

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

The skill of making social inferences is not easily approached in isolation. Making accurate inferences about social situations and expectations depends upon many factors, including interpreting information about emotions, locations, social status, and communication intentions. Making an incorrect social inference and responding inappropriately in a social situation can have disastrous communication consequences. Students with special needs often have difficulty deciding what is appropriate to say and when it is appropriate to say it. *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Making Social Inferences* focuses on presenting a wide variety of contexts for practicing making accurate inferences and responding appropriately. These are the outcomes of this book:

- understand the difference between making a guess and making an inference
- use dialog and questioning to make inferences about occupation, location and action
- make inferences about social situations from body language and photographs
- explore how social expectations differ in public and private settings
- consider social status when making communication choices
- organize and use basic information to make accurate inferences
- make appropriate social comments
- understand and interpret indirect requests
- judge intentions and understand consequences

Here are some tips to conduct social inference training with your students:

- You can practice a basic level of making inferences by having your students make guesses based on pantomime and nonverbal information. Write easily-mimed everyday activities on slips of paper (hitting a baseball, working on a computer, mixing batter, eating a sandwich, etc.) and have your students use the activities to play charades. After each activity is guessed, challenge students to extend the activity by asking contextual questions about it: "Where would you do this activity?" "Where wouldn't you do this activity?" "What person would do this activity?" This practice will help your students see how actions, locations and the people who do them are all elements that combine to create a social situation. Understanding the individual activities, who does them and why is a good first step toward making more complicated social inferences.
- Explore social situations from a clinical perspective. Use a graphic organizer to break down individual elements of typical social situations. If you want to talk about appropriate ways to interact and communicate during lunchtime, create a diagram that illustrates the place, people, and rules that make up the situation. Encourage students to use a graphic format to gather information in situations and use their models to make inferences or mentally rehearse how they will interact in those situations.
- Prepare your students in advance to approach novel social situations. If a student's class is taking a field trip, work together to list behavioral expectations and review them several times before the event. During each review, ask "What if" questions about the expectations. For example, if an expectation is to talk quietly on the bus ride, ask "What if someone yells a question at you from across the bus?" Brainstorm appropriate ways to respond to situations that might disrupt the behavioral expectations.
- Have your students view brief snippets of movies or TV shows without sound. Ask them to make inferences about the places, people and relationships in the clips. Encourage them to provide reasons for their inferences by asking questions such as "How do you know those people are angry at one another?" or "What makes you think these people are at a party?" Then have your students imagine themselves in a situation after they've viewed it (you might "freeze frame" a segment as a visual cue). Have students talk about how they would interact with the characters on the screen and ask them to role-play appropriate dialog for the scene. Complete the activity by playing the clip with sound and talk about how the dialog, sound effects and background music work together to create an overall message.

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

Carolyn and Paul