

Social Competence in Individuals with ASD

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Definition of Social Competence

- “Social competence is an ability to take another’s perspective concerning a situation and to learn from past experience and apply that learning to the ever-changing social landscape. The ability to respond flexibly and appropriately defines a person’s ability to handle the social challenges that are presented to us all. Social competence is the foundation upon which expectations for future interactions with others are built and upon which children develop perceptions of their own behavior. Social experiences are intimately connected to emotional competence. It is rare that social competence is present without appropriate emotional functioning also present.” (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007)



Social Intelligence:

Social Awareness (Goleman, 2006)

- “Refers to the spectrum that runs from instantaneously sensing another’s inner state to understanding her feelings, thoughts, to “getting” complicated social situations.”
- Includes:
 - Primal Empathy
 - Attunement
 - Empathic accuracy
 - Social cognition



Social Intelligence:

Social Facility (Goleman, 2006)

- “ ...builds on social awareness to allow smooth, effective interactions.
- Includes...
 - Synchrony
 - Self-presentation
 - Influence
 - Concern

One of the key factors in determining social competency was whether the individual was “successful” in the social interaction

Words Used to Describe Individuals Who Struggle Socially

- Matter-of-fact
- Explosive
- Manipulative
- Socially incompetent
- Out-of-synch
- Uncooperative
- Noncompliant
- Oppositional
- Pushover
- Clueless
- Socially Naïve
- Tactless
- Inflexible
- Friendless
- Aggressive
- Unmotivated/lazy
- Bully
- Jerk

Some Areas of Social Challenge for Individuals with ASD

- Lack of social and emotional reciprocity
- Difficulties with joint attention
- Communication is vague
- Overly talkative, candid, or detailed
- Restricted interests/topics
- Topic maintenance difficulties
- Overly formal or informal communication style
- Odd humor
- Difficulty with use and interpretation of nonverbal information (i.e., eye gaze)
- Difficulty making and maintaining peer relationships
- Social withdrawal or avoidance—preference for solitude
- Social anxiety
- Difficulty with perspective taking
- Out of synchrony/harmony

Ways that difficulty with social competence might manifest in the classroom

- Work refusal
- Not answering questions
- Withdrawal
- Aggressiveness
- Talkativeness
- Challenges with following directions
- Difficulty following or accepting rules
- Inappropriate comments
- Difficulty with physical boundaries
- Slow responses
- Difficulty understanding the "hidden curriculum"
- Narrow range of interest
- Sarcastic tone of voice
- Difficulty staying on topic

Key Principles to Working with Social Intelligence

- First, we must address any arousal issues
- The adult serves as social interpreter and mentor
 - Adults' intact system used to bolster the child's system
- Use relationship-based language
 - i.e., I understand that is how you see it.
- It develops as a part of experience, not just instruction
 - It is "learned" as the individual is a part of the "social synapse," a community of some sort



Questions for PLC

- Share with your group situations where you have felt that you were, and were not, socially successful.
 - How did you know when you were socially successful?
- How do you feel your students experience social success, or a lack of social success, in your class/area?
 - What are some ways that you might increase the social success of students in your class/area?