

## **Social 2: Social Inclusion: Script**

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### **M8T0: Introduction to Module**

Hi! Thank you for supporting Spectrum Teaching and welcome to this module: Social Part 2. In Social 1, we discussed challenges in social interactions, including communication, theory of mind, fixations, and sensory challenges. We also covered ways to help students develop fundamental social skills.

In this module, we will build upon what we learned in Social 1 and focus on supporting interactions and inclusion with peers. We will cover the importance of peers; preparing for social interaction; supporting inclusion; privacy, safety, and bullying, and circle of friends.

As always, throughout our learning and application of these skills, we should always consider our guiding principles: understanding the individual, empathy, and patience. These help us determine the best strategies for our students and guide our implementation.

Thank you again for watching, and hope you enjoy this module. In the next video, we will start by talking about the importance of peers.

### **M8T1: Importance of Peers**

Hi! To begin this module, let's start by discussing why peers are important.

One big reason to support inclusion of students with ASD with their peers is that interaction with others can help support social development. By playing, talking, and engaging with other students, children with ASD can learn from others, develop certain social skills, and practice these skills.

However, for this to occur, we must ensure that a child's ability level for social interactions is high enough for social learning. This means understanding the individual to evaluate their fundamental social skills and if their understanding of social situations will support positive interaction for their age group.

One example to help us think of this is that, reading is a great way to improve our writing skills, but if we are still learning how to spell, we won't be able to benefit from reading philosophical essays. This is maybe an extreme analogy, but the same concept should be noted in social development. In these cases, we need to work with the student, and likely other professionals to support a child's social development on a one-on-one basis. This does not necessarily mean a child has to master all of the skills we discussed in Social 1, but that they are at a level to interact with their peers.

Another reason why peers are so important, is that positive interactions with peers help build a child's confidence and emotional health. Just because children with autism may like being alone or may not interact much with their peers, does not mean that they do not want friends. Just like everyone else, children with ASD want and benefit from being accepted, having social support, and having fun with others. Many children with autism desire friendship and want to



be accepted by peers, they just may not know how to begin, and may have other challenges that make it more difficult.

Inclusion of students with ASD with their typically developing peers, if done well, can be very beneficial. Students can learn from others, build friendships, support emotional wellbeing, protect against bullying, and also reduce stigma surrounding ASD. However, if done poorly, this can lead to feelings of isolation, awareness of being “different,” social exclusion, and bullying. This then negatively impacts academic performance and learning. Without proper peer support all aspects of a child’s development is negatively impacted.

That concludes this video. Hopefully you have learned reasons why peers are important, and in later videos, we will discuss how we can support children with ASD in their peer interactions. Thank you and in the next video we will further discuss Bullying, Safety, & Privacy.

### **M8T2: Bullying, Safety, & Privacy**

Hi, in the last video we discussed the importance of peers, and when integration goes poorly, children may be vulnerable to bullying. In this video we will talk about bullying, safety, and privacy.

As we know from Social Skills 1, there are a number of challenges that may impact the social interaction of students with ASD. Some may have difficulties understanding others’ communication, may have difficulties communicating themselves, and ultimately have challenges in understanding the underlying social code that neurotypical individuals seem to understand intuitively.

This difficulty in understanding may lead to unconventional behaviours or outbursts. These behaviours then feedback and can make it harder to interact with others. This is a dangerous situation, as it often leads to exclusion and social isolation. In fact, one study (Science Daily from Dad) showed that classroom integration with typically developing peers makes students with ASD more conscious of being “different.”

Combining this “different” nature of students with ASD and social isolation, they become prime targets for bullying. About 60% of all bullying involves a student on the autism spectrum. This abuse from peers further compounds this issue, and can further exacerbate issues with confidence and self-esteem. With this social isolation and lack of social support, there is often nobody to stick up for the student. Worst of all, some students may have communication challenges and may not know to ask for help.

Bullying is a complex issue for any school, and there are no easy fixes, but through this module, we will look at some strategies to help facilitate success in inclusion. To protect our children, it is best to have a responsible adult that checks in with the child on a regular basis or monitors the child during recess and breaks. One of the biggest risks of bullying is simply being alone, often making children with ASD at high risk. To help with this we can have a peer buddy, which we will discuss later in the topic. However, we can’t always rely on the child to bring concerns forward, making it important for supervision when possible

We must protect these students, and fundamentally, this begins with identifying the issue and teaching a child to ask for help. Each school system may differ slightly in their policy and



approach to bullying, so please take our following approach as a suggestion, and feel free to adapt as you see fit.

The first step is that student themselves must be able to understand that a situation is bullying. We can help by setting out a structure or criteria that students can use to identify bullying. Students with ASD often have concrete understandings and structures. We should keep this in mind in defining bullying. For example, we could tell the class that bullying is “any mean, aggressive, or harmful behaviour from someone to another, when they think they are cooler, smarter, stronger, or better than the other person.” We can then go through examples and a class discussion to identify situations of bullying for everyone to understand.

Next, we should to teach students how to respond in these situations. During the situation, it is unadvised for the student to fight back against the bully. Instead, all children, including children with ASD, should ignore the bully, and walk away.

Finally, students should tell an adult once they have removed themselves from direct contact with the bullying. When a child reaches out, it is important to comfort and praise them, as it can be very difficult for students to tell others. Now that we aware of this, we can respond appropriately with school guidelines.

Children with ASD can have challenges with all three of these steps. To help with this, it is advisable to use social stories and social scripts to help students how to recognize, respond, and reach out. We will cover these tools more in-depth later in this module, so keep in mind how you may utilize them to support a child who is experiencing bullying when they are brought up.

Privacy is also important to teach students. Some students with ASD may not understand boundaries, as this is part of these underlying social rules children have trouble picking up on. This involves respecting the privacy of others, understanding privacy for themselves and their bodies, and appreciate how these rules can vary across different situations.

For example, students should learn and know that it is inappropriate for them or their peers to touch each other’s genitalia areas. This may seem obvious for peers but may not be for children with ASD. Many of times this just needs explicit communication as to what is accepted and what is not. This way students understand the expectations of their actions, and where these social boundaries lie.

In this video we talked about bullying. We discussed giving students ways to recognize bullying and teaching to ask for help, in order to ensure that school is a safe place for all students. We also discussed privacy, boundaries, and how communicating expectations can help with this. Thank you for watching, and in the next video we will cover Preparing for Peer Interactions.

### **M8T3: Preparing for Peer Interactions**

Hi! In this video we will discuss some ways that we can help prepare students with ASD for peer interactions. To begin let’s quickly review some common challenges these students experience in peer exchanges.



Communication is an area that many students with ASD have difficulties with, including the delivery, interpretation, and context of information. Children may also have difficulties manipulating and comprehending language, especially more complex or abstract language. There are also challenges in understanding body language and non-verbal communication. In Social 1 we discussed theory of mind and how students may have difficulties understanding the thoughts and feelings of others. These and other challenges can make it hard for students with ASD to integrate with their peers, so what are some things that we can do as educators to make this easier?

One aspect is to help a student with ASD develop skills in the fundamental social skills we previously social 1. Imagine how difficult interacting with your coworkers would be if you did not understand how to greet, initiate, maintain, and close social interactions.

Social stories and social scripts are flexible and adaptable tools that can help students with ASD prepare for interactions with peers. The same tools can be used to help children understand responses to bullying as discussed previously. Social scripts take common social interactions and convert them into a script that students can practice to prepare for real life scenarios. Social Scripts sets out the typical interactions that will occur, focusing on “how” an interaction flows to give children a structure to follow. Often, we will have a collection of social scripts for multiple scenarios to help a child.

For example, we could create a script for a student Molly, asking to play with a classmate. We would practice this with the student. “Hi Mr. Zhang [name], Can I (finger paint) [activity] with you?” “Yep, for sure” “great, thank you Mr. Zhang [name]!”

Social stories are similar, as they describe common social scenarios and how to interact, but can also help explain “why” people act in certain ways, depending on how they are written. For example, if we were take a look again at playing with others, we could write a story. “Sometimes I want to play with other people. To see if I can play with them, I can ask ‘Can I play with you?’ If they want to play with me they can say ‘yes.’ I can play with them and I may have fun!” It is important to not be too definitive, especially with feelings, as the child might not always experience the same things in similar interactions.

One thing we should consider is not over simplifying these stories and scripts and teaching different ways of asking the same thing. Although the previous example is great, we should try to teach Molly different ways of asking the same thing as well. Not only will she be able to use a variety of phrases to ask others to play, but can recognize them when they are used with her.

In addition, we can explicitly teach or use social stories and social scripts to help students understand what to do if the answer is negative. For example, “sometimes they may say ‘no,’ and that is okay. I can go find someone else to play with!”

To help with challenges in theory of mind and nonverbal communication, we can help students better understand facial expressions and emotions. We can teach students explicitly about emotions and how others feel, such as, teaching what being sad or happy means, and how people might act when experiencing these feelings.



To help with facial expressions, we can utilize a Facial Expressions Book, to help students with ASD understand what certain emotions look like on people. For example, if we were to teach what happy looks like, we can have book with a variety of illustrations and visuals that demonstrate “happy.” We can do this for “sad,” “angry,” “tired,” and others! This same tool can also be used for body language as well.

In this video, we quickly reviewed challenges in communication, and discussed how social scripts, social stories, and facial expression books can help students better understand social interactions. This helps prepare them for interactions with their peers and hopefully will help your child make friends! In the next video, we will discuss buddy systems. Thank you for watching.

#### **M8T4: Managing Conflict**

- In the last video we talked about ways that we can help prepare students with ASD to engage peers.
- Despite successful implementation of these strategies, conflict may occur. In fact, conflict is a natural part of learning about social interaction and most students will find themselves in situations where there is friction between one or more individuals.
- To help support all students to succeed, it is important to have a framework for managing conflict between peers set into place. Of course, most schools already have these, and please adapt elements of this video into your daily practice if you see fit.
- Misbehaviours that are associated with ASD are often challenging to help with and requires a high level of expertise, so please reach out to ABA support or other resources if you feel out of your comfort zone. We also have an entire module on functional behavioural assessment that covers this more in-depth.
- Things to keep in mind:
  - All students are unique — do not assume that similar behaviours between students are due to the same reasons
  - Behaviours is a form of communication, and is functional — ie it serves a purpose. Behaviour is also contextual.
  - Only by understanding the reason or function for the behaviour can we truly work to correct it.
- However, this video will focus on conflict between peers.

#### **M8T4: Buddy System**

Hi, in this video we will talk about a few types of buddy systems that we can implement to help support inclusion for a child with ASD. As we discussed previously, social peer support is important for children, as it protects against bullying, can help develop social skills, and helps foster positive emotional and mental health.

In Social Skills 1, we discussed how educators can help facilitate inclusion through helping students with ASD teach and practice social skills, give reminders to utilize these skills, and help introduce them to other students. A peer-to-peer buddy system is another way that we can do this, and involves pairing a child with ASD with another student that can help look out for them.

For these buddy systems, it is important to clarify that a peer support member is not the same as a friend. Hopefully, the relationship will develop into a friendship, but it does not necessarily



begin as this. Instead, the role of peer buddies is to look out for each other by making efforts to support the child in inclusion, prevent bullying, prevent exclusion, and be supportive in times of stress or anxiety.

To implement this in the classroom, we begin by identifying the child of focus for the buddy system. This does not have to be a child with ASD, but any kid that might be experiencing social challenges. We want to understand the child and the particular challenges that might impact relationships with peers and the potential peer buddy. Make sure to talk to the parents and child to inform and gain consent to set-up a buddy system.

Following this, we want to identify peer role models that might be interested in volunteering to help out their classmate. Buddies are often chosen for their maturity and kindness. Some schools, given consent from the parents and child with ASD, will choose to present to the class about ASD, and then receive interest in volunteering. Other schools, and this is the version we recommend, is to talk to the students that you think could be best for the job, and see if they would be interested in being a buddy. We can create a group of peers or a single buddy. Again, make sure to speak with the peer and their parents to ensure that they consent to being part of the buddy system as well.

Next, we conduct training for the peers and identify roles and responsibilities. This would include teaching the students about ASD and defining boundaries, especially when to ask for help. For roles, we would discuss supporting the child, preventing bullying, preventing exclusion, and being supportive in times of stress/anxiety. Many times, the best way to do this is to have the peer support responsible for engaging with the child with ASD in activities or include them in groups. Being alone is one of the biggest risk factors of bullying, and through this, we are protecting the child against bullying.

To monitor this system and help success of the peer buddies, we should establish check-ins with all members to see if any extra help or guidance is needed. We should make sure that the peer buddies are also enjoying their involvement, and gaining something out of this relationship as well. It is important to make sure the peer support does not become stressed out or negatively impacted due to their added responsibilities.

One variation of this peer support is to have a universal buddy system, where all students are paired with a peer support. Bullying can affect anyone, and it is beneficial for all students to have someone to look out for them. This is also beneficial to avoid labelling or identification of the child with special needs, since this is not created specifically for a child. However, one limitation of the universal buddy system is that students often take their role less seriously, which may be less effective in supporting the child with ASD.

Another option for peer pairing is to pair a younger student with an older one. Often the most senior year at the school has a volunteer that helps with the younger age group. If we do this specifically for ASD, we may have a student with experience with ASD, or have a higher maturity level to promote success of this support strategy. We can also do this for all students utilizing the older grades as well. Feel free to use the system that you believe will be most beneficial for your students. All students and schools are different, so please adapt these models as you see fit.



That concludes this video on buddy systems and peer support. Thank you for watching and in the next video, we will discuss Circle of Friends.

### **M8T5: Circle of Friends**

Hi, thank you again for watching this Social Skills 2 Module, and in this last video, we will focus on Circle of Friends. Similar to buddy systems, Circle of Friends is a program designed to support inclusion for students with ASD, with a bit more of a structured approach.

The rationale behind the Circle of Friends is that students that have difficulty in social situations may have behaviours that furthers isolation, causing worsening of these misbehaviours. Essentially, this creates a cycle in which misbehaviours continue to worsen through a snowball effect. By supporting inclusion, we can support modification of these behaviours, thus breaking this cycle, and improving confidence and self-esteem. It is a great way to facilitate social inclusion that has been shown to work across classrooms globally.

The Circle of Friends stems around a concept of levels of relationships. These are: intimacy, friendship, participation, economic exchange. The circle of intimacy would contain individuals of closest relationship such as family members; circle of friendship contains friends; participation would be acquaintances and other people you interact frequently with; and economic exchange would include people you engage in transactions with, such as a doctor, dentist or hairdresser. It is important for children to know the different levels of relationships and how each of these can impact their lives. This helps them understand the interactions that they experience with their peers and other individuals as well.

The idea behind Circle of Friends is to have peer role models help support children with autism in social settings. These students look out for the student to protect them from exclusion, isolation, and bullying. Students with ASD often have a very empty circle of friendship, and through these peer groups, our goal is to help populate this level. Essentially, in Circle of Friends, we create a “friendship group,” whereas in the Buddy System, the focus was on a peer-support. In addition, people report academic, behavioural and social improvement for students with ASD, while peer mentors develop empathy, understanding of ASD, and leadership abilities.

Let’s go through the steps to implement a Circle of Friends. Please note that before implementing this, it may be helpful to research some other sources, look into variations of the program, and speak with a professional or someone experienced at creating a Circle of Friends to ensure the right steps are taken for your students to succeed.

To begin, we always need to talk with parent, child and school staff to gain consent to implement a circle of friends for the focus child. We need to be able to explain to the child with ASD what the friendship group is, so that they understand the implications of this. Next, we should define a purpose for the group and choose social peers to be role models. We should communicate to all parties that the purpose of the Circle of Friends is to get to know classmate with autism and help them better connect with others at school.

Once the people who will be participating are confirmed, we would go through an activity of Circle of Friends with the typically-developing peer volunteers and the same with the focus



child. In this activity, we would present the Levels of Relationships, and ask students to fill in the names of people in each level. Often, the child with ASD completes this before, and is not present when the results are shown to the peer-group. At this point, it becomes apparent to the volunteers that their social circles are drastically different from that of a student with ASD. It is recommended to educate these students on autism spectrum disorder during this session, if appropriate.

For the peers who want to participate, a peer-group is established, and they brainstorm with the teacher how they can help their classmates. These students are asked to try to fill this second friendship circle, and it may be best to define roles among the students. It is often beneficial for these peers to have shared interests with the child. This helps them find areas they can enjoy together and build a friendship. We want the relationship to be rewarding for all members, and common interests can greatly help with this.

To start everything off, we would set up a meeting with the peer-group and student. Typically at this meeting, each individual friend would say something positive about the focus child and why they want to be their friend. The goal is to have the focus child meet their friends, and create a positive foundation for the group. Moving forward, we would plan weekly or biweekly meeting sessions to ensure the group is fulfilling their roles, and if any extra support is needed. We may even choose to have more self-directed activity time for these groups to interact and build their relationships. Overtime, the group will become friends, and all members can benefit from these new relationships!

That concludes this video on Circle of Friends and Social Skills 2. Throughout this module, we have learned about the importance of peers; bullying, privacy & safety; ways to prepare students with ASD for peer interactions; Buddy Systems; and Circle of Friends. I hope these topics have given you a better understanding of how we can help support social inclusion for children with ASD, and that these tools can be used to benefit your students. Thank you!

