

Introduction

Adolescents who have not acquired appropriate social skills on their own are unlikely to develop those skills without specific instruction. Activities in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent* include explicit teaching, modeling, observation, discussion, role-playing, and other guided practice to spotlight specific social skill areas from different perspectives and with varying everyday situations. These activities can be presented to individual students or small groups of students with similar skill deficits.

Before beginning any social skill training, you should evaluate each student's current performance. Determine whether the student has a performance deficit (has the skills but doesn't use them) or an acquisition deficit (lacks the skills or the discrimination of which behaviors to use in specific situations). The activities in this series are designed for students who need direct instruction and guided practice to acquire and master specific skills. Use the Pretest/Posttest, observation, teacher reports, and/or personal interview to select appropriate lessons to present. These are the books in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent*:

- Nonverbal Language
- Making Social Inferences
- Emotions
- Conversations
- Getting Along
- Interpersonal Negotiation

Most adolescent social interaction takes place via spontaneous conversations, affording conversation partners no advance planning. Conversation navigation requires skills in both nonverbal and verbal behaviors, so students with deficits in one or both of these areas are at risk in talking with peers, family and others. *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Conversations* highlights key elements of conversations in various everyday contexts to teach adolescents to engage in conversations appropriately. These are the student objectives of this teaching:

- learn key vocabulary for discussing conversation skills
- take turns speaking and listening appropriately
- use appropriate nonverbal behaviors
- respond to conversation openers
- initiate, maintain and close conversations
- recognize, respond to and initiate topic shifts
- request clarification or information as needed during conversations
- repair communication errors during conversations
- role-play and evaluate conversations

Here are some tips to conduct conversation training with your students:

- Typical adolescents maintain eye contact during conversations 65% of the time as listeners and 45% of the time as speakers. Note that eye gaze patterns are not usually consciously controlled and therefore may be difficult to change. Also, be cautious about encouraging your students to use more eye contact than they can handle comfortably. Some of them may process what they hear more efficiently when they aren't also processing nonverbal cues. Evaluate each student's capacity for handling concurrent auditory and visual information. Guide each student toward appropriate strategies to maximize the ability to process information during conversations.
- Some students may think of a conversation as just a way to exchange important information about a topic. This limited perspective may make these students hesitate to participate in a conversation if they don't know about the topic. It may also lead them to discard small talk as pointless when, in fact, small talk is almost essential to form or enhance a relationship. For example, suppose two students saw a movie together. They both know what happened because they were there, but by talking about the movie later, they might learn a lot about how each of them felt about it and why.
- Teach your students that the main impact of any conversation has much more to do with the way the partners relate to each other than what is actually said. Does each partner feel listened to? Do they both show their interest in each other as well as the topic? Do they respect each other by taking appropriate turns speaking and listening? Throughout the lessons in this book, help your students broaden their thinking about conversation types and their impact on getting along with others.
- Before presenting a worksheet to your students, prepare them for the lesson by reviewing critical vocabulary, encouraging students to suggest their own definitions or examples. Where these definitions or examples suggest a limited grasp of a word, help your students deepen their understanding by giving your own examples. Demonstrate and paraphrase conversation concepts and help students relate them to their own experiences to enrich your lessons and increase the likelihood your students will master them.

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Conversations!*

Carolyn and Paul