication skills*

are firstly related to the abilities to initiate and maintain verbal and nonverbal contact, but also in more complex abilities of maintaining interpersonal relations. Social expressiveness is also needed when communicating as well as flexibility and adjustability abilities and conflict resolution abilities.

- rituals of initiation, development, and closing of the conversation, determining appropriate topics for conversation, listening/answering questions, turn-taking, etc.
- cooperation - working or playing with partners or in groups - participating, taking turns, following the rules
- sharing (interests or objects)
- following the rules of social interactions in different settings/being polite (respect and manners)
- interacting with authority figures
- resolving (negotiating) conflicts

Affective Skills - Skills needed for recognizing and managing emotions

Affective skills manifest in two ways - on the one hand, they help the person to understand oneself and to cope with his/her emotions, also to control oneself while communicating and participating in a common activity with others. Components of emotional skills are abilities of *self-awareness* and *self-evaluation* - those abilities help individual to understand oneself in social interaction situations; and *emotional expressiveness* or *self-revelation abilities* - they help to positively reveal oneself to others. It is important to understand others in communication situations and emotional sensitivity abilities are necessary in order to do this; self-regulation, self-management or self-control abilities help to behave adequately (Jureviciene et al., 2012).

Emotional expressiveness and emotional sensitivity are the ones that integrate with communication abilities. According to R. Malinauskas (2004), emotional skills enrich and enliven verbal and nonverbal communication. The author states that emotional expressiveness belongs to the area of nonverbal information transfer and includes not only the ability to express the need for communication, but also shows the individual's ability to express emotions in a manner that is understandable and acceptable to others. Emotional sensitivity means the recognition of other's emotions, and emotional control - ability to control and regulate one's emotional states and nonverbal expression, as well as to mask one's emotional state and avoid a spontaneous burst of emotions (Malinauskas, 2004).

- identifying one's feelings
- recognizing the feelings of others
- decoding body language and facial expressions



- showing interest in others, demonstrating empathy and prosocial behaviours, respecting ourselves and others
- accepting individual and group differences (tolerance and diversity)
- remaining on a task and being patient
- demonstrating emotional reactions appropriate to the situation (matching 'energy' or level of emotion to the social situation), expressing thoughts, and feelings in a verbal and nonverbal manner
- flexibility and adjustability abilities
- stress management – abilities of resistance to stress and control impulsiveness
- handling peer pressure or peer teasing

Cognitive Skills - Skills needed to maintain more complex social interactions

The basis of *cognition skills* are social norms which regulate behaviour and knowledge (cognitive level). The practical level of social cognition skills is social sensitivity which aids to decode social signals, assess the situation by comparing it to the knowledge about social norms, as well as it helps to make decisions about a behaviour that would be adequate to the situation, and when needed, to solve problems (Jureviciene et al., 2012). Social cognition skills relate to emotional skills (self-regulation, and self-control abilities). Both the knowledge of social norms and practical orientation to social norms in various social situations require a high level of social and emotional intellect. Social cognition skills reflect a person's orientation in social life, understanding the logic of interpersonal relations, expectations from the surrounding people's viewpoint, and behaviour control corresponding to expectations (Jureviciene et al., 2012).

- self—monitoring
- social perception – the ability to understand the environment by observing others
- understanding another's perspective
- ability to analyse information, alternative solutions, and their outcomes, and to make decisions (choices)
- understanding community norms, following the rules
- determining appropriate behaviour for different social situations
- understanding sarcasm, irony, metaphors, and non-literal meaning
- managing viral communication

In summary, it can be stated that communication skills are essential in the structure of social skills; however, communication skills are closely related to emotional and social cognition skills. So, *communication* induces the development of all other social skills: helps to learn ways to express socially acceptable behaviour and emotions, control the expression of behaviours and



emotions, constructively resolve conflicts and strengthen interrelationships. On the other hand, *communication* is both the *factor* and the *presumption of social skill formation*; communication and other social skills are the *result of social and educational interactions* (Jureviciene et al., 2012).

Are There Sequences of Skills?

A functional approach, in which we search for the skills that are necessary for the student to function in a desired setting, can help us decide what skills to target. What does this individual do too much or doesn't do enough of in that setting that may interfere with the ability to function? There are two categories of skills that are prerequisites for many other skills: joint attention and symbolic communication skills. *Joint attention* refers to the child's ability to attend to what the teacher is attending to (Baker,2013). *Symbolic communication* refers to the ability to communicate about events, objects, or people when those events, objects, or people are not concretely present to the child. This kind of ability is a prerequisite for a conversation about the past, future, or hypothetical situations. If a child is not able to do this, he will not be able to discuss situations easily or learn only from verbal explanations, which is a primary way many children are introduced to new topics in school. Without good symbolic language skills, students will need to see pictures or videos of events or actually be in the event in order to learn about it.

4.4. Examples of activities by modules

All images are the property of ARASAAC. Some of the activities are adapted from "101 WAYS TO TEACH CHILDREN SOCIAL SKILLS" by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D. (2004).

The following activities are examples you can build on and make them more suitable for your students. Each activity can be adapted to the age, abilities, preferences, and needs of students, as well as to the requirements of a given situation. The teachers have the freedom to lead the activity in a way they find most useful, and by being flexible, they can be role models for their students and teach them flexibility and tolerance to changes.

The teacher's task is to create an environment that enables the learning of social skills in each student and to encourage students to participate by allowing everyone to participate to the extent and in the way that suits them best. This is especially true for autistic students to whom we do not want to send the message that it is wrong to be different, or that they have to mask or camouflage themselves or behave in a way that is unnatural to them. The aim is to help autistic students navigate their social environment more easily, therefore the focus is on

learning skills that help autistic people to communicate their wants and needs in a way that works for them, teach them self-advocacy skills, expand their understanding of language, recognize and understand their own emotions, and develop self-regulating strategies and problem-solving skills.

The accent of the activities for all students is on teaching that we are all different, everyone communicates in different ways, and we can all communicate better if we're accepting each other's communication needs.

As the games are intended for learning social skills in autistic students, it is good to follow general rules that have been shown to be effective:

- Take into account each student's unique set of strengths and difficulties in order to achieve optimal results.
- Set clear school and classroom rules, together with your students if possible, and ensure everybody understands and accepts them.
- Be a role model for your students and set a positive example for them with patience, a calm and peaceful tone of voice, and a friendly attitude toward others.
- Value other people's individuality.
- Encourage everybody to take part in a game as much as they like, to stop and leave the game if they feel uncomfortable - everybody's feelings and sensations must be considered.
- Use explicit and clear instructions.
- Tell them what TO do, instead of what NOT to do.
- Use visual supports whenever possible. For autistic students, a picture is worth a thousand words or more!
- Be mindful of the requirements of the senses and avoid circumstances that might lead to sensory overload because of the prevalence of sensory sensitivities among autistic individuals.
- Provide opportunities to practice and repeat what they have learned, in different environments if possible. Do not assume autistic students will generalize.

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4.4.1. Foundation Skills - Basic social interaction (nonverbal skills)

1. APPROPRIATE USE OF BODY LANGUAGE – MAKING EYE CONTACT

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the meaning of eye contact in everyday interactions



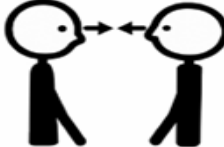
Ask the pupils in the classroom what eye contact means to them. Is it important to them? What differences between people have they noticed regarding their different desire to make an eye contact. In which situations they try to avoid eye contact? What information can they get from making eye contact with others? For experiencing how students feel about eye contact, you can do three exercises:

One student will be the speaker and one the listener for all three exercises, and then they will switch roles. Activity sheet:

MAKING EYE CONTACT

Name _____

Date _____



1. Tell your partner everything you did last night. While you are talking, your partner should never take his eyes off your face—he should actually stare at you. While you were talking, how did you feel about the eye contact your partner was making with you?

2. Tell your partner everything you are planning to do tonight. While you are talking, your partner should never look at your face. While you were talking, how did you feel about the eye contact your partner was making with you?

3. Tell your partner everything you are planning to do this weekend. While you are talking, your partner should look at you some of the time. While you were talking, how did you feel about the eye contact your partner was making with you?

After they finish, they will share their feelings about the three types of eye contact. You can have a class discussion about what they learned. Tell them that people speak with their eyes as well as their words. When people make eye contact, they look at the person to whom they are talking or listening. Making eye contact doesn't mean staring into the other person's eyes the whole time. It means looking at her every so often, so that person realises you understand and care about what the person is saying.

People, especially autistic students differ in their ability to establish and maintain eye contact and teachers should use proper terminology so they don't make children feel uncomfortable or

promote their masking behaviours. All differences among children are valid and should be taken into account when teaching the meaning of eye contact.

2. APPROPRIATE USE OF VOICE QUALITY – TONELEJE

Learning Objective: To help students to recognise how things are said can be just as important as what is said.

Ask the pupils in the classroom what they think the “tone of voice” means and ask them to give examples of different tones of voice. Then you can do exercises. The pupils will sit in a circle and going around the circle they will give examples of how voice tones can change the meaning of what’s being said or communicate the wrong feeling.

Example 1: The first pupil in the circle says, “I love chocolate” in a bored voice. The next pupil then says, “I love chocolate” like he really loves it.

Example 2: The next child says, “I think your hair is cool” in a repulsive voice. The next pupil says the same sentence in a tone he thinks is appropriate, such as complimentary or friendly.

Example 3: The next pupil says, “I have so much homework!” in a happy voice. The next child says the same sentence in a tone he thinks appropriate, such as sad or angry.

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This activity can continue around the circle, with pupils making up their own statements.

After they finished, follow up with a discussion of how voice tone affects the meaning of what’s being said. The tone of voice is an essential element of communication that often “speaks” more powerfully than our actual words. It’s not just the words you use but how you deliver the message. Sometimes, how you say, something can change the meaning of what you are saying. It can even give the message that you don’t mean what you are saying.

3. APPROPRIATE USE OF VOICE QUALITY – VOICE VOLUME

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the importance of using appropriate voice volume.

Ask students if they can remember a situation where someone spoke too softly or too loudly. Do they remember what they were thinking about in that situation or how they felt?

Ask them to give examples of situations in which it is appropriate to speak more quietly or loudly. Ask the group why it is important to use the appropriate volume in different situations. Ask them to think of other situations where different volumes are appropriate and why.



Put a check under the voice volume that is appropriate for each situation

	SOFT	NORMAL	LOUD
Studying at the library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheering at a football game	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shopping in a store	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing outdoors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing indoors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When someone is taking a nap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When someone is on the phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When you are on the phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On the school bus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking in the lunchroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watching a movie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LIBRARY, SWIMMING POOL, STREET, HOSPITAL

Choose two of the situations above and tell why you would use a soft, normal, or loud voice.

4. RESPECT AND MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE PERSONAL SPACE

Learning Objective: To teach and help pupils with the concept of personal space

Ask the pupils to talk about personal space and what that concept means for them. You can explain that personal space refers to the distance between two people. Your personal space is the space around your body that helps you feel comfortable around other people and helps them feel comfortable around you. It’s like an invisible bubble you carry around with you.

Most commonly we differentiate four personal space zones:

- **INTIMATE** zone, which starts where someone can almost touch you. This zone is where your family and closest friends will stand to talk with you about something personal or to be near you. If someone you don’t feel close to stands in this zone, you will probably feel uncomfortable.
- **PERSONAL** zone, which goes from 45 to 120 cm distance from another person. People you know well stand in this zone for everyday conversations.
- **SOCIAL** zone, which ranges from approximately 1.2 to 3.5 m from your body. Acquaintances stand in the social zone to talk to you.



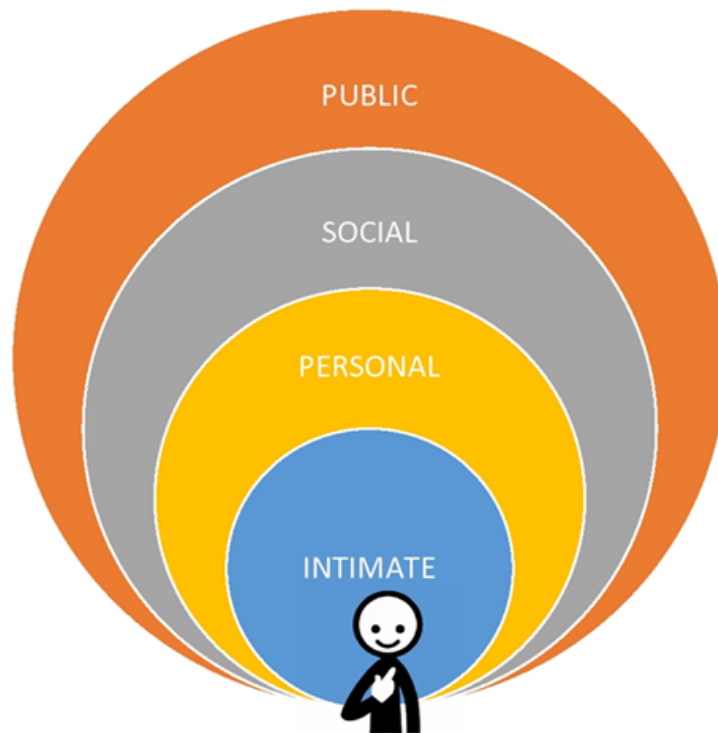
- **PUBLIC** zone begins at 3.5 m and goes as far as you can see. People stand in this zone to speak in public.

On the activity sheet, they can give examples of whom would they feel comfortable talking to in each zone.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Whenever You are with another person, you should ask yourself, "Does my distance feel right?" On the circles below, you can write who you would feel comfortable talking to in each zone.



Pupils can also experientially practice the sense of personal space through the next activity. Draw a circle on a big sheet of paper. The inner circle will be the intimate space (45cm radius), surrounded by personal space (120cm radius), and the area outside is the social space. Put that paper on the floor. Take turns to role-play conversations where kids speak to each other without trespassing in their personal spaces. (You may also use a string to create the circle or a hula hoop).

5. APPROPRIATE UNDERSTANDING OF NON-VERBAL SIGNS – GESTURES

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the meaning of gestures in nonverbal communication.






Ask pupils what “gesture” means, and choose volunteers to show gestures with their arms and hands. Ask others to tell what they think these gestures mean.

Talk with pupils about how gestures play an important role in communication. Many people use their hands to emphasise what they are saying. For example, clapping or giving a “thumbs up” shows your approval. People who bite their nails or stare at the ground reveal their lack of confidence as well as nervousness. It’s important to recognise what signals and gestures mean so that we can communicate effectively. Ask pupils to fill activity sheet about the meaning of gestures.

Name _____

Date _____

 <p>What this gesture mean? _____</p> <p>When it might be used? _____ _____ _____</p>	 <p>What this gesture mean? _____</p> <p>When it might be used? _____ _____ _____</p>
 <p>What this gesture mean? _____</p> <p>When it might be used? _____ _____ _____</p>	 <p>What this gesture mean? _____</p> <p>When it might be used? _____ _____ _____</p>

You can also practice with pupils: USE OF TOUCH, POSTURE, INTERPRETING BODY LANGUAGE...

4.4.2. Interaction Skills - Skills needed to interact with others (verbal skills)

1. USE RITUALS OF INITIATIONS – INTRODUCING YOURSELF

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the proper way to introduce themselves and to make friends.

Explain your pupils that there are specific steps that people usually follow when they introduce themselves to others. When people are meeting for the first time, it's polite to tell each other their names. They try to appear friendly and interested in the person they are meeting. We can shake hands too. First impressions make a difference, so when you meet someone new:

- Stand up
- Look the other person in front of you
- Smile
- Say, “Hi. I’m _____.”
- You can add something interesting about yourself as a conversation starter, for example, you can say: I like sports or I’m interested in music.

Choose two students to role-play in introducing each other. Then ask each child to choose another person and introduce one to the other, until the entire group has been introduced.

2. DETERMINING APPROPRIATE TOPICS FOR CONVERSATION – MAKING FRIENDS

Learning Objective: To help pupils find appropriate topics of conversation and to recognise similar interests.































Explain to the students what “having something in common” means. Two people enjoy doing the same thing, own something similar, or have a similar ability...

Distribute an activity sheet and ask the children to circle their interests. When they are done, have children choose partners, or divide the group into pairs. Partners look at their sheets together, finding similar interests and talking to each other about them. Finally, partners share their different interests and tell each other about them.



Name _____

Date _____

I like to play...	My favorite thing to do is...	I love to eat...
Basketball 	Read 	Pasta 
Soccer 	Write 	Pizza 
Rugby 	Listen to music 	Soup 
Table tennis 	Hang out with friends 	Hamburger 
Tennis 	Play video games 	Salad 
Other _____	Other _____	Other _____
My favorite subject is...	When I grow up I want to be...	I have a pet...
Math 	A pilot 	A dog 
History 	A doctor 	A parrot 
Music 	A policeman 	A rabbit 
Art 	A teacher 	A hamster 
Science 	A firefighter 	A cat 
Other _____	Other _____	Other _____

3. ACTIVE LISTENING

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the meaning and the benefits of active listening

Tell pupils that active listening includes looking at the person in front of you, appropriate body position, the acts of asking questions, not interrupting and reflecting (repeating what is said in your own words). Active listening is an essential skill for making new friends, understanding information, and communicating effectively.

Have pupils make a chart of good listening behaviours including eyes on the speaker, body facing the speaker, hearing and understanding, not interrupting, asking questions to understand more, making comments relevant to the topic, summarizing, etc.

Then ask for two volunteers to do exercises, one in which they exhibit poor conversational skills (one pupil will start a conversation telling something about himself, and the other student will turn away, showing poor body language and looking away, and interrupting the student mid-

sentence with comments unrelated to the topic), and the other in which they exhibit good conversational skills (the listener will maintain active listening behaviours including eye contact, body language, asking follow-up questions, summarizing and acknowledgment (nodding).

After that, all students can do both exercises in pairs, taking turns in both roles, and comment on how they felt when they recognised that they were being listened to, and how they felt when the situation was the opposite.

4. GROUP STORY TELLING

Learning Objective: To teach pupils to take turns talking and listening during a conversation.

Ask pupils to create a story together. Have one pupil begin a story with one sentence, for example, by saying, “A boy woke up one summer morning ...” In turn, each pupil adds another sentence until the story is finished. The pupils must listen to the entire story as it progresses, and their contributions must be relevant to the information that came before. Children can then write or recite a short summary of what happened in the story.

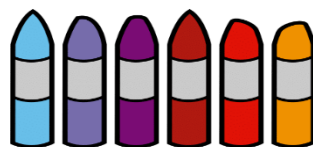
In the second activity, each pupil writes a sentence of the story on a sheet of paper that is folded in such a way that each pupil sees only the sentence written by their predecessor.

After completing both exercises, pupils can compare both stories and how connected and meaningful they are.

5. DRAWING IN PAIRS or TEAM DRAWING

Learning Objective: To teach pupils to cooperate with others, to take turns in activities, or to wait for their turn.

Have your pupils draw a painting working in pairs or as a group. Before they start, you can agree on the rules, for example, colouring by numbers, where everyone has a crayon with a certain number, or everyone has a certain time to draw, after which they pass the crayons to another student. In this way, students learn to cooperate and wait for their turn, as well as take turns in activities.



6. HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT – APOLOGIZING

Learning Objective: To teach pupils that some conflicts require an apology.

Ask pupils, “What is something you have done that required an apology?” Write answers on the blackboard or a large sheet of paper. Apologizing is often hard to do. When you have a conflict with someone or hurt someone’s feelings, it’s often not intentional. When you are accused of doing something wrong, you may get defensive, especially if you don’t think the accusation is fair. The last thing you’ll feel like doing is apologizing. But apologizing—realizing that you did something wrong, saying you’re sorry, and really meaning it—shows that you care.

There are several things to remember about apologizing:

- Try to understand fully how your actions hurt the other person.
- Never blame your actions on someone or something else.
- Validate the person’s feelings by saying, “If I were you, I’d probably feel the same way.”
- Make it clear what you’re sorry about.
- Don’t expect the situation to be instantly better. It might take a while.
- After you apologise, let the other person talk.

Then practice with pupils in pairs, each student in the pair should have a chance to give and receive an apology.

- You said you would call your friend, but you forgot.
- You borrowed a book from your friend, and then you lost it.
- You were talking to someone else, and when your friend came along, you didn’t include him in the conversation.
- You had a bad day and were very sarcastic toward your friend.

Then have a group discussion about why some apologies end conflict and others do not.

4.4.3. Affective Skills - Skills needed for recognizing and managing emotions

1. IDENTIFYING ONE’S FEELINGS

Learning Objective: To define feelings a person might experience at different times; to increase recognition of these feelings.

Ask the pupil or a group: “What are some feelings you might have during a normal day? Can you describe situations in which you feel this way?”

“Can you draw on the worksheet the face of a person who feels one of the listed feelings - choose one feeling you want to draw.”



When the group has finished drawing, ask pupils to look at other children’s drawings and try to identify the feelings in the drawings. After that, they can take turns demonstrating some of the feelings using their body and facial expressions while the others guess what they are acting out.

2. FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Learning Objective: To help pupils recognise one's feelings based on their facial expressions and body language.

Show them the drawings with different expressions and ask them to determine which feeling the picture is about.

What does body language of the person in the picture tell you about how they feel?

This person is feeling _____

This person is feeling _____

This person is feeling _____

This person is feeling _____



Then pupils can imagine a feeling and try to act out the imagined feeling using facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Other pupils can guess which feeling is acted out.

3. INTERPRETING BODY LANGUAGE

Learning Objective: To help children learn about the messages our bodies give others and to recognise nonverbal signs that communicate what other people are feeling.

Ask pupils to choose an emotion from the list (Happy, Confused, Disappointed, Angry, Shocked, Scared, Surprised, Proud) and answer some of these questions:

- If a person were feeling this way, what would the face look like?
- What tone of voice would a person use when speaking?
- What voice volume would this person use?
- What would the person's posture be?
- What gestures would the person use?

4. FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND BODY LANGUAGE

Learning Objective: To raise awareness of facial expressions and body language's role in feeling and expressing emotions.

“Ask pupils to laugh and jump and clap their hands along the way as they try to feel the sadness”. You can repeat the same exercise with other feelings - anger, happiness, fear, etc. Afterward, they can discuss their experiences while doing this exercise.

5. EMPATHY

Learning Objective: To teach pupils how to identify with, and understand another person’s feelings.

Sean often hits Oliver. How do you think Oliver feels?	Ian mocks Dean in front of the other students. How do you think Dean feels?	Marc was the only one not invited to John's birthday. How do you think Marc feels?
Can you empathize with Oliver?	Can you empathize with Dean?	Can you empathize with Mark?
Has something similar ever happened to you?	Has something similar ever happened to you?	Has something similar ever happened to you?
Juliet won first place in the athletics competition. How do you think Juliet feels?	Marry is caught in the middle of an argument between Tony and Dan. How do you think Marry feels?	The neighbor's cat suddenly jumped on Timmy and scratched him. How do you think Timmy feels?
Can you empathize with Juliet?	Can you empathize with Marry?	Can you empathize with Timmy?
Has something similar ever happened to you?	Has something similar ever happened to you?	Has something similar ever happened to you?

Ask pupils what is empathy and what it means to “put yourself in another person’s shoes”. Encourage them to discuss examples from the worksheet and share examples from their own experience afterward.

6. PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the importance of helping others.

Ask the group to give examples of times when they helped someone or were prosocial toward another person. Make sure they share how they felt after such behaviour.

7. ACCEPTING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP DIFFERENCES

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the importance of tolerance and accepting others

Ask pupils to list how they differ from each other, starting with their appearance, behaviour, and speech, and continuing with their interests or values. Have pupils discuss why it is important to be tolerant and what are the benefits of accepting others along with their peculiarities.

8. MANAGING EMOTIONS

Learning Objective: To teach pupils calming strategies under stress and the importance of controlling impulsive behaviour.

Ask the pupils what are the differences between reacting impulsively and thinking between reacting.

Ask the group to think of recent situations in which they were upset or angry. Have them talk about what they did, and whether they exercised self-control or reacted impulsively. Ask them to fill out the worksheet individually or in pairs.

“Name one situation when you felt upset/angry/out of control. Then think about the possible consequences of thinking and choosing your actions as opposed to acting impulsively.”

A SITUATION THAT MADE ME UPPSET: _____

CONSEQUENCES

THINKING BEFORE ACTING	IMPULSIVE ACTION

9. MANAGING STRESS

Learning Objective: To teach pupils different choices they can make to reduce their stress levels.

Ask pupils: “What do you do when you feel upset? What activities make you calm, happy, positive, relaxed, secure...?” They can write their ideas on a blackboard or a large sheet of paper and decorate the board with cheerful motives.

10. HANDLING TEASING OR PEER PRESSURE

Learning Objective: To teach pupils how to handle peer teasing. To teach pupils how to recognise the pressure to conform to a group and how to say NO when pressured by peers to do something they don’t want to do. Ask them to fill out the worksheet individually.

<p>Have you ever found yourself in a situation where someone teased or made fun of you?</p>	<p>Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt pressured by others to behave in a way you don't want to?</p>
<p>What did you do or say in that situation?</p>	<p>What did you do or say in that situation?</p>
<p>What could you have done or said differently?</p>	<p>What could you have done or said differently?</p>

They can practice saying no in different situations in pairs. One pupil can try to convince the other pupil to do something by exerting pressure in any way, except by using bad language or by touching the other person. After the first round, they can change the roles and afterward, they can discuss what it felt for them to be in each role.

Here are some examples of situations.

- “Let’s cut class. No one will know.”
- “I want you to shoplift with me.”
- “Let’s tease Jake, and see if we can get him to cry.”
- “Let's not share these sweets with our friends and keep everything to ourselves.”

11. DEALING WITH ANGER

Learning Objective: To teach pupils emotional control and to deal with anger in peaceful, calm, and nonphysical ways.

Ask pupils what are their most common reactions to anger. Can they name some of the “triggers,” or things that make them angry? What strategies do they use to stay calm in these situations?

Have the pupils fill out an activity sheet and share their experiences and choices of constructive ways to manage their anger.



Think of a recent situation in which you were angry and didn't manage your anger well. What happened? How did you react? Write about it here.

Now choose a sign that would have helped you deal with your anger in a more constructive way, and fill in the blank.

<p>IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL BECAUSE</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>I'LL TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND I'LL FEEL</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>I CAN CALM MYSELF BY</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>I CAN TALK ABOUT MY ANGER WITH</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>I CAN THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE, LIKE</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>I'M WALKING AWAY, AND THAT MAKES ME FEEL</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

12. I-MESSAGES

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the use of I-Messages to express themselves without placing blame.

Explain to pupils how I-Message works.

1. Say what you feel (I FEEL...)
2. Tell what the other person did that upset you (WHEN YOU...)
3. Describe how you were affected (BECAUSE...)
4. State what would make the situation better for you (AND I WANT...)

Now they can practice I-Messages in pairs based on fictional or real situations. They can say I-Messages to each other or write them on the worksheets.

I-MESSAGES

I FEEL _____
 WHEN YOU _____

 BECAUSE _____

 AND I WANT _____

I-MESSAGES

I FEEL _____
 WHEN YOU _____

 BECAUSE _____

 AND I WANT _____

13. EMOTIONAL MIRROR

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the skills of recognizing and mirroring other people's states and emotions.

The exercise can be done in pairs. One pupil pulls out an emotion written on a piece of paper and tries to act it out as convincingly as possible without naming the emotion. Another student mirrors his behaviour trying to match gestures, sounds, and energy level and, based on his actions, tries to guess what emotion he is acting on.

4.4.4. Cognitive Skills - Skills needed to maintain more complex social interactions

1. HOW OTHERS SEE ME AND DESCRIBE ME

Learning Objective: To help pupils become more aware of themselves and how others see and experience them.

Ask students to describe themselves in a way a best friend or family member would describe them. They can do the exercise in pairs by telling the answers to another student and commenting on them together and then switching roles, or they can write the answers on a blank sheet of paper which they will insert into the empty box when finished. Then all the students in the group draw out the answers without knowing who the author is and guess who it is about.

2. SELF-TALK

Learning Objective: To teach pupils to use positive self-talk to direct their thoughts and behaviour.



Discuss with the pupils what they think “Self-talk” is. Tell them Self-talk or “inner speech” is what you say to yourself every minute of every day. You’re probably not aware of it, but you are constantly telling yourself things that affect what you think, say, and do. For example, you can help yourself concentrate by saying something like, “Tune everything else out, and focus on what you are doing.”

If you think positively, you will probably succeed. If you think in negative terms, you probably won’t. When you recognise the thoughts that make you feel good, you can make them happen more often. Some people repeat the positive thoughts at different times during the day, until thinking these thoughts becomes a habit. You can learn to comfort yourself when things go wrong or to calm yourself down using calming sequence like this one:

Squeeze your hands together and count to five; close your eyes and rub your head and count to five; then rub your legs and count to five. Repeat the sequence five times

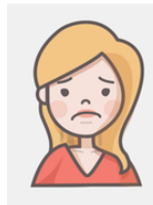
After the children complete the activity sheet, have them discuss how positive self-talk makes people feel better about themselves.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Read the statements below. For each, give an example of negative self-talk. Then, replace it with positive self-talk.

*There’s a math test on Friday.
I’m going to fail—no doubt about it.*



NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

*There’s a math test on Friday.
If I study hard, I’ll do okay.*



POSITIVE SELF-TALK

I really want a puppy.

Negative self-talk: _____

Positive self-talk: _____

I wish I were taller.

Negative self-talk: _____

Positive self-talk: _____

Martha’s clothes are so cool.

Negative self-talk: _____

Positive self-talk: _____

3. ME IN RELATION TO OTHERS

Learning Objective: To help pupils become more aware of their reactions and behaviours in different situations as well as the reactions of others to their behaviours.

Ask your pupils to devote a few minutes to think about the situations where they showed kindness and respect for other people and situations where they have acted differently. How did other people react to them? Did they like it? What did they learn?

4. UNDERSTANDING THE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS

Learning Objective: To help pupils to understand better why people behave the way they do.

Ask students if they have ever wondered why people behave the way they do. Have they ever been surprised by other people's reactions? How did they deal with these situations?

Explain to them that no two people are exactly alike. Everyone sees things differently, and no one can really know what is in another's persons' head. To understand the behaviour of others, it's best to observe the person by:

- Watching what the other person is doing.
- Listening to what she's saying.
- Thinking of reasons why she's saying or doing those things. If you are not sure, ask her.
- Decide which reason explains her behaviour best.

Then, decide if you want to say or do anything in response.

Then students can play a group game while sitting in a circle. The volunteers describe some of their recent behaviours, and the other members try to guess their motives for such behaviour.

5. WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF...?

Learning Objective: To help pupils think and plan their actions in different challenging situations.

Reflecting on our reactions in everyday situations is the best way to understand our environment, observe others and plan our actions. The pupils can see how they play an important role in society and how their social skills can influence everyone around them.

What would be your responses to different situations that occur in real life?

Write out different situations that can occur to anyone and have your pupils journal how could they respond in a socially appropriate manner. Some situations that you could write about are:

- The seller in the store gave you back less money than expected.



- You lend your pen to your classmate, and they forget to return it.
- You are not invited to participate in a group activity in your favourite sport.
- Your classmates whisper in front of you and do not engage you in conversation.

Pupils can add some examples on their own. Afterward, they can comment and discuss the answers together or even act different scenarios out in a respectful, or disrespectful way. Through this exercise, pupils can see how their behaviour can create positive results or negative consequences.

6. SELF-CONTROL

Learning Objective: To teach pupils the importance of remaining calm under stress and controlling impulsive behaviour.

Ask pupils what self-control is and have them give you some examples. You can write their answers on a large sheet of paper. Tell them when they have self-control, they decide the best way to act instead of acting without thinking. It might only take a second or two, but a person with self-control stops, thinks, and remains calm—even if she is very upset or angry. Before she acts, she thinks about the situation and what might happen if she reacts impulsively.

Ask the group to think of recent situations in which they were upset or angry. Have them talk about what they did, and whether they exercised self-control or reacted impulsively.

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Ask for volunteers to think about the following situations, and what they would do to exercise self-control.

- Someone bumps into you in the hallway.
- You get ice cream all over your new shirt.
- Your sister forgets to close the door and your cat runs away.
- You got a lower grade on a test than you believe you deserved.
- Your parents cancel a vacation you were looking forward to.
- You have no idea how to do your science homework.

7. ENCOURAGING POSITIVE/ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOURS - ROCKS OF KINDNESS

Learning Objective: To reinforce kind and respectful behaviours in students.

Have a jar in your classroom that is primarily for encouraging positive behaviour. Whenever one of your students is seen doing something positive, being kind, or being respectful, add a small rock to the jar. Once the jar is full, have your classroom receive a reward such as a bag of candies during recess.

8. CREATING A CLASS MURAL ABOUT ACCEPTING DIFFERENCES AND COOPERATION, OR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Learning Objective: To reinforce the sense of belonging to the community among students.

Using a bulletin board, have your students work together to create a beautiful piece of artwork for the entire school to enjoy. This exercise aims to explore the meaning of positive behaviours such as kindness, helping others, accepting others, showing respect, and creating a feeling of community by working hard to build a mural together. They can draw or write some rules and messages in a positive tone. Once a community is established, then showing respect is much easier in the classroom.

9. ESTABLISH CLASSROOM RULES OR RULES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Learning Objective: To acquaint pupils with and promote the rules of behaviour within the community.

Pupils will be more likely to exhibit positive behaviours towards one another once they understand what is and what is not allowed.

Together with the students, create a poster on which you will list all important class rules and expectations from each member. Use a positive tone and positive messages to do this. For example:

In this classroom, we use kind words; we help and support each other; we look after our class property and others' property; we care for each other.

10. MANAGING VIRAL COMMUNICATION

Learning Objective: To acquaint pupils with and promote responsible and safe viral communication.

Discuss with pupils the similarities and differences between live communication and communication through social media. Have them try to think of examples of when they witnessed inappropriate communication on social networks. Explain to them the dangers of giving out personal information online.

Together they can make a poster with the important rules of viral communication.



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