

The Nuances of Social Communication: How to Effectively Teach Social Skills to a Student with Autism

Nancy Kling, MA, LSSP

Nancy@BehaviorPlus.com

Our Mission

- I believe our mission, as an educator, should be to prepare students to have a meaningful life after school – ability to establish and maintain meaningful relationships and ability to secure and retain meaningful work.
- Since persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction is criteria for diagnosing a student with autism spectrum disorder, every student with ASD has persistent deficits in social skills that we should be addressing.
- So, how can we achieve our mission with these students without teaching them social skills?

How Social Skills Impact Adult Life

○ The greater the difference in their scores in kindergarten, the more pronounced the differences in their outcomes by age 25

American Journal of Public Health, 2015. <http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2015/07/how-children-s-social-competence-impacts-their-well-being-in-adu.html>

3

© Nancy Kling, 2021

○ Suicide rates ages 10 – 19 w/ASD rose significantly higher than non-ASD peers between 2013 and 2017 their rate

Autism Speaks article June, 2019
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/suicide-risk-autism>

4

© Nancy Kling, 2021

○40% of young people with ASD have clinically elevated levels of anxiety; untreated anxiety has been associated with the development of depression, aggression, and self-injury

Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018

<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/anxiety-autism-spectrum-disorder>

5

© Nancy Kling, 2021

My Own Information Gathering

○40% were receiving services in PPCD, Life Skills, 18+

○6% received services in non-self-contained behavior program

○22% received speech services

○29% received no specialized services to remediate the deficits in social skills due to ASD

6

© Nancy Kling, 2021

The Social-Emotional Chain Reaction of Social Skills

○When we do something in the presence of another person that is unexpected, it starts the social-emotional chain reaction and those around us become uncomfortable. If we persist, they get irritable. This Social-Emotional Chain Reaction is what causes many adults with autism to be fired...and neither party knows it.

7

© Nancy Kling, 2021

1. Choose Your Resources/Strategies Wisely

- Anything by Michelle Garcia Winner! (email a request to me for a list of her curriculum resources)
- Difference between Social Skills and Social Thinking = difference between rote and meaningful learning
- A sequence should be followed

www.SocialThinking.com

8

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Example of Beginning Sequence

1. We all think thoughts and feel feelings
2. How to be part of a group and follow the group plan
3. How to “think with your eyes”
4. How to keep your “body in the group”
5. How to use “whole body listening”

9

© Nancy Kling, 2021

- Only when they have learned these first 5 concepts are they fully ready to learn the “hidden rules” of various situations and “expected” and “unexpected” behavior.
- Be careful not to jump ahead. If you can’t think with your eyes, how can you figure out the hidden rules and determine which behavior is expected and which is not?









10

© Nancy Kling, 2021

The 5-Point Scale

Kari Dunn Buron

- Makes abstract concepts visual and more concrete
- Useful for teaching anything that has levels – volume, touching others, being upset, reactions

5 Point Scale			My "Help" Scale	
5	Extremely loud 	This is only for emergencies.	5	Impossible to handle! Not ready
4	"outside voice" 	This is to call my friend when we are at recess.	4	Really hard for me. I will need lots of help to work on this.
3	talking 	This is called my "inside voice". 	3	Hard for me. I can try to work on this.
2	whisper 	This is for talking quietly, 	2	With a plan I can do this on my own.
1	quiet 	This is for the library or when the teacher is talking. 	1	No sweat – easy as pie. I can do this totally on my own!

How Big Is This Problem?

5 Hurricane, death of pet

4

3

2

1 Can't open locker

5 Whole family is upset;
upset for a long time

4

3

2

1 Only you are upset, can
get help

13

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Size of Reaction Must Match Size of Problem

5 Hurricane, death of pet

4

3

2

1 Can't open locker

5 Upset for a long time

4

3

2

1 Frustrated; ask for help

14

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Getting Started

- Decide how you want to break down the concept
- Create the scale, defining the behaviors or feelings that go with each level
- Discuss, explain, and/or practice the scale
- Post the scale near the student's desk
- Review the scale often when the student is calm and ready to learn
- Generalize to other environments

15

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Idea for Practice

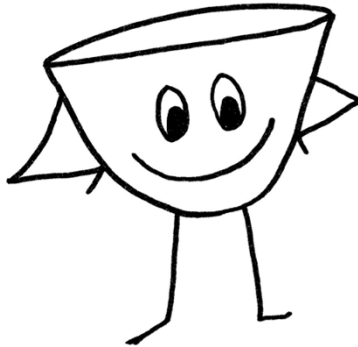
- Identify typical situations and activities – some that are problems, some that are not
- Write each situation (changes in routine, playing with peers, coming to class late, following rules in the class) or activity (math test, team game in PE) on a card
- Make 5 pockets, numbered 1-5
- Have student sort situations/activities into the pockets according to how the situation makes him feel

16

© Nancy Kling, 2021

The Cup Kid

Nancy Kling

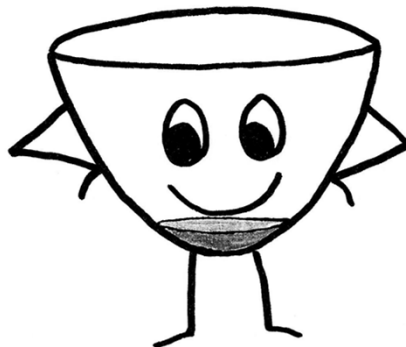


Email me for a PDF of *I'm a Cup Kid! The Workbook*
Nancy@BehaviorPlus.com

© Nancy Kling, 2021

17

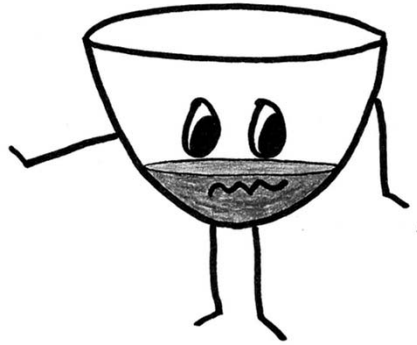
We all have a cup and things go in it.



© Nancy Kling, 2021

18

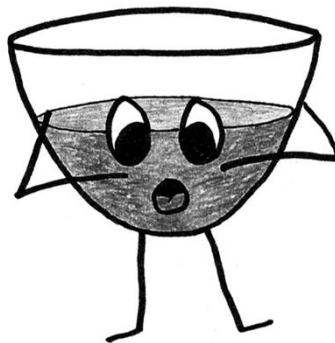
All day, things go in.



© Nancy Kling, 2021

19

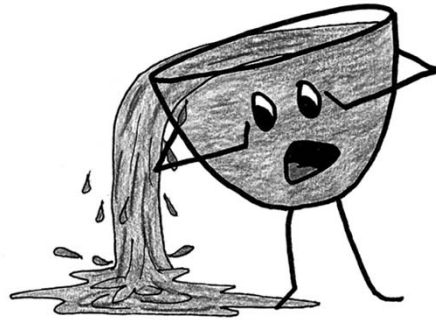
If you do nothing, it fills up



© Nancy Kling, 2021

20

and then runs over, causing a melt-down!



21

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Make a list of things that fill the cup.

- Environmental factors
- Physical and emotional needs and feelings
- Concerns for physical or emotional safety
- Not knowing what to expect or having inaccurate expectations – schedule change, subs



22

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Make a list of things that empty the cup.



- Self-stimulatory behaviors
- Preferred activities
- Organizational tasks

23

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Make an emptying plan



- Review the child's schedule; determine times, places, and environments where the most cup fillers are
- Remove or change some fillers if possible
- Determine a time and place for the student to empty his cup
- Inform all stockholders; revise plan as necessary
- Gradually re-introduce any fillers removed when possible

24

© Nancy Kling, 2021

Other Strategies/Resources

- Steven Gutstein's *Solving the Relationship Puzzle* – contains information on teaching joint attention
- Tony Attwood's *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*
- Scott Bellini's *Building Social Relationships* – writing goals and objectives, using video modeling

25

© Nancy Kling, 2021

- Carol Gray's Social Stories© - great way to teach hidden rules and expected behaviors
- Jed Baker's *Social Skills Training, The Social Skills Picture Book, Preparing for Life*

26

© Nancy Kling, 2021

2. Choose the Social Skills Coach Wisely

○ Someone who gets these students

○ Understands how they process information and can think like they think

○ Genuinely likes them

○ Someone who can think on their feet and make a lesson of whatever walks in the door

27

© Nancy Kling, 2021

○ Someone who knows age-appropriate social skills of neurotypical students

○ Even though the Coach is teaching the skills, all adults need to be aware of the concepts and terminology, so students are reinforced, reminded, and corrected throughout the day. Social skills are not just for social skills class.

28

© Nancy Kling, 2021

3. Choose and Group the Students Wisely

- Separate students who are AU from students who are ED or ID
- Separate students who have joint attention from those who do not
- Choose students who have adequate cognitive skills and adequate language skills

29

© Nancy Kling, 2021

4. Choose Your Goals/Objectives Wisely – Use Task Analysis

- Initiate a greeting with a peer upon entering the classroom each morning a minimum of 3 times per week

30

© Nancy Kling, 2021

- Determine which peer would be open to being greeted by reading nonverbal and contextual cues and using social memory
- Determine an appropriate time to greet the peer (don't interrupt another conversation, don't bother a person busy with an activity)
- Think about what to say (words) and how to say it (volume and tone)
- Approach the person in a way that will help them feel comfortable: have a pleasant look on your face, get their attention/make eye contact, and greet them

31

© Nancy Kling, 2021



Behavior Plus, Inc.
Empowering people. Transforming lives.

Nancy Kling, MA

Nancy@BehaviorPlus.com

281-48 B-PLUS

www.BehaviorPlus.com