Making Social Skills Fun!

Juli Gunner, BCBA, NYSCT
What Will We Learn?

+ Selecting and sequencing target skills
+ Components of Behavioral Skills Training
  - Explicit Instruction
  - Modeling
  - Learner Role Play/Rehearsal
  - Performance Feedback
  - BONUS: Contrived Practice Generalization Activities
+ Adapting and differentiating components for learners of different developmental levels and behavioral needs
Selecting and Sequencing Target Skills

+ Social, adaptive, and coping skills can all be targeted!
+ Emphasize EMOTIONS and their relationship to CHOICES
  - Happy, sad, angry/mad, calm
  - Strong vs. Weak
  - “It is okay to feel ______, but we need to make a strong choice”
+ Consider important prerequisite skills to inform WHAT and HOW you teach
  - Identifying emotions
  - Following one-step and multi-step directions
  - Expressive language and/or functional communication
  - Joint attention and following instructions in a group
  - Raising hand
  - Responding yes/no to answer questions about facts and preference
Planning for Instruction

+ Break down complex skills into steps
  - Skillstreaming.com has program books for different developmental levels, skill cards, skill posters, student workbooks, etc.

+ Consider relevant situations (e.g. materials, people, times of day)

+ Give learners something to SAY or DO
  - Functional phrase (e.g. ‘I need space’, ‘I don’t like that’, ‘I feel angry’)
  - Adaptive/coping skills (e.g. ask for a hug, deep breaths, take a break, count, etc.)
  - Alternative choices (e.g. choose a different toy, ask a different friend to play, etc.)

+ Gather materials (role play items, additional reinforcement, contrived practice or generalization activity materials, etc.)
Delivering Explicit Skill Instruction

+ Start with gaining attention!
  ❖ Sing a song, gross motor imitations, review rules, feelings “check-ins”, intro video

+ Engage learners with educational technology
  ❖ PowerPoints, video models, start and stop YouTube clips, etc.

+ Use names and prompt active student responding
  ❖ Consider using learner names for strong choices!
  ❖ “thumbs up” and “thumbs down”

+ Ask yes/no, fill-in, and simple questions about…
  ❖ Emotions felt (what, who, why)
  ❖ Choices made (strong/weak)
  ❖ Consequences (e.g. did they get the cookie they wanted? OR do friends want to play with them anymore?)
Model the Skill

+ Choose relevant examples and materials
  ❖ Sing a song, gross motor imitations, review rules, feelings “check-ins”, video
+ Consider role playing both STRONG and WEAK choices
  ❖ Weak choice always comes first → “do you think I can make a stronger choice?”
+ BEFORE modeling, succinctly explain…
  ❖ Situation and steps you will take (e.g. Skillstreaming)
  ❖ What will happen → how it will make you feel → choice (strong vs. weak)
+ “Lights, Camera, Action!”
  ❖ May also use a bell, prop, or other attention grabber!
Property of
Juli
Gunner,
BCBA
When I can’t have what I want right away

I need to wait

I want you to wait with me

Wait a minute

Okay

Property of
Julie Gunne
BCBA

I need to wait
I may need to wait for my turn with a toy

Your turn!

I wait with a calm body until it is my turn
If I need to wait, I may feel sad or angry

Can I have more juice?

You need to wait.

Can I have juice?

Okay.

I can take a deep breath and wait with a calm body.
If I need to wait for my turn with a toy, can I have a turn? Not right now. I can play with something different while I wait. Okay.
If I feel angry because I have to wait for the center I want

I can take a break or choose something different while I wait.
If I need to wait, I may feel angry. I may want to:

hit
push
grab

These are weak choices
If I feel angry or sad because I need to wait, I can...

I can make strong choices!

Say how I feel

Deep breaths

Take a break

Choose Something Different

Property of
Julie Gunner, BCBA
Tina is waiting at the top of the slide. Is this a strong choice or a weak choice?
Teacher & learner role play
Learner Role Play/Rehearsal

+ Remind learners to make a strong choice
+ Succinctly reiterate modeled situation and how they should…
  ❖ Follow each step of the skill sequence
  ❖ Use a functional phrase, coping skill, or choose an alternative
+ Repeat “lights, camera, action!”
+ “CUT” early if learners…
  ❖ Demonstrate signs of anxiety
  ❖ Display challenging behavior
  ❖ Appear confused
+ Mediate role play by…
  ❖ Adapting expectations (e.g. change “I need space” to “space”, 1 deep breath, etc.)
  ❖ Reminding learners they can try one more time, or try again later with a teacher
Performance Feedback

+ TONS of social praise
  - Clapping, high-fives, behavior-specific verbal praise (e.g. “I love how you just…”)
  - Prompt learners and staff to clap for and/or praise other learners
  - As needed, provide additional reinforcement (e.g. edible, tangible)

+ Ask one or multiple peers to provide feedback on…
  - If/how they performed a step of the skill sequence
  - Strong/weak choice
  - How their choices made themselves and others feel
Contrived Practice Activities

Creating structured opportunities to practice skills with expectations explained and available reinforcement in view

- Example: Waiting
  - Set a visual timer on the SmartBoard for 1 minute and explain that they are going to practice waiting. Tell learners that you have a special set of toys (e.g. poppers, sticky hands, figurines, etc.). First, they must wait and listen to a book with a calm body on the rug until the timer beeps/runs out. Then, they can play with the toys. If learners wait appropriately the first time, reinforce with extra sticker/edible, provide social praise, and preferred items.
Generalization Activities

+ Collect data! 😊

+ Examples: Waiting
  - Pull a virtual game up on the board and reinforce learners who wait appropriately by giving them a turn (“I love how you’re waiting with a calm body and a quiet voice, come on up to the board!”)
  - Seat learners at a table with coloring sheets, “answer the phone”, and instruct the learners to “wait a minute, and I will get you some markers”. Provide an additional sticker to learners who remain in their seat with a calm body and quiet voice.
Adapting and Differentiating

+ Consider individualized or small group instruction
+ Increase rates of reinforcement and praise for attending
+ Collect data and set specific goals
+ Errorlessly prompt during role play and rehearsal
+ Use video models instead of in-vivo role play
+ Include preferred characters (clips, books, pictures, etc.)
+ Focus on highly specific situations (e.g. waiting for iPad)
+ Wait to introduce contrived practice and/or generalization until they show progress in highly structured settings
Questions?
Helpful Apps

• Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame - engaging and interactive app for problem-solving with Sesame Street characters!
• Daniel Tiger’s Grr-ific Feelings – songs, drawing, and games!
• Conversation Builder Teen - great for higher skill level learners
• Model Me Going Places 2 – community social skills in story based format
• Choiceworks App - good for simple calming routines/schedules
• Breathing Bubbles – fun calming activities
• Brilli – scheduling app great for teaching tolerating change in routine for higher skill level learners
• Kaleidoscope Magic – fun calming activities
• Social Story Creator and Library – great for social stories!
Helpful Websites

- Be Good People Core Ed. (Free)
  - Great lessons and extension activities for higher skill level learners [here](#)
  - Calming Strategies Toolbox [here](#)
  - Educator guidelines on SEL across tiers [here](#)
- Zones of Regulation Curriculum (paid content)
  - [https://zonesofregulation.com/index.html](https://zonesofregulation.com/index.html)
- Therapist Aid (subscription required)
  - Problem-solving, emotions ID, and calming strategy resources
- ABA Educational Resources Social Stories
  - [https://www.abaresources.com/social-stories/](https://www.abaresources.com/social-stories/)
- Life Skills Advocate Guide for Writing Social Stories
  - [https://lifeskillsadvocate.com/blog/how-to-write-a-social-story/](https://lifeskillsadvocate.com/blog/how-to-write-a-social-story/)
- Healthy Bodies Toolkit
  - [https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/](https://vkc.vumc.org/healthybodies/)
- PBS Kids for Parents