

Role Playing:

A hands-on approach to teaching social skills.

Role-Playing: What is it?

- Bellini, 2006: "...involves the acting out (of) situations or activities in a structured environment to practice newly acquired skills and strategies, or previously learned skills that the child is having difficulties performing."

Why do we use role play?

- One core feature for individuals with ASD is that they struggle with social skills.
- This struggle may relate to (Mayo & Waldo; 2008):
 - A lack of (social) knowledge (of the rules of social interaction)
 - A lack of practice or (meaningful) feedback (in social interactions)
 - A lack of cues or opportunities (to practice social skills)
 - A lack of (meaningful social) reinforcement
 - The presence of interfering behaviors (that may inhibit the expression of social skills)

Why do we use role play (cont.)

- Nelson, 2010:
 - Role play creates a safe, structured environment in which to practice
 - "When mindfully executed, role play allows participants to let their guards down and work in the spirit of trust."
 - Role play can be fun and motivational--it can be liberating to walk in someone else's shoes
 - Role play encourages repeated practice--mistakes and making choices are embraced
 - Role play provides structure to abstract social concepts--the structured framework allows concepts to be broken down.
 - Role play is active--individuals with autism can benefit from enacting roles, and encourages the active sharing of space, interaction, and pursuit of answers and change

Performance Guidelines

Actor's Rules:

1. Never hurt an actor (physically or emotionally).
2. Always listen to the director(s).

The Big 3

(The tools we use to communicate besides the words we choose.)

1. Vocal tone
2. Body Language
3. Facial expression

Steps to Conducting a Role-Play

- These are some of the steps from the social skills curriculum "Scripting: Social Communication for Adolescents" by Patty Mayo and Patti Waldo
- When conducting role plays in Pride, I will provide the steps to you.
- We may not have time for all of the steps, all of the time.

1. Identify the Problem

Example:

- Students are giving negative feedback to each other and they are not using positive comments.
- Either they don't know how to give compliments (skill deficit) or are choosing not to give them (performance deficit).
- The skill of *giving compliments* should be taught.

2. Introduce the skill

- On the board, instruct the students to *write down something nice about a person in this room.*
- Collect the papers and read them aloud.
- Some may be appropriate, "Your hair looks nice," or "You have a great sense of humor." Others may be put-downs in disguise, like, "Your last haircut is a lot better than the one you had before," or "You're almost as cool as Kyle."
- Have the students respond to the comments and they will probably point out that some of the 'compliments' were actually put-downs.
- Share with the class will be studying the skill *giving compliments.*

3. Present the steps of the skill

- Develop the steps of the skill (there may be fewer or more steps for students, depending on social skills competency.)
- Present the skills to the class
 1. Decide if the compliment is necessary. (Did the person do something that you really like?)
 2. Choose the right time and place. (Usually right after the person did the thing that you appreciated.)
 3. Compliment the person.
 4. Give a reason for the compliment.
 5. Continue the conversation or close it with an appropriate ending.

Practice the steps

- Break the class into pairs
- Offer suggestions to start the role plays
 - Write a list of 3 situations that would deserve a compliment on the board, one at home, one at school and one in the community.
- Have the students practice the steps of giving a compliment.
- After they have practiced your suggested topics, allow them to create their own situations. (But monitor to ensure they are still following the skills steps!)

Performing the Role Play

- Invite a student (or staff member) to practice the skill with you in front of the class. (Show them what you are asking them to do first.)
- Invite the students to share their role plays with the class.
- NO NOT FORCE THEM!!!
 - Performance anxiety is best overcome by creating a welcoming, relaxed situation.
 - A student will not learn the lesson you want them to learn if they are experiencing a traumatic moment.
 - For the students who do not participate in the performances, invite them to share their observations following others' role plays. (They are still learning the skill and that is what is important.)

Feedback

- After each role play offer positive and specific feedback
 - I find it difficult to come up with original observations for each student every performance... staff should help each other with this.
- Feedback can be as simple as mentioning one of the skill steps the students demonstrated. (ie. "You gave a very clear reason for your compliment.")
- Never criticize! This will increase performance anxieties.
- If a student is making a joke of the situation, you may acknowledge it, but do not to engage in the joke. This is attention seeking behavior and should not be fed. Instead, try to find some redeeming quality in the role play to recognize as a positive.

Follow-up

- Think of a fun way to wrap up the lesson.
 - Explain that giving a compliment is one of the best gifts you can give a person.
 - Bring wrapping paper boxes and bows to class.
 - Have the students draw names from a hat.
 - Have them write down a compliment for the person who's name they drew.
 - Wrap the compliments and exchange gifts.
- Review and re-enforce in the following weeks, months and years.
- Recognize and give positive feedback when students use the skill.
- Occasionally create situations for them to practice their skill.

Your Turn!

- Suggested skill:
 - Saying 'thank you'
- Practice with the person next to you.
- Share your role plays with the larger group.
- Practice offering positive and specific feedback.
- Have fun!

Practice Role Play (cont.)

- Steps of *saying thank you*.
 - Identify if thanks is necessary. (Did someone do something kind or helpful for you?)
 - Say Thank you. (Practice different variations/ways of saying thanks. How is saying thanks to your sibling different from your thanks to a gas station attendant?)
 - Respond to the receiver of the compliment in a positive way and continue the conversation or end it appropriately.
- 3 Suggested situations:
 - At home: You are running late school and still have to iron your shirt, eat breakfast and brush your teeth. Your sibling offers to iron your shirt for you.
 - At school: Your teacher stayed after school until 5:00 with you to help you study for a test.
 - In the community: Someone at a gas station gave you directions to the mall.

Resources

- Baker, J. Social Skills Training: For Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communication Problems
- Bellini, S. Building Social Relationships: A Systematic Approach to Teaching Social Interaction Skills to Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Social Difficulties
- Crimmens, P. Drama Therapy and Storymaking in Special Education
- Mayo, P. & Waldo, P. Scripting: Social Communication Role-Plays for Adolescents
- Nelson, A. Foundation Role Plays for Autism: Role Plays for Working with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Parents, Peers, Teachers, and Other Professionals