

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Evidence-Based Practice Brief: Social Skills Groups**

This evidence-based practice brief on social skills groups includes the following components:

1. **Overview, which gives a quick summary of salient features of the practice, including what it is, who it can be used with, what skills it has been used with, settings for instruction, and additional literature documenting its use in practice**
2. **Steps for Implementation, detailing how to implement the practice in a practitioner-friendly, step-by-step process**
3. **Implementation Checklist, to be used to monitor fidelity of the use of the practice**
4. **Evidence Base Summary, which details the NPDC-ASD criteria for inclusion as an evidence-based practice and the specific studies that meet the criteria for this practice**
5. **Social skills groups data collection sheets and progress monitoring materials**

## **Module: Social Skills Groups**

### **Overview of Social Skills Groups**

Collet-Klingenberg, L. (2009). *Overview of social skills groups*. Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

Social skills groups are used to teach individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) ways to appropriately interact with typically developing peers. Social skills groups typically involve small groups of two to eight individuals with disabilities and a teacher or adult facilitator. Most social skill group meetings include instruction, role-playing or practice, and feedback to help learners with ASD acquire and practice skills to promote positive social interactions with peers.

#### **Evidence**

This practice meets evidence-based criteria with six studies (two group; four single-subject design) in the social domain across preschool, elementary, and secondary age ranges.

#### **With what ages are social skills groups effective?**

Within the evidence-base, studies included learners as young as 4 and as old as 12 years of age. Thus, social skills groups have the potential to be an effective practice with all learners. Research also exists that supports its use with adult learners.

#### **What skills or intervention goals can be addressed with social skills groups?**

In the evidence base, social skills group training targeted the following: perspective-taking, conversation skills, friendship skills, problem-solving, social competence, emotion recognition, theory of mind, and problem-solving. In addition, specific interaction skills such as initiation, responding, maintaining, greeting, giving/accepting compliments, turn taking, sharing, asking for help, offering help, and including others were also improved through the use of social skills groups.

#### **In what settings can social skills groups be effectively used?**

In the evidence base, training took place in a variety of school and clinic settings and included both inclusive and non-inclusive settings.

#### **Evidence Base**

The studies cited in this section provide the basis upon which this practice was determined to meet the NPDC on ASD's criteria as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

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### **Preschool**

Kroeger, K. A., Schultz, J. R., & Newsom, C. (2007). A comparison of two group-delivered social skills programs for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37(5), 808-817.

### **Elementary**

Bock, M. A. (2007). The impact of social-behavioral learning strategy training on the social interaction skills of four students with Asperger syndrome. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disorders*, 22(2), 88-95.

Feng, H., Lo, Y., Tsai, S., & Cartledge, G. (2008). The effects of theory-of-mind and social skills training on the competence of a sixth-grade student with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention*, 10, 228-242.

Kamps, D. M., Leonard, B. R., Vernon, S., Dugan, E. P., Delquadri, J. C., Gerson, B., Wade, L., & Folk, L. (1992). Teaching social skills to students with autism to increase peer interactions in an integrated first-grade classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 25(2), 281-288.

Kroeger, K. A., Schultz, J. R., & Newsom, C. (2007). A comparison of two group-delivered social skills programs for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37(5), 808-817.

Licciardello, C. C., Harchik, A. E., & Luiselli, J. K. (2008). Social skills intervention for children with autism during interactive play at a public elementary school. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 31, 28-37.

Solomon, M., Goodlin-Jones, B., & Anders, T. F. (2004). A social adjustment enhancement intervention for high functioning autism, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder NOS. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34, 649-668.

### **Secondary**

Solomon, M., Goodlin-Jones, B., & Anders, T. F. (2004). A social adjustment enhancement intervention for high functioning autism, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder NOS. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34, 649-668.

### **Selected Additional References**

Bauminger, N. (2007). Brief report: Individual social-multi-modal intervention for HFASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 1593-1604.

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- Bauminger, N. (2002). The facilitation of social-emotional understanding and social interaction in high-functioning children with autism: Intervention outcomes. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 32*(4), 283-298.
- Hillier, A., Fish, T., Cloppert, P., & Beversdorf, D. Q. (2007). Outcomes of a social and vocational support group for adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 22*(2), 107-115.
- Howlin, P., & Yates, P. (1999). The potential effectiveness of social skills groups for adults with autism. *Autism, 3*(3), 299-307.
- Mackay, T., Knott, F., & Dunlop, A. W. (2007). Developing social interaction and understanding in individuals with autism spectrum disorder: A groupwork intervention. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 32*(4), 279-290.
- Matson, J. L., Matson, M. L., & Rivet, T. T. (2007). Social-skills treatments for children with autism spectrum disorders: An overview. *Behavior Modification, 31*(5), 682-707.
- Mesibov, G. B. (1984). Social skills training with verbal autistic adolescents and adults: A program model. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 14*(4), 395-404.
- Ozonoff, S., & Miller, J. N. (1995). Teaching theory of mind: A new approach to social skills training for individuals with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 25*(4), 415-433.
- Tse, J., Strulovitch, J., Tagalakakis, V., Meng, L., & Fombonne, E. (2007). Social skills training for adolescents with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*(10), 1960-1968.
- White, S. W., Koenig, K., & Scahill, L. (2007). Social skills development in children with autism spectrum disorders: A review of the intervention research. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 1858-1868.
- Williams, T. I. (1989). A social skills group for autistic children. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 19*(1), 143-155.

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### **Evidence Base for Social Skills Groups**

The National Professional Development Center on ASD has adopted the following definition of evidence-based practices.

To be considered an evidence-based practice for individuals with ASD, efficacy must be established through peer-reviewed research in scientific journals using:

- *randomized or quasi-experimental design studies*. Two high quality experimental or quasi-experimental group design studies,
- *single-subject design studies*. Three different investigators or research groups must have conducted five high quality single subject design studies, or
- *combination of evidence*. One high quality randomized or quasi-experimental group design study and three high quality single subject design studies conducted by at least three different investigators or research groups (across the group and single subject design studies).

High quality randomized or quasi experimental design studies do not have critical design flaws that create confounds to the studies, and design features allow readers/consumers to rule out competing hypotheses for study findings. High quality in single subject design studies is reflected by a) the absence of critical design flaws that create confounds and b) the demonstration of experimental control at least three times in each study.

This definition and criteria are based on the following sources:

Horner, R., Carr, E., Halle, J., McGee, G., Odom, S., & Wolery, M. (2005). The use of single subject research to identify evidence-based practice in special education. *Exceptional Children, 71*, 165-180.

Nathan, P., & Gorman, J. M. (2002). *A guide to treatments that work*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Odom, S. L., Brantlinger, E., Gersten, R., Horner, R. D., Thompson, B., & Harris, K. (2004). *Quality indicators for research in special education and guidelines for evidence-based practices: Executive summary*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children Division for Research.

Rogers, S. J., & Vismara, L.A. (2008). Evidence-based comprehensive treatments for early autism. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 37*(1), 8-38.

Using these criteria, the empirical studies referenced below provide documentation for supporting the use of social skills training groups as an evidence-based practice for children with ASD. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

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### **Preschool**

Kroeger, K. A., Schultz, J. R., & Newsom, C. (2007). A comparison of two group-delivered social skills programs for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37(5), 808-817.

### **Elementary**

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Feng, H., Lo, Y., Tsai, S., & Cartledge, G. (2008). The effects of theory-of-mind and social skills training on the competence of a sixth-grade student with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention*, 10, 228-242.

Kamps, D. M., Leonard, B. R., Vernon, S., Dugan, E. P., Delquadri, J. C., Gerson, B., Wade, L., & Folk, L. (1992). Teaching social skills to students with autism to increase peer interactions in an integrated first-grade classroom. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 25(2), 281-288.

Kroeger, K. A., Schultz, J. R., & Newsom, C. (2007). A comparison of two group-delivered social skills programs for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 37(5), 808-817.

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### **Secondary**

Solomon, M., Goodlin-Jones, B., & Anders, T. F. (2004). A social adjustment enhancement intervention for high functioning autism, Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder NOS. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 34, 649-668.

## **Module: Social Skills Groups**

### **Steps for Implementation: Social Skills Groups**

Collet-Klingenberg, L. (2009). *Steps for implementation: Social skills groups*. Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

Social skills groups may be used to teach a variety of social behaviors. In the evidence base, social skills group training targeted perspective-taking, conversation skills, friendship skills, problem-solving, social competence, emotion recognition, theory of mind, and problem-solving. In addition, specific interaction skills such as initiation, responding, maintaining, greeting, giving/accepting compliments, turn taking, sharing, asking for help, offering help, and including others were also improved through the use of social skills groups. The researchers who provided the evidence base for this practice approached group instruction in various ways, but all included several common components, outlined in the steps that follow. Most published social skills group curricula provide guidelines or implementation steps specific to the program that should be followed. The following steps are designed to help teachers/practitioners use existing resources to implement social skills group instruction that is based on informal needs assessment and data collection and on individual IEP/IFSP goals.

#### **Step 1. Identifying Social Skills Targeted for Instruction**

1. Teachers/practitioners refer to the IEP/IFSP to identify relevant goals for individual learners with ASD.

Often when the decision is made to implement social skills group instruction, skill deficits or social goals have already been identified for two or more learners with ASD. Before implementing social skills training groups, teachers/practitioners objectively define the target behaviors or skills that will be the focus of the intervention based on learners' IEP or IFSP goals.

2. Teachers/practitioners discuss goals with the IEP/IFSP team, including family members and learners.

Teachers/practitioners talk with the learners and with those who know the learners to determine how group skills could be targeted during instruction. For example, one learner may have trouble initiating verbal interactions with others. Another may have no trouble initiating, but usually does so in a way that alienates others (e.g., runs toward them yelling). A third may initiate, but does not wait for a response before moving on to someone else. Many social behaviors can be grouped for instruction. Conversation skills, for example, are made up of smaller skills or behaviors such as initiating, turn-taking, and terminating interactions. Learners with different skill levels and needs can be placed in the same group where they can model and practice the skills that they have, while at the same time learning new skills.

3. Teachers/practitioners ensure that the target of instruction is observable and measurable.

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Once relevant goals have been identified, and the goals of multiple learners have been grouped for instruction, teachers/practitioners write goals for the target behavior/skill that are observable and measurable. Using the example of conversation skills, it is not enough to write the goal simply as, “Joe, Tom, and Matt will improve their conversation skills.” While those who know the boys well will have a general understanding of the goal, it does not provide enough detail for collecting reliable data or providing systematic instruction. A specific goal that becomes more easily observed and measured might be, “Joe, Tom, and Matt will improve their conversation skills in the following ways: Joe will increase conversational initiations by 50%; Tom will initiate interactions with others using a calm voice and will stand still or sit during interactions; and Matt will wait for a count of ten, allowing his partner an opportunity to respond, before initiating a second time or with another person.”

### **Step 2. Organizing Training Groups**

1. Teachers/practitioners identify group members with similar goals.

Unlike peer-mediated instruction and intervention (**please refer to the PML resources developed by the National Professional Development Center on ASD at [www.autisminternetmodules.org](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org)**), social skills groups are typically made up only of learners with ASD or other disabilities. Though it may be tempting to include typically developing learners with limited social skills, the evidence base for this practice was based on learners with ASD. Students with ASD have unique social and communication characteristics that are often not evident in learners with other disabilities.

2. Teachers/practitioners select adults/helpers who have experience with ASD or who have received professional development about the needs of learners with ASD.

When selecting adult leaders or group facilitators, teachers/practitioners should be careful to employ only those who are familiar with the learners and/or have had experience working with learners with ASD. Group leaders may include teachers, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, educational assistants, parents, or others who have previously worked with some or all of the learners. Many high schools, however, use upper classmen to tutor or otherwise support younger learners (with and without disabilities). This is an acceptable alternative if qualified adults are not available to assist with social skills group instruction. If peers assist with social groups, they should be given an overview of ASD and introduced to the learners in the social skills group (with parental permission, of course) prior to beginning the group instruction. This introduction to ASD and to the students in the social skills group will provide an opportunity for any questions or concerns to be addressed prior to beginning training.

3. Teachers/practitioners organize groups that contain no more than three or four learners per adult/helper.

Ideally, one leader or assistant for every three learners should be involved in training. Depending on the needs and characteristics of the learners, more or fewer helpers may be appropriate. In the evidence-based studies, groups ranged from three to nine members, with most having four per group.

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### **Step 3. Collecting Baseline Data**

1. Teachers/practitioners create data sheets using group members' individual target behaviors and goals.

Data sheets may vary by individual, or one data sheet that captures all students' target skills may be developed. For example, if the individuals participating in the social skills group are each working on different aspects of conversational skills, teachers/practitioners could design a data sheet that reflects all aspects of conversation (e.g., initiations, turn-taking, terminations, asking leading or follow-up questions, responding to others' initiations). On this same data sheet, teachers/practitioners could then collect data for individual learners that focus only on the specific skill that they are working on. (See sample data sheets attached to this document.)

2. Teachers/practitioners record data for each group member on the data sheet(s).
3. Teachers/practitioners collect, summarize, and graph sufficient data to identify learners' current use of skills.

Once baseline data have been collected for a sufficient amount of time (e.g., on at least three occasions), data should be summarized or graphed to document learners' current use of target skills and to provide a starting point for tracking learner progress.

### **Step 4. Scheduling Group Meetings**

1. Teachers/practitioners select a time and place for holding training meetings that is mutually convenient and optimal for both learners and helpers.

Once the learners have been identified for social skills group instruction, and the adults who will lead and assist the group have been recruited, it is time to determine when the group training will take place. Social skill group training may occur during the regular instructional day, before or after school, during a lunch or recess/break time, or even on a weekend. When selecting the time for the training, consider the schedules of leaders and learners, as well as the characteristics of learners. For example, if missing the regularly scheduled lunch or recess is likely to lead to interfering behavior (e.g., increased stereotypic behaviors or aggression), then avoid scheduling a group session at that time. Similarly, if a learner is known to have trouble getting started in the morning, including him in an early morning social skills group may not result in the desired outcome.

2. Teachers/practitioners establish sufficient time for teaching, but not so long that learners become overwhelmed or lose interest.

The studies in the evidence base included training meetings that lasted from 10 to 90 minutes and included time for a warm up, instructional time, practice time, feedback, and ended with a snack or free time to reward those involved (as well as provide a safe setting for continued practice of the skills being learned).

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The number of training sessions and how often each group meets will vary by the topic or target of instruction and by how quickly progress is made in learning the skills. In the evidence-based studies, social skills training groups were implemented for a minimum of 12 sessions; however, some trainings lasted for as many as 20 sessions. Many of the groups in the studies met three or four times each week.

3. Teachers/practitioners consider the ages, developmental level of learners, and the context of instruction when scheduling group meetings.

The length of the session should reflect the ages and developmental levels of learners as well as the context of instruction. For instance, younger learners will generally have shorter sessions. Also sessions that focus on pre-teaching (or advance shadowing) before a social context, such as prompting social behaviors before going to recess or lunch, may be shorter than those that include a longer practice time within the context of group instruction.

### **Step 5. Creating a Training Format or Structure**

1. Teachers/practitioners clearly identify a format with set beginning/ending times and time for various activities.
2. Teachers/practitioners insure that the format includes at least an introduction, instruction, practice, and feedback with reinforcement.

Social skills training group sessions should be carefully formatted to clearly identify date/schedules for the sessions, the purpose of the session, the members of the group, expectations for the session, beginning and ending times, and the location of the sessions. For some learners, a visual schedule of events should ease anxiety about the group.

3. Teachers/practitioners select a format appropriate for the age and characteristics of the learners in the group.

To make the best use of time set aside for social skills training groups, it is especially important to have a carefully planned format for the session. If the format is planned and adhered to, learners will be more likely to successfully acquire the targeted skills. In addition, both learners and leaders/helpers will enjoy the sessions and want to continue participating. The format chosen may vary according to the types of skills being taught, the setting for instruction, and the time allotted for the session. In the evidence base studies, most social skills groups used a format that included an opening and closing time with instruction and practice time embedded in the middle. A general format may include the following components:

- a. *introduction/warm-up*. In this phase, everyone settles into the group time. Introductions are made initially, but may need to be repeated for at least the first few sessions if group members do not already know one another. Having both leaders and learners sit in a circle and take turns introducing themselves was often used during this introductory/warm-up time. (Some facilitators ask learners to pass an object, such as a small rubber ball, from person to person as they share.) At subsequent meetings, participants can be asked to introduce one another, if

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- appropriate. After group members become familiar with one another, this introductory/warm-up time may be used to discuss experiences in using the target social skills from the previous week (or the time between meetings, if it is not a weekly group time).
- b. *topic focus*. The group leader will introduce the topic or focus of instruction for the session. This component of the session may also be a good time to review skills that were previously learned and to ask if anyone has questions or concerns. As group members become more comfortable with one another and the format, individuals can take turns reviewing and sharing from prior weeks.
  - c. *modeling*. Once the topic for the week has been clearly identified, the target skill should be modeled. Modeling may be done by group leaders and helpers, with group members themselves, or with video modeling. The goal of this phase is for group members to observe the target behavior or skill being practiced correctly and successfully. Some groups may find it helpful to have both good and bad examples of the behavior and/or target skill component. Before moving on to practice and/or rehearsal, group leaders should ask for questions or comments.
  - d. *practice*. After learners have seen a model of the behavior, time should be provided for practice of the new skill or behavior, often through role-playing, (i.e., having participants pair off and take turns practicing the skill). Learners should have several opportunities to practice the new skill or behavior in the safety of the group. Teachers/practitioners may choose to video record participants (with permission of the learner and his/her parent/guardian, of course) as they practice so that they can watch the videos and talk about what they did right and what they might do differently the next time. Videos may also be sent with learners so that they can review them outside of group time. **For more information please refer to resources on Video Modeling developed by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.**
  - e. *coaching/prompting*. Depending on the skills being taught, the group may go into a more inclusive environment (e.g., a shopping mall) and practice the skills with strangers, while receiving coaching from group leaders and helpers. Regardless of the setting, group members must have someone available to provide support and prompting as needed. The type and amount of prompting should be individualized based on the characteristics of the individual learner. **For more information on Prompting, please see resources developed by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.**
  - f. *feedback/problem solving*. Generally, this phase of instruction is integrated within the practice element. To be successful, participants must receive detailed feedback on their use of the target skill or behavior. Leaders and helpers should emphasize skills that the participants implemented correctly. For behaviors/skills that need improvement, leaders should help learners to identify corrective strategies and alternative responses.

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- g. *free/snack time*. Because the social skills group should remain a positive and motivating activity for participants, adults/leaders should include reinforcers as a regular part of the session. Reinforcement may be provided at the end of the session, or it may be embedded within the training sessions during a slightly less structured snack time that allows participants to interact with one another without being evaluated. The free/snack time component of the session may also be a good time to provide interactive materials such as card or board games or a topic for discussion (e.g., one teacher uses funny YouTube videos as the springboard for students to have a conversation). **For more information, please refer to resource on Reinforcement developed by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.**

### **Step 6. Organizing Topics for Instruction**

1. Teachers/practitioners break large topics of instruction (e.g., conversation skills) into more teachable units (e.g., initiations, turn-taking, asking questions, terminating).

Depending on the social skill or skill group being taught, it may be necessary to break skills down (using task analysis) into smaller increments that can be taught sequentially. Using the example of conversation skills, the following sub-topics may be addressed sequentially during the topic focus or instructional time, with opportunities for the entire set of skills to be practiced later in the session:

- initiating conversations,
- responding to initiations of others,
- taking turns talking during conversation,
- changing topics during a conversation,
- asking questions during a conversation,
- strategies for what to do when you disagree during a conversation,
- inviting a third person into a conversation,
- leaving a conversation, and
- ending a conversation.

In this example, the social skills training group focused on conversation skills. These skills could be taught throughout a semester, with the first session designated for getting to know one another and providing an overview of what the group will involve. Each of the next nine sessions might focus on a specific sub-skill or focus on a sub-skill for more than a week, if necessary. The final session of the semester could be designated as a wrap-up time, providing an extended opportunity to practice the learned skills in a safe social context or to celebrate the group's accomplishments.

### **Step 7. Specifying Embedded Instructional Strategies or Materials**

1. Teachers/practitioners identify additional instructional strategies (e.g., social narratives, video modeling) for promoting skill development.

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Using other strategies and/or high interest materials may help bring learners to the group, sustain interest/motivation, and increase meaningful learning opportunities. In one of the evidence-based studies, researchers used video modeling to teach appropriate play and social behaviors. The videos, using peer models, were shown prior to the play time during which the young learners could practice the skills. Before and after the video and play times, a circle time was used to orient group members to the topic and to assist with transition out of the group time. In another study, a social narrative was used with group members who were learning to interact more with peers in cooperative learning contexts, during organized sports, and during lunch. Some other instructional strategies that may be used within the context of group instruction include peer modeling, self-modeling, role playing, computer-aided instruction, and the use of visual supports. **Please refer to resources on Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention, Computer-Aided Instruction, and Visual Supports developed by the National Professional Development Center on ASD for more information on these practices.** Remember also to document strategies used and how they were combined within the group instruction format.

2. Teachers/practitioners provide appropriate resources (e.g., interactive toys, books or social narratives, videos) for specific skills that are the focus for group training.

Before the social skills session, group leaders should have all necessary materials available and ready to use during group time. Planning for resources is usually accomplished during Steps 5 and 6. Some examples of materials that may enhance the group training include interactive toys (e.g., such as Legos™), video games for two or more players, and board or card games. Teachers/practitioners should avoid having too many materials that could be used as an escape or isolated play activity, tempting learners not to participate in the group training.

### ***Step 8. Training Helpers Prior to Implementing Group Instruction***

Teachers/practitioners will have identified and recruited helpers in Step 2. In addition, if helpers have little or no experience working with learners with ASD, they should be given instructions on working with learners with ASD and should be given opportunities to become familiar with the learners in the group. For example, having the helper spend some unstructured time with learners in the school setting should help prepare them for interactions during the social skills group. In addition, some additional orientation and/or training specific to the group instruction may be required.

1. Teachers/practitioners train helpers on group instruction, data collection, and help them become familiar with strategies and materials

Specifically, teachers/practitioners review the goals of the group instruction, provide an overview of how training will be done, and provide time for helpers to become familiar with the topic and materials. In addition, teachers/practitioners train helpers on the use of data sheets to collect baseline, intervention, and generalization data for progress monitoring.

2. Teachers/practitioners regularly provide time to confer with helpers to discuss learner progress; questions that have emerged; and to review goals, priorities, and status of social skills group activities.

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Teachers/practitioners and helpers must have time (in addition to social skill group sessions) to review data, discuss student progress, problem solve, and adapt instruction as necessary. The amount of time will vary, but plan on a minimum of a half an hour each session. An easy way to accomplish this is to have the leaders and helpers stay for half an hour after the training has ended and the learners have left and/or have them arrive before the social group session to review and prepare before learners arrive.

### **Step 9. Implementing Social Skills Group Training**

1. Teachers/practitioners conduct social skills group training regularly, as planned.

The most important aspect of social skills group training, of course, is actually implementing the social skills group training. As previously suggested, teachers/practitioners should plan for a minimum of 12 sessions per semester (if held weekly) and taking into account school holidays and breaks. Group training can occur for shorter or longer periods of time, depending on learner needs and progress, as well as the complexity and number of skills being taught. Implement the social skills training groups following the format chosen in Step 5.

### **Step 10. Collecting and Using Data on Target Behaviors/Skills to Inform Instructional Decision Making**

1. Teachers/practitioners (and/or helpers) collect data on target behaviors/skills over time, including baseline data (i.e., data on the behavior or skill prior to intervention/instruction).
2. Teachers/practitioners collect data on intervention/instruction (e.g., type and number of prompts used to elicit target behavior).

Data collection is an integral part of social skills group training. Prior to intervention, baseline data documents that instruction is necessary and establishes the starting point for instruction (see ABC Data Collection example). Once a program has begun, data collection documents learner progress and informs instructional decision making. Data may be collected in a variety of ways depending on the behaviors or skills targeted for instruction as well as features of the intervention. For instance, in the example of training conversation skills, frequency (i.e., how often a behavior occurs) may be collected on various aspects of making conversations (e.g., initiations, turn-taking, terminating conversations). Another measure might be the amount of pause time between an initiation and the communicative partner's response. Other types of data may include voice quality or tone during the conversation or how the learner is positioned in relation to his communicative partner. In addition, notes may be taken regarding the effectiveness of the learner's attempts at conversation. Some group facilitators may find it helpful to video record the practice time following instruction and then play the video back to the group so that members can analyze their own conversational skills and provide feedback to one another. If using video recording, data may not have to be collected during the actual training time, it might be taken from review of the video at a later time. *Please see the accompanying Social Skills Training Group Sample Data Sheet for one example of the type of data that may be collected on specific social skills.*

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3. Teachers/practitioners collect data on generalization of target behaviors to other settings and with other people.

Generalization data may be gathered in a variety of ways, including observations in other settings and with other people. Information on the target skill (e.g., number of conversational initiations in the cafeteria at school) can be recorded, while taking care to avoid being socially intrusive. A more subtle way of gathering data in such circumstances is to recruit another adult to casually observe and make notes on the target skill. Another option is to have learners with ASD report back to you, thus collecting data on their own behavior, a component of self-management. **Please refer to *Self-Management: Steps for Implementation* (National Professional Development Center on ASD, 2008) for more information about self-management.**

4. Teachers/practitioners summarize or graph data.

As discussed in Step 8, having a regular time for teachers/practitioners and helpers to meet outside of group time to manage and review data and discuss learner progress is an important part of the group process. During this time, group leaders can summarize and/or graph data. How the data are managed will be a reflection of the type of social skills being trained. For conversation training, for instance, leaders will likely have a single data sheet on which they have recorded information on participants' target skill use during the training session. From this sheet, they can transfer each learner's data to a sheet that reflects only that learner's target skill(s). To use the earlier example, this would mean that from the group conversation skills group data sheet, the leader would transfer specific information about the number of initiations made by Joe (e.g., a simple line graph showing frequency of interactions over time), the presentation of Tom's initiations (e.g., notes detailing whether or not he was standing still and speaking at an appropriate volume), and the wait time or delay that Matt allowed between initiations with others (e.g., a bar graph representing the amount of time allowed by count or seconds). *See the accompanying examples of how these data could be graphed at the end of this document.*

5. Teachers/practitioners use data to make instructional decisions.

Once data have been collected and summarized and/or graphed, data are used to make instructional decisions. These decisions may include:

- *beginning group instruction.* Baseline data should show a stable trend before beginning instruction. A stable trend is indicated by data points that are similar in frequency/intensity. It is also appropriate to begin instruction if the baseline data are not stable, but are moving away from the desired level of the skill. For instance, if baseline data collection indicated that Matt was leaving less and less time for conversational partners to respond or if his interfering behavior was beginning to escalate (e.g., he was showing signs of frustration with the lack of an immediate response), it would be appropriate to discontinue baseline data collection and begin intervention.

## **Module: Social Skills Groups**

- *continuing group instruction.* Data taken during social skills training groups may show that learners are making progress in acquiring the target skills or behavior, providing evidence that group instruction should continue. Data may also show that little or no progress is occurring, suggesting that the instruction may need to continue for a longer time period or perhaps be changed in some way (e.g., increase the frequency or length of training sessions).
- *changing group instruction.* Data taken on the type and amount of instructional prompts may suggest the need for changes in instruction. For instance, once a learner is able to successfully use a target skill when given verbal prompts, the instructor would begin to phase out verbal prompts so that the learner might begin using the skill more independently.
- *discontinuing group instruction.* Data also provide documentation to support discontinuation of instruction in a particular area. If data demonstrate that the learner has reached the goal of instruction, it may be time to reduce the amount of instruction for that learner or turn the focus toward generalization of the skill to other settings, people, or situations.

In this age of educational accountability and increasingly limited resources, using data to inform and support instructional decisions is a must! Before beginning, changing, or discontinuing any type of instruction, such as social skills groups, data must be collected on the specific behavior or skill and the progress that has been made by the learner.

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Example: Conversation Skills Training A-B-C Data Sheet**

**Who:** Barb with Joe, Tom, and Matt

**When:** Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 1:30-2:00 p.m.

**Where:** Music Room

**Data Type:** This A-B-C recording of learners' use of conversation skills can be used to record the general flow of conversation from which specific data on learners' goals may be derived. This process may be useful because it is often difficult to follow the pace of a conversation while trying to simultaneously record data.

**Learner Goals:** Joe will increase initiations by 50% for three out of four sessions; Tom will initiate with others using a calm voice during interactions 100% of the time for at least three out of four sessions; Matt will wait for a count of ten, allowing his partner opportunity to respond before initiating a second time or with another person. Matt will do this for at least two of three opportunities during a single conversation.

Date: 1/20/09 (baseline)

<b>A – Antecedent</b>	<b>B – Behavior</b>	<b>C - Consequence</b>
The bell rang, J & M are sitting waiting with Barb.	T runs into room, knocks over a chair while approaching the group, and yells, "What are we doing today?"	Barb asks T to sit down, and shows him the picture card with the no yelling symbol
T sits down and repeats the question in a whisper.	J reads from the board, "Small group music appreciation."	T begins to yell, "What. . ." and B lays her hand on his arm and points to the no yelling card.
T smiles and says, "What are we listening to?"	M. immediately says, "Well, what?"	B reminds M to allow time for an answer and then says, "The Beatles, J you pick a song."
J chooses "Yellow Submarine."	B asks T to choose the next song and say it quietly.	M immediately asks, "What song, T?"
B again reminds M to allow time.	M waits, T chooses "Maxwell's Silver Hammer."	B thanks T for speaking quietly.
T gets up, jumps up and down, and yells, "Strawberry Fields!?"	B says, "T! Please sit down and wait for your next turn."	T sits and whispers, "Strawberry Fields."
M repeats, "Strawberry Fields."	B says to M, "Your turn to choose a song," and points at the wait card.	M says, "Come Together."
B. says, "Good song choice, M! Your turn, T."	M begins to repeat, "Come. . ." and B points to wait card while repeating, "Your turn, T." T points to the no yelling card and says, "The Long and Windy Road."	B.says, "You mean, 'The Long and Winding Road'?"
T nods yes. B points to the wait card in front of M and says, "M, which song first?"	M says, "My song."	B asks which one
	M says, "Come Together."	B starts song on CD player while tapping on wait card in front of M

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Example Data Sheet: Conversation Skills Training Group**

Activity: Music

Learner #1 target skill: Joe will increase unprompted initiations by 50% for 3 out of 4 sessions.

Learner #2 target skill: Tom will initiate with others using a calm voice during interactions without prompts 100% of the time for at least 3 out of 4 sessions.

Learner #3 target skill: Matt will wait for a count of 10 before initiating a 2nd time with another person without prompts for at least 2 of 3 opportunities during a single conversation.

Facilitator: Barb

Others present: \_\_\_\_\_

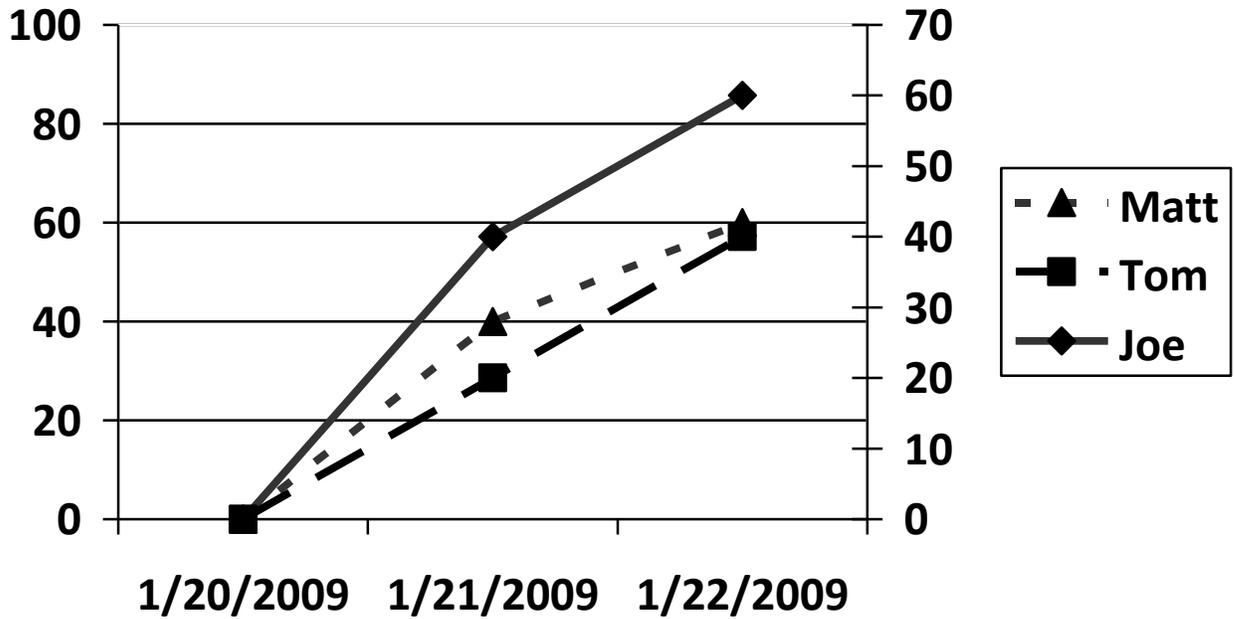
Target skill: Initiating interactions	Learners														
	Joe					Tom					Matt				
Date	Learner attempts					Learner attempts					Learner attempts				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1/20/09 (Baseline)	0	0	V	0	V	P	P	V	V	P	V	V	P	P	P
1/21/09 (Intervention)	V	V	+	+	V	P	P	P	V	+	P	P	+	+	P
1/22/09 (Intervention)	P	+	+	+	P	P	P	P	+	+	P	+	+	+	P
Summary Data															
Date	Joe					Tom					Matt				
# Unprompted															
1/20/09	0 unprompted					0 unprompted					0 unprompted				
1/21/09	2 unprompted					1 unprompted					2 unprompted				
1/22/09	3 unprompted					2 unprompted					3 unprompted				
% Correct															
1/20/09	0% unprompted					0% unprompted					0% unprompted				
1/21/09	40% unprompted					20% unprompted					40% unprompted				
1/22/09	60% unprompted					40% unprompted					60% unprompted				

Key: + = unprompted; P = picture prompt; V = verbal prompt; 0 = no response

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Example Graph: Conversation Skills Training Group**

**Initiating Conversations: Percent Unprompted**



**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Example Data Sheet: Conversation Skills Training Group**

**Activity:** Music

**Learner #1 target skill:** Joe will increase his unprompted responses to others' initiations by 50% for 3 out of 4 sessions.

**Learner #2 target skill:** Tom will respond to others' initiations while sitting or standing 100% of the time for at least 3 out of 4 sessions.

**Learner #3 target skill:** Matt will increase his unprompted responses to another person by 50% for 3 out of 4 sessions.

**Facilitator:** Barb

**Others present:** \_\_\_\_\_

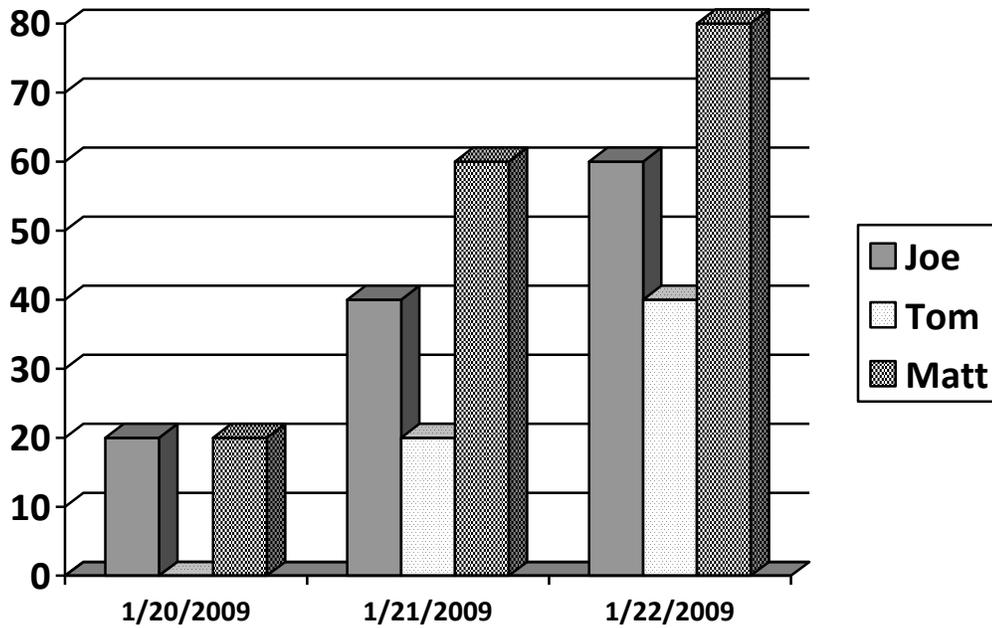
Target skill: Responding to others	Learners														
	Joe					Tom					Matt				
Date	Learner attempts					Learner attempts					Learner attempts				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1/20/09 (Baseline)	0	0	0	V	+	0	0	0	P	P	V	V	P	P	+
1/21/09 (Intervention)	V	V	V	+	+	P	P	P	P	+	P	P	+	+	+
1/22/09 (Intervention)	V	V	+	+	+	P	P	P	+	+	P	+	+	+	+
Summary Data															
Date	Joe					Tom					Matt				
# Unprompted															
1/20/09	1 unprompted					0 unprompted					1 unprompted				
1/21/09	2 unprompted					1 unprompted					3 unprompted				
1/22/09	3 unprompted					2 unprompted					4 unprompted				
% Correct															
1/20/09	20% unprompted					0% unprompted					20% unprompted				
1/21/09	40% unprompted					20% unprompted					60% unprompted				
1/22/09	60% unprompted					40% unprompted					80% unprompted				

Key: + = unprompted; P = picture prompt; V = verbal prompt; 0 = no response

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Example Graph: Conversation Skills Training Group**

**Responding to Others: Percent Unprompted**



## Module: Social Skills Groups Implementation Checklist for Social Skills Groups

Collet-Klingenberg, L. (2009). *Steps for implementation: Social skills groups*. Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

**Instructions:** The Implementation Checklist includes each step for Social Skills Training Groups. Please complete all of the requested information including the site and state, individual being observed, and the learner's initials. To assure that a practice is being implemented as intended, an observation is *always* preferable. This may not always be possible. Thus, items may be scored based on observations with the implementer, discussions and/or record review as appropriate. Within the table, record a 2 (implemented), 1 (partially implemented), 0 (did not implement), or NA (not applicable) next to each step observed to indicate to what extent the step was implemented/addressed during your observation. Use the last page of the checklist to record the target skill, your comments, whether others were present, and plans for next steps for each observation.

Site: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual(s) Observed: \_\_\_\_\_ Learner's Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

**Skills below can be implemented by a practitioner, parent, or other team member**

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
<b>Planning (Steps 1 – 8)</b>									
<b>Step 1. Identifying Social Skills Targeted for Instruction</b>		<b>Score**</b>							
1. Refer to IEP or IFSP to identify relevant goals for individual learners with ASD.									
2. Discuss goals with the IEP/IFSP team, including family members and learners.									
3. Ensure that the target of instruction is observable and measurable.									
<b>Step 2. Organizing Training Groups</b>									
1. Identify group members with similar goals.									
2. Select adults/helpers who have experience with ASD or who have received professional development about the needs of learners with ASD.									
3. Organize groups that are no more than three or four learners per adult/helper.									

\*\*Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
<b>Step 3. Collecting Baseline Data</b>	<b>Score**</b>								
1. Create data sheets using group members' individual target behaviors and goals.									
2. Record data for each group member on the data sheet(s).									
3. Collect, summarize, and graph a sufficient number of data points to identify learners' current use of skills.									
<b>Step 4. Scheduling Group Meetings</b>									
1. Select a time and place for holding training meetings that is mutually convenient and optimal for both learners and helpers.									
2. Establish sufficient time for teaching, but not so long that learners become overwhelmed or lose interest.									
3. Consider the ages, developmental level of learners, and the context of instruction when scheduling group meetings.									
<b>Step 5. Creating a Training Format or Structure</b>									
1. Clearly identify a format with set beginning/ending times and time for various activities.									
2. Ensure that the training format includes at least:									
a. an introduction,									
b. instruction,									

**\*\*Scoring Key:** 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
<b>Step 5. Creating a Training Format or Structure (cont.)</b>	<b>Score**</b>								
c. practice, and									
d. feedback with reinforcement.									
3. Select a format for the social skills training sessions that is appropriate for the age and characteristics of the learners in the group. The format may include the following:									
a. introduction/ warm up phase is used to start session in efficient manner,									
b. topic/focus skill for the session is clearly conveyed to learners,									
c. focus skill is clearly modeled for learners,									
d. practice opportunities are provided for learners,									
e. coaching/prompting is provided to learners as they practice the skill,									
f. positive feedback provided and problem solving used to help learners acquire skills, and									
g. free/snack time provided at end of session to serve as reinforcer for participating in session.									
<b>Step 6. Organizing Topics for Instruction</b>									
1. Break larger topics for instruction (e.g., conversation skills) into more teachable units (e.g., initiations, turn-taking, asking questions, terminating).									

**\*\*Scoring Key:** 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
<b>Step 7. Specifying Embedded Instructional Strategies or Materials</b>	<b>Score**</b>								
1. Identify additional instructional strategies (e.g., video modeling, social stories).									
2. Provide appropriate resources (e.g., interactive toys, books or social narratives, videos) for specific skills that are the focus of group training.									
<b>Step 8. Training Helpers Prior to Implementing Group Instruction</b>									
1. Train helpers on group instruction, data collection, and help them become familiar with strategies and materials.									
2. Regularly provide time to confer with helpers to:									
a. discuss learner progress;									
b. ask questions that have emerged; and									
c. review goals, priorities, and status of social skills group activities.									
<b>Intervention (Step 9)</b>									
<b>Step 9. Implementing Social Skills Group Training</b>									
1. Conduct social skills group training regularly, as planned.									
<b>Progress Monitoring (Step 10)</b>									
<b>Step 10. Collecting Data on Target Behavior/Skills to Inform Instruction</b>									
1. Collect data on target behaviors/skills over time, including baseline data).									

\*\*Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
<b>Step 10. Collecting Data on Target Behavior/Skills to Inform Instruction (cont.)</b>	<b>Score**</b>								
2. Collect data on intervention/instruction (e.g., type and number of prompts used to elicit target behavior).									
3. Collect data on generalization of target behaviors to other settings and with other people.									
4. Summarize or graph data.									
5. Use data to make instructional decisions.									

**\*\*Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable**

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

Date	Observer Initials	Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps
Date	Observer Initials	Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps
Date	Observer Initials	Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps
Date	Observer Initials	Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Observer Initials</b>	<b>Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Observer Initials</b>	<b>Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Observer Initials</b>	<b>Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Observer Initials</b>	<b>Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps</b>

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Social Skills Group Data Sheet**

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Learner #1 target skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Learner #2 target skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Learner #3 target skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

Others present: \_\_\_\_\_

Target skill:	Learners														
Date	Learner attempts					Learner attempts					Learner attempts				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Summary Data															
Date	Student #1					Student #2					Student #3				
<b># Unprompted</b>															
	unprompted					unprompted					unprompted				
	unprompted					unprompted					unprompted				
	unprompted					unprompted					unprompted				
<b>% Correct</b>															
	% unprompted					% unprompted					% unprompted				
	% unprompted					% unprompted					% unprompted				
	% unprompted					% unprompted					% unprompted				

Key: + = unprompted; P = picture prompt; V = verbal prompt; 0 = no response

**Module: Social Skills Groups**

**Social Skills Group A-B-C Data Sheet**

Who (learners)? \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

When (class/activity/time)? \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

**Data Type:** A-B-C recording of learners' use of conversation skills. This form can be used to record social skills during naturalistic interactions. Specific data on learners' goals may be derived following the interaction. This process may be helpful because it is often difficult to follow interactions and conversations while simultaneously recording data.

**Learner Goals:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A – Antecedent	B – Behavior	C - Consequence