



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Siceolaíochta Oideachais | National Educational Psychological Service

# Setting Up a Social Skills Training Group



## Primary and Post-Primary Information Pack 2015

This NEPS Good Practice Guide was developed by educational psychologists. It is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will apply to any one student or situation.

# Setting up a Social Skills Group

## *Some practical considerations*



This guide was prepared by Shirley Murphy and the NEPS Waterford team. While no particular social skills programme is recommended, key social skills programmes referred to here were used as part of a two year action research project in Waterford. These programmes were found to be evaluated by teachers as effective.

## **Setting Up a Social Skills Group**

### ***Purpose of a Social Skills Group:***

- The aim is to teach and develop social and behavioural skills that may be absent or ineffectively used.
- To identify and evaluate an effective and user-friendly programme that can be implemented by the school
- To provide a caring environment for children to learn by encouragement, experience and practise.
- As well as working on developing the skills within the group sessions, it is important that these are followed through at home and in the yard. Therefore meeting parents/guardians, teachers and children beforehand to discuss the group with them is important to ensure that they understand the purpose of the group and are willing participants. This will increase the chances of success.

### **Who would benefit from being included in a social skills group?**

The following are potential participants of a social skills group.

- Children who the teachers think are negatively affected by feeling different in some way.
- Children who find it difficult to make and keep friends.
- Children who attract attention by use of negative processes and behaviours such as attention seeking behaviours, calling out inappropriately, inappropriate social contacts and those exhibiting difficulties with basic social skills such as listening, turn taking and sharing.
- Children who are not asking for help when needed because they do not know how to effectively seek help from adults and other children.

### **Participants and Identifying Key Areas of Focus**

It is suggested that social skills groups are between 4 and 6 participants in order to work effectively. These participants need to be matched in their emotional/social/behavioural needs in order to be able to effectively implement a programme. However, it is also helpful if members of the group have their individual areas of strength in order to act as models for each other.

It is suggested that participants are identified through the use of behaviour checklists/rating scales completed by teachers in order to identify children with

specific needs and what these are. These checklists/rating scales also serve as a baseline in order to evaluate performance at the end of the programme.

### **Parental Involvement**

In order for social skills groups to be as successful as possible, parental/guardian involvement is vital. It is suggested that meetings are held initially with parents/legal guardians to help them understand what the group is about, the key areas of focus and to discuss with them how they can help. At these meetings, it is suggested that parent/guardians are advised that each week, their child will bring home a letter for them to read which outlines what they have been doing in the social skills group and how they, as parents/guardians can help.

### **Teachers' Involvement**

It is suggested that whenever possible, teachers meet as a staff group to discuss the social skills programme being implemented in the school and how they can help to encourage and develop the social skills being targeted. Research has shown the significant impact that this may have on the success of the social skills programme and working towards generalisation of the skills being targeted.

### **Social skills background information**

For our purposes here we define social skills as being a range of behaviours you need to have available to you in order to access relationships and behave appropriately in social situations. Social skills can be tools for bringing about change. They allow the individual to communicate appropriately and to have the skills to manage the process of change.

The assumption for inclusion in the group is therefore that these children have not, for whatever reason, had the opportunity to learn or apply the targeted social skills effectively.

It is envisaged that the group will be run in a way that is attentive to the needs of each individual participant. Because the number of pupils involved will be fewer than in an average class, more attention can be given on a one-to-one basis. This attention may go some way toward meeting individual special educational needs. The group cannot be seen as therapeutic in a psychological sense but should perhaps be seen as providing some additional help space and attention for children who are experiencing a specific learning difficulty with regard to some aspects of social skills acquisition.

## **A General Guide to Running a Social Skills Group**

The following is a step-by-step guide to starting and running a social skills training group.

### **Time**

Establish a consistent time and day the group is to meet and stick to this. This will help to establish a routine and cement the importance of this work by giving the sessions a definite time and place in the timetable.

### **Meeting Place**

Where the group meets is again important. It should be somewhere where:

- The group has sole use of the space for each session during the period of the programme.
- The group will not be interrupted, over looked or overheard.

***In addition, the following considerations are important:***

- Set the room up in the same way each time to avoid time being wasted and the pupils getting distracted by changes in the environment. Remove anything that may be a distraction to the participants beforehand, especially when working with younger children.
- It is a good idea to provide a circle of chairs that are all the same to prevent arguing over the one considered the best.
- If posters of the group rules are to be used each session, these need to be put up before the pupils arrive. Keeping all the materials together in a folder readily accessible to all involved with the group is helpful.
- If the pupils have a folder/materials to bring with them, provide a tray placed in the centre of the table/circle for them to leave these until needed. This will help to reduce fiddling and pupils becoming distracted.

## **Rules:**

You may choose to have no rules but some rules help the children to feel safe, secure and set clear limits.

It is important that the children are involved in deciding on these rules as this will again contribute to the feeling of ownership of the group.

Suggested rules include the following:

- *Confidentiality within the group of what's discussed within the group (Discuss this with reference to when you, as group leader, may have to break that confidentiality).*
- *Only one person to talk at any one time.*
- *No eating or drinking.*
- *Treat others with respect.*

When rules are discussed, it is also important to talk about the consequences if these rules are broken. Again, include the participants in this to enhance ownership and their feeling of control of the group.

## Social Skills Programmes

The following programmes are a selection of social skills programmes available currently and this selection is by no means exhaustive. This selection comprises of those programmes that schools are currently using and have been found to be useful. They are available from distributors such as Outside the Box, ETC Consult and Amazon. Prices quoted here are as appears on relevant websites at this time.

# Time to Talk

**Price: €30 approx**

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## **A Programme to develop oral and social interaction skills in 4 to 6-Year-Olds**

Helps 4-6-Year-old pupils to gain access to the curriculum and develop friendships. School can be a frustrating and confusing experience for children who have not developed their communication skills. Access to the curriculum may be difficult, as will developing co-operative skills and friendships. **Time to Talk** has been developed to teach and develop oral language and social interaction skills to young children. Containing 40 sessions, designed to take place 2 or 3 times a week, **Time to Talk** will help you teach and develop the 'rules' of interaction with the help of Ginger Bear who features in all the activities.

The skills taught include:

- Eye Contact
- Turn Taking
- Sharing
- Greetings
- Awareness of Feelings
- Giving and Following Instructions
- Listening
- Attention
- Play Skills

Your pupils and your whole class will benefit from **Time to Talk**.

[ISBN: 9781855033092; 224 Pages]

[Author: Alison Schroeder; Suitability: 4 - 6+]

## **Additional Resources:**

### **The Time to Talk Game**

'This fantastic board game will teach and develop essential language and social skills to pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1. The game is centred around Ginger Bear and is designed to complement the Time to Talk book. It is a fun and accessible way of helping younger children improve their communication skills and social interactions. Pupils have the opportunity to perform a variety of role-play activities, practice everyday actions and provide information about themselves. Through these enjoyable tasks they learn vital social skills including: listening, turn-taking, asking and answering questions, engaging in basic conversations, non-verbal communication, eye-contact and understanding feelings. Contains game board, 96 question cards, Ginger Bear toy, 4 Ginger Bear jigsaws, 4 playing pieces, die and teacher's notes'.

### **Ginger Bear Puppet**

'This friendly and very cute Ginger Bear puppet will be an invaluable resource for all social, emotional and behavioural work with your class. It is ideal for use either on its own, or to accompany and enhance use of the Time to Talk book or game. Ginger Bear will encourage and develop a variety of social, communication and language skills such as turn-taking, active listening, role play and building friendships, and will be a popular addition to any classroom. Ginger measures 280mm'.



# Socially Speaking

**Price: €30 approx**

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Effective social interaction does not come naturally to many children with learning disabilities and yet is vital for developing and maintaining relationships and for independent living outside the school context.

This social skills programme for pupils with mild to moderate learning disabilities, physical and/or medical disabilities and for those with special needs in mainstream education is divided into three units:

- let's communicate;
- let's be friends
- let's practice.

It aims to increase self-esteem and improve listening skills and expressive language abilities.

Teacher's notes, photocopiable illustrated pupil worksheets and assessment and evaluation forms are included.

[ISBN: 9781855032521; 149 Pages]

[Authors: Alison Schroeder; Age Suitability: All]

## **Additional Resource:**

### ***Socially Speaking Game***

'This brilliant new board game teaches and reinforces important social skills in a fun way. Designed to complement the Socially Speaking book, the game focuses on social interaction in 3 key areas: home, school and the wider community. Through a variety of role-play and problem-solving activities, children are given the opportunity to practise vital skills such as listening, turn taking, giving compliments, asking questions, making telephone calls and conveying emotions. Contains game board, 100 question cards, playing pieces and teacher's notes. Ideal for 3-6 players at Key Stage 1 & 2, plus older children with special needs'.

# Social Skills Programmes

- an Integrated Approach from Early Years to Adolescence

Maureen Aarons & Tessa Gittens (2003)

**Price: €40 approx**

*Please note this book went out of print at the end of 2013. However, some suppliers still have available stock.*

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From the authors of *Autism: A Social Skills Approach for Children & Adolescents*, this publication contains detailed photocopiable session plans for early years, infants, juniors and adolescents.

Primarily for able and verbal children with an autistic spectrum disorder, the programmes are relevant to the needs of a much wider group of children than those with a formal diagnosis.

- The session plans are very flexible; they can be used as presented, or adjusted to include aspects of the national curriculum or to meet the needs of particular groups in both clinical and educational settings.
- At the early-years level the programme introduces children to good attention behaviour, which includes looking, listening and turn-taking. By adolescence, the participants are helped to deal effectively with real-life situations, as well as gaining some insight into the thoughts, perspectives and intentions of others.
- The programmes emphasise integrated working practices that cross professional boundaries, particularly for teachers and speech & language therapists, which reflects the current focus for the integration of children with special needs into mainstream education.

## **Contents**

The introduction; The programmes (over 10 sessions for early years, infants, juniors and adolescents); Appendix.

## **Readership**

Teachers and speech & language therapists working together in an educational setting.

**ISBN: 0863883109**

# Talkabout

**Price: €52 approx**

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Designed to help therapists and teachers run social skills groups in a more structured way, this comprehensive workbook suggests ideas for therapy and provides numerous useful handouts to use in practise.

Divided into six levels with more than 120 photocopiable ideas, Talkabout will raise self and others' awareness, explore communication, cover the eight aspects of body language, advance paralinguistic skills, better conversational skills and enhance the use of assertiveness.

With forms provided for session planning and evaluation, this complete social communication skills package will be indispensable to professionals working with groups of children or adults who need to improve such skills.

## **Contents:**

- Talkabout Me & You
- Talkabout Communication
- Talkabout Body Language
- Talkabout the way we Talk
- Talkabout Conversations
- Talkabout Assertiveness

## **The complete Talkabout range consists of:**

### **complete Talkabout range consists of:**

- Talkabout Book 1, Developing self-awareness and self-esteem skills
- Talkabout Book 2, Developing social skills
- Talkabout Book 3, Developing friendship skills (new in 2014)

These core books come with an accompanying CD.

- Talkabout Activities (Book)
- Talkabout Relationships (Book)
- Talkabout for Teenagers (Book & CD)
- Talkabout DVD
- Talkabout Assessment Tools CD
- Talkabout Board Games
- Talkabout Cards- Self Awareness

[ISBN: 9780863883231, 162 Pages]

[Author: Alex Kelly, Suitability: All]

## **Other Social Skills Materials Available:**

### **101 Games for Social Skills**

This invaluable new book is packed with creative and dynamic games that will help children to develop positive relationships. There are 2 sections to the book; the first part includes games that teach looking, listening, speaking, thinking and concentration skills. The second consolidates the 5 skill areas and provides opportunities for children to apply them in different social contexts. All of the activities have been tried, tested and thoroughly enjoyed! They are suitable for schools, youth groups, young adults' groups, health departments and social services. Contains 144 pages (246 x 168mm).

### **101 Games for Self Esteem**

This practical book provides a comprehensive collection of innovative games that are essential for any teacher interested in unlocking the full potential of children by promoting their self-esteem. This is vital, as a positive self-image leads to more effective social skills. 101 Games for Self-Esteem is full of exciting and engaging games that promote an enjoyable environment in which to teach and encourage children. The games are a great way for children to learn how to relate well to others, feel more positive about themselves and to teach valuable skills, such as self-awareness, empathy, co-operation and the confidence to trust. Benefiting from the authors' considerable knowledge and experience, this book will enable teachers to share in the fun, humour and friendship of games, with the positive knowledge that these childhood experiences will help shape the adult lives of their pupils. Contains 144 pages (246 x 168mm).

### **Social Skills Activities for Special Children**

For all teachers of children with special needs, here are 142 ready-to-use lessons and reproducible line master activity sheets to help children become aware of acceptable social behaviour and develop proficiency in acquiring basic social skills. Each lesson places a specific skill within the context of real-life situations. It gives the teacher a means to guide students to think about the social skill and why it is important, and provides a hands-on activity for students to work through, think about, discuss, and practice in or outside of the classroom.

## **Jed Baker Resources for Children with Social Skills Difficulties**

There are a range of publications in this series including:

'Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communication Disorders (2003)'. Published by AAPC  
Price €50 approx.

'Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond. (2001)'. Published by Future Horizons. Price €44 approx.

'Social Skills Training and Frustration Manual –DVD (2007)'. Published by Future Horizons. Price €130 approx.

## **STOP, Think, Do, Social Skills Training by Lindy Petersen**

Finally, the classic 1989 '*Stop, Think, Do Social Skills Training*' has been revised and below are the current editions. Outside the Box organise on-line training in the use of these resources and have very positive evaluations of the use of this resource in Ireland.

Stop and Think Learning, a Teacher's Guide (1995). Price €30 approx.

Stop, Think, Do, Social Skills Training, Early Years 4-8yrs (2009). Price €60

Stop, Think, Do, Social Skills Training, Primary Years Schooling, 8-12yrs (2009). Price €60 approx.

Stop, Think, Do, Social Skills Training, Middle Year, 12-15 (2004). Price €60 approx.

Stop and Think Friendship DVD Package (2006). Price €70 approx..

Social Savvy, Help your child fit in with others (2008). Price €20 approx.