

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 in the context of 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

Since peer relationships are the most important to the majority of adolescents, this training resource contains content mostly targeted to adolescent concerns and peer relationships. Each activity sheet affords a chance to highlight a specific skill and to facilitate discussing that skill with your students. The more you personalize the activities with examples from the students' particular situations, the more effective your training will be.

Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Nonverbal Language unlocks the code of nonverbal behaviors that help us infer how someone feels and predict what the person might do next. As you present the activities, teach your students to become keen observers of others, especially their peers. How do they look when they greet each other? How do they act? What is interesting to them? How do they have conversations? What do they show with their faces? How do they move their eyes and why? What do they do with their hands and their bodies during a conversation? You might need to give your students specific things to look for at a time until they become effective observers. Keep talking with them about what they notice, guiding them to understand why their peers act the way they do.

Here are some ways to enrich your social skills training for nonverbal language:

- Frequently assess individual students and modify your training accordingly. Gather baseline data on specific behaviors, such as the number of times a student initiates a conversation or uses good nonverbal language to express a thought.
- Provide specific feedback and guidance as often as possible when doing the activities in this training series. Emphasize the positive and boost students' self-esteem by showing them they can control many of their social interactions with others.

- Have mirrors available for students to imitate nonverbal behaviors themselves. The more they try these behaviors, the more likely they will use them spontaneously in other contexts.
- Play muted snippets of movies or TV dramas. Frequently stop the action to ask what is going on and what nonverbal cues helped to make that clear. Then replay the same snippet with the sound on. Ask your students if the dialog has changed their impressions of what is going on.
- Videotape your students doing and discussing some of the activities, especially the role-playing tasks. Talk individually with your students about their performance, spotlighting what each student did well vs. what was inept or inappropriate. Have your students repeatedly watch taped segments in which they performed well to provide personal social scripts students can then apply in similar situations.
- Some nonverbal factors are not directly addressed within this book, yet these factors can convey important information. Look for teachable moments to incorporate modeling and discussion of these factors:
 - Voice volume, tone, pitch, and quality
 - Speaking rate and style
 - Laughter
 - Repairing errors as a speaker
 - Personal appearance (grooming and dress)
- Present pictures from various sources and ask your students to detect nonverbal cues. Encourage your students to verbalize how such cues help us to make inferences about what someone is thinking or might do.
- Have your students play Pantomime, acting out statements or emotions. As your students become more skilled, encourage them to write their own items for peers to pantomime in a game context.
- Use the cards and activities in the *Nonverbal Language Kit* (LinguiSystems, 2003) to help your students identify and use key nonverbal behaviors.
- Use caution in encouraging students to increase or change their eye contact habits. Eye movements are largely unconscious and existing patterns may be resistant to change. Also, some students cannot process visual and auditory information at the same time with efficiency. Such students may need to avoid eye contact in order to get the meaning of what a speaker says, even if that means these students will miss the nonverbal cues from the speaker.

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

Carolyn and Paul