



Social Skills and Communication Practice

What are Social Skills and Communication?

- Social skills involve understanding social context and responding appropriately in interactions (e.g, taking turns, interpreting body language)
- Communication practice focuses on expressing thoughts, needs, and emotions effectively through both verbal and non verbal methods.

Why are Social Skills and Communication so important?

- a) Reduces Social Isolation: When we are able to improve our social skills, we can participate in more meaningful social relationships that decrease feelings of isolation.
- b) Supports Academic Success: Often, classroom collaboration and participation rely on social skills and strong communication.
- c) Builds Self -Advocacy: When adolescents communicate their needs and curiosities better when seeking help, they can build self sufficiency.

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What are three CBT based strategies to improve social skills and communication?

1. Emotion Recognition Training

- *Definition:* Emotion recognition training is an approach to help adolescents with developmental disabilities acknowledge emotions in themselves and others– a crucial skill for successful relationships.
- *Instructions:*
 - a) Interactive Activities: A caregiver and adolescent can play “guess that feeling” where a caregiver rotates through multiple acted out emotions, and the adolescent has to practice guessing each one. The caregiver then applies immediate feedback to help their adolescent refine their understanding and correct misidentifications.

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- b) TV Emotion Spotting: Watch a TV show or a movie with your adolescent, and have them practice “emotion spotting” or identifying emotions in TV / movie characters.
- c) Real Life Emotion Spotting: Throughout the week, have your adolescent create a tracker of everytime they spotted a family member's emotion, and how they identified the emotion they saw.



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2. Assertiveness Training

- *Definition:*

- Assertiveness is the ability to *express your thoughts, feelings, and needs openly and directly*, while also respecting the feelings and rights of others.
- Assertiveness is not about being passive or overly aggressive; it is a balance where you communicate clearly and confidently, and maintain health boundaries.
- CBT uses assertiveness training to help individuals recognize and change unhelpful patterns of thinking or behavior that prevent them from being assertive.

- *Instructions:*

- Use the exercise practicing assertiveness with the DESC script below!



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3. Breaking down Social Interactions into Steps

- *Definition:* Breaking down social interactions into manageable steps helps children with developmental disabilities understand and participate in difficult social situations.
- *Instructions:*
 - a) *Task analysis:* Break down a social situation into simple, consecutive steps. For example, “entering a conversation” might be:
 - Stand near the group
 - Listen patiently
 - Wait for a pause in the conversation
 - State, “can I join you?”
 - b) *Visual Support:* Use flowcharts or visual schedules to illustrate each step, making these social steps feel more approachable
 - c) *On the Spot Practice:*
 - Role play using your task analysis with a family member to become more comfortable with the steps

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Exercise: Practicing Assertiveness with the DESC Script



(Describe, Express, Specify, and Consequences)

1. Describe: State the situation objectively.
 - “When you put me down in front of my coworkers while I’m studying...”
2. Express: Share your feelings using “I” statements.
 - “...I feel embarrassed and frustrated.”
3. Specify: Clearly state what you want to happen.
 - “I would like you to keep your negative comments to yourself.”
4. Consequences: Explain the positive outcome if your request is met.
 - “If you do, I’ll be able to finish my work sooner and have a more positive relationship with you.”

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Instructions:

- Think of a recent situation where you wanted to be more assertive.
- Write out a DESC script for that situation.
- Practice saying it aloud, focusing on a peaceful tone and positive body language.
- (Optional) Role-play the scenario in a group setting, and discuss how it felt to use assertive communication.

Case #1:

1. Describe: State the situation objectively.
2. Express: Share your feelings using “I” statements.
3. Specify: Clearly state what you want to happen.



4. Consequences: Explain the positive outcome if your request is met.

Case #2:

5. Describe: State the situation objectively.
6. Express: Share your feelings using “I” statements.
7. Specify: Clearly state what you want to happen.
8. Consequences: Explain the positive outcome if your request is met.

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Case #3:

9. Describe: State the situation objectively.
10. Express: Share your feelings using “I” statements.
11. Specify: Clearly state what you want to happen.
12. Consequences: Explain the positive outcome if your request is met.