

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

Understanding others' emotions and appropriately responding to them is the cornerstone of good communication. Often students with special needs have difficulty understanding their own emotions and expressing them appropriately. Since conversation and productive communication require that partners mirror one another's emotional states, it is vital that students learn the language of emotions and understand how appropriate actions contribute to better communication. *Spotlight on Social Skills, Level 2: Adolescent* focuses on emotions from understanding basic vocabulary associated with emotional expression to the nuanced emotional interpretation even the simplest social interactions demand. These are the objectives of this book:

- learn the vocabulary associated with basic emotions
- explore how degrees of emotion affect responses
- compare negative and positive emotional states
- appropriately respond to others' emotional states
- understand how actions affect others' emotions
- exhibit self-control in emotionally-charged situations
- handle bullies and understand the motivation for bullying behavior
- reduce impulsivity by considering hidden factors for a behavior
- role-play emotionally-charged conversational situations

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

- Emotions are not reflected solely in our mental states. Each emotion we feel manifests itself in physiological changes as well. Talk with your students about the changes their bodies go through as they experience emotions (heart rate increases with anxiety and fright, metabolism and energy go down during depression and loneliness, energy level increases with happiness and joy, etc.). Have your students do an Internet search on “physical changes and emotions” to discover more precise information on physiological changes associated with emotions. Use a large silhouette of a human body and label body part changes associated with different emotions on it.
- Play a “Guess the Emotion” game. Begin by writing several brief, emotionally-neutral quotes on slips of paper (“How are you today?” “That’s an interesting shirt.” “This weather is nice.”). On another set of slips of paper write an emotion on each slip (the list on page 14 is a good resource). Put the two sets of slips in different containers. Then have a student pick a quote and an emotion slip. Have the student speak the quote in the emotional tone he picked. Encourage the student to use tone of voice, body language and other nonverbal cues to express the emotion. For example, if he picked “How are you today?” and “angry,” he should use an angry voice to ask the question, narrow his eyes and frown angrily. See if the other students can guess what emotion he is trying to express.
- We experience different kinds of emotions in all settings. Here’s a good activity to illustrate that concept. Use the emotion slips of paper that you made in the game above. Have someone name a place, such as the library, the kitchen, a gas station, etc. (Note: avoid the bedroom and the bathroom). Then have another student randomly choose an emotion slip and tell something that might happen in the location that would evoke the emotion using this carrier phrase, “I felt _____ in the _____ because.” For example, if the place was the *cafeteria* and the emotion was *thrilled*, the student might say, “I felt thrilled in the cafeteria because today was pizza day and I love pizza!” Have the next student draw another emotion slip and use the same location. That student might say “I felt embarrassed in the cafeteria because I spilled soup on my lap in front of everyone.” Use the same location until everyone in the group has associated an emotion and a cause with it.
- Exhibiting self-control is difficult for many adolescents. Due to the high degree of developmental brain activity they are experiencing, their reactions to emotional situations are often amplified. Often, getting adolescents to simply delay their responses to situations can solve and prevent many problems. Have your students brainstorm strategies to avoid reacting immediately to emotional situations (taking a deep breath, closing your eyes and visualizing something peaceful, etc.). Encourage each student to choose a strategy and commit to using it. Periodically review these strategies and ask students to share situations in which they’ve successfully (or unsuccessfully) used these calming strategies.

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

Carolyn and Paul