Introduction

Age-appropriate social skills are essential for students to get along well with their peers and to foster strong self-esteem. Social skills are rarely taught directly as a school subject, and most students gradually master social skills without formal instruction. Those who fail to infer expectations and "rules" from personal interactions with others are at risk for being criticized by their peers or, worse, ignored. Students on the autism spectrum are particularly at risk for poor social skills due to the nature of the disorder; many students with language and/or learning disabilities are also at risk.

The activities in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary* highlight specific aspects of social skills and include strategies of direct instruction, modeling, observation, discussion, role-playing, and other guided practice in contexts of everyday interaction. These activities can be presented to individual students or small groups of students. Small groups are preferred because they expose students to their peers' perspectives and offer a safe setting for practicing social skills.

For an overview of a student's social skills functioning, administer the *Social Language Development Test, Elementary* (Bowers, Huisingh, & LoGiudice, 2008). Use the Pretest/Posttest (page 6) to check the student's awareness and functioning in the appropriate area addressed by one of the six books in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary:*

- Nonverbal Language
- Emotions
- Making Friends
- Making Social Inferences
- Conversations
- Predicting Consequences

These are the student objectives for the activities in this book:

- understand what an inference is
- understand how to make an inference
- make logical inferences about pictured/described, everyday contexts
- make inferences to predict what will happen next
- infer typical social responses to common situations (manners)
- infer situation settings from context clues
- infer people's relationships and emotions from pictured situations
- infer causes and effects in social situations
- understand social hints that are polite commands (indirect requests)
- justify inferences based on contextual clues

The activities in this book focus on making logical inferences about social relationships and situations. The activity sheets offer many opportunities to explain and discuss the clues that lead to logical inferences, making social expectations and behaviors explicit for those who do not abstract the dynamics of social relationships without direct explanations and examples.

In addition to the Pretest/Posttest, use the Making Inferences Checklist (page 38) to document baseline skills as well as improved performance during the instruction period. You can also gather helpful information by asking students' teachers and parents to complete this checklist.

Here are some other tips to help you improve students' skills in making inferences:

- Teach your students to look for "free clues" to understand what is going on in a situation. "Free clues" are things you can observe directly without any additional information, such as what a person's posture or facial expression tells you. Repeatedly noting and talking about such clues helps students realize the wealth of information available to grasp what is happening, how someone feels and why, and what someone is likely to do next.*

- When a student tells you what happened in a social situation, help him to state the situation clearly and ask him questions that will spotlight salient clues that led to the student's inferences, such as "How do you know?" or "What did you see that told you how the person felt?"

- Teach your students to ask themselves pertinent questions to figure out what's going on or how someone feels in a situation, such as these:

  "Does the person look happy/worried/scared?"

  "What is the person thinking right now? Why?"

  "What will the person do next? Why?"

  "What has happened like this before? How is this situation the same/different?"

  "If there's a problem, what would solve the problem?"

- When a student has made an inference about a current social situation, revisit that situation later to help the student confirm or adjust her inferences about what was going on and why.

- Some students have trouble detecting and interpreting the nonverbal clues that display emotions and intentions. Use The Nonverbal Language Kit by LoGiudice and Warner (LinguiSystems, 2003) for additional training in nonverbal language.

- For basic practice in making inferences beyond just social situations, use No-Glamour Inferences by Kanefsky (LinguiSystems, 2008).

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

Carolyn and Paul

*We are indebted to Lonnie Legler, CCC/SLP, an autism specialist in the school district of Santa Clarita, CA, for her suggestion of teaching students to search actively for free information in order to form inferences in social situations.