

Social Skills Development for Elementary School Children: Engaging and Empowering Students

**Laura Fazio-Griffith, Ph.D., NCC, LPC-S, LMFT,
Registered Play Therapist/Supervisor
Assistant Professor
Southeastern Louisiana University**

THE MEANING OF PLAY

Children's play is not mere sport. It is full of meaning and import.

F. Froebel

Birds fly, Fish swim, and Children play.

Garry Landreth

FACILITATION OF TRIADIC CONNECTION

Feelings



Behaviors



Thoughts

THE ASCA MODEL

Skills:

- Interpersonal communication
- Self Regulatory
- Appreciation for Diversity
- Flexibility
- Problem Solving & Critical Thinking



Issues in School Settings

- ◉ Grief/Loss
- ◉ Fears
- ◉ Anxiety
- ◉ ADHD
- ◉ Bullying
- ◉ Behavior
- ◉ Anger Management
- ◉ Trauma
- ◉ **SOCIAL SKILLS**

What are Social Skills?

- According to Combs and Slaby (1977), “the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial, or beneficial primarily to others” (p. 162).



What Does This Mean?

- Generally, social skills are defined as socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable children in a school environment to interact with their peers and teachers in a way that elicit positive response responses and assist in avoiding negative responses as a result of these interactions.



Top 10 Skills Needed to Succeed in Elementary School

- 1. Listen to others.
- 2. Follow the steps.
- 3. Follow the rules.
- 4. Ignore distractions.
- 5. Ask for help.
- 6. Take turns when you talk.
- 7. Get along with others.
- 8. Stay calm with others.
- 9. Be responsible for your behavior.
- 10. Do nice things for others.
 - Elliott and Gresham (2007)

What is the Difference Between a Skill Deficit and a Performance Deficit?

- ◉ **Skill Deficit:** A student cannot perform the skill.
- ◉ **Performance Deficit:** A student won't perform the skill consistently.

Selecting Specific Social Skills for Elementary School Children

- ◉ Classroom Survival Skills
- ◉ Friendship Making Skills
- ◉ Dealing with Feelings
- ◉ Skill Alternatives to Aggression
- ◉ Skills for Dealing with Stress



Methods for Implementing Social Skills Development in Elementary Schools

- ◉ Social Skills Groups
- ◉ Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy
 - (CBPT)



Social Skills Groups

- Small groups or guidance lessons have been proven to be most effective in developing social skills.
- ASCA (2012) has endorsed group work as an important component in a comprehensive school counseling program
- A small group counseling intervention can strengthen the development of social skills and promote school counselor visibility and improve school counselor relationships with parents, teachers, and other stake holders (Kayler and Sherman, 2009)

Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy

- All children could profit or benefit from engaging in play therapy as an opportunity to exercise social skills within a controlled setting (Gould as cited in Landreth, (2001).
 - CBPT
- Developed by Susan Knell
- Integrates ideas from behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Play activities, verbal and nonverbal forms of communication are used to resolve problems.

Six Tenets of CBPT

- CBPT involves the child in treatment via play.
- CBPT focuses on the child's thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and environment.
- CBPT provides a strategy or strategies for developing more adaptive thoughts and behaviors.
- CBPT is structured, directive, and goal-oriented, rather than open-ended.
- CBPT incorporates empirically demonstrated techniques such as modeling, and role playing.
- CBPT allows for empirical evaluation of treatment which can enhance the involvement of parents and stakeholders in the school environment (p. 44-45).

CBPT Techniques

- Modeling
- Behavioral Rehearsal
- Behavioral Contingencies
- Coping Self-Statements
- Bibliotherapy

A School Based Social Skills Group: Engaging and Empowering Students

◎ Purpose of the group:

- Assist the students in developing a positive self-image, expressing their feelings, dealing with stress, and making friends
- 8 Sessions
- Approximately 30-40 minute sessions
- Mixed gender and grade levels depending on skill deficits

Social Skills Group Session 1

- ◉ Develop rapport and build trust
- ◉ Group rules
- ◉ School counselor introduces the skill: Self introductions and building relationships within the group (friendship)
- ◉ Each group member selects a crayon and takes a piece of white paper. The school counselor instructs the group to read the color on the crayon. “ If you were this color, how would you describe yourself? Please write words on your paper that describe how you are similar to the color crayon you selected.”
- ◉ Modeling Technique

Social Skills Group Session 2

- ⦿ Check in: One thing that was positive about your week was..
- ⦿ Introduction of the Skill: learning how to identify and express feelings.
- ⦿ Technique: Feeling Charades

Social Skills Group Session 3

- ◉ Introduction of the Skill: Making appropriate choices and handling our own problems.
- ◉ Creating stories and choosing your own endings.
- ◉ Technique: Puppets
- ◉ Behavioral Rehearsal
- ◉ Behavioral Contingencies

Social Skills Group Session 4

- ⦿ Review of previous skills
- ⦿ Reminder of remaining sessions
- ⦿ Introduction of the skill: Help the students replace negative self-defeating behaviors
- ⦿ Technique: Collages

Social Skills Group Session 5

- ◉ Introduction of the skill: Stress Management
- ◉ Focus on the positive instead of the negative stressor
- ◉ Activity: Draw your World
- ◉ Check out: Asking each group member to state which stress technique works best for them.
- ◉ Behavioral Contingencies: Giving each member a coupon to check out an extra book at the library that week.



Social Skills Group Session 6

- ◉ Remind students only 2 groups left
- ◉ Introduce the skill: Building self-esteem by creating a positive self-image.
- ◉ Self-Perception Activity
- ◉ Close the group by having members share one thought about their self perception that would help them have a positive interaction at recess
- ◉ Behavioral Rehearsal

Social Skills Group Session 7

- ◉ Discussion of how to end the group and celebrate the work the members have done collectively and individually.
- ◉ Introduce the skill: Expressing anger in an appropriate way
- ◉ Technique: Anger Box
- ◉ Reading the book: “When Sophie Gets Angry- Really, Really, Angry”
- ◉ Bibliotherapy

Social Skills Group Session 8

- ◉ Introduction of final skill: interpersonal relationships and saying goodbye.
- ◉ Appreciation Booklets
- ◉ Closure of the group by asking each group member to reflect upon one skill that they had learned and utilized in the classroom or on the playground.

Follow Up

- Three weeks after the completion of the group
- Teachers should complete some type of post check list
- Comparison of the results to see if social skills have improved
- Continued work with the teachers

Bibliotherapy Resources for Social Skills Development

- ◉ **. Double-Dip Feelings: A Book to Help Children Understand Emotions** by Barbara Cain 1990. Grades K-4.
- ◉ **I Like Me** by Nancy Carlson 1988. Grades K-4.
- ◉ **When Sophie Gets Angry--- Really, Really Angry** by Molly Bang 1996. Grades K-4.
- ◉ **I'm Gonna like Me: Letting off a Little Self-Esteem** by Jamie Lee Curtis.
◉ Illus. by Laura Cornell 1998. Grades K-3.
- ◉ **Today I Feel Silly & Other Moods That Make My Day** by Jamie Lee Curtis.
◉ Illus. by Laura Cornell 1998. Grades K-3.
- ◉ **Where Do Balloons Go? An Uplifting Mystery** by Jamie Lee Curtis.
◉ Illus. by Laura Cornell 1998. Grades K-3.
- ◉ **Whoever You Are** by Mem Fox. Illus by Leslie Staub 1997. Grades K-5.
- ◉ **Go Away, Big Green Monster!** by Ed Emberley 1992. Grades K-2.
- ◉ **Hands Are Not For Hitting** by Martine Agassi. Illus. by Marieka Heinlen 2006. Grades K-2.
- ◉ **Words Are Not For Hurting** by Elizabeth Verdick Illus. by Marieka Heinlen 2003. Grades K-3.
- ◉ **Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day** by Judith Viorst.
◉ Illus. by Ray Cruz 1972. Grades K-5

Questions

