

human services




## A Pilot Social Skills Program

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## Why Social Skills Training?

Most social skills depend on the ability to take on another person's perspective. This does not come naturally to those with ASD and social skills need to be explicitly taught (Baker, 2005)



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## Why...?

- o 'Theory of Mind'-Individuals with ASD have difficulty recognizing other people's feelings, thoughts, beliefs and intentions and responding appropriately (MacAfee, 2002)
- o More likely to suffer from anxiety, mood disorders and depression due to their difficulties with social integration (Attwood, 2000)


## What Does the Research Tell us?

- o Howlin and Yates (1999) conducted a year long social skills group with 10 adults focussing on understanding and developing social skills.
  - Participants significantly improved in their conversation skills
- o Williams (1989) reported on a 4 year project developing social skills with a group of children with ASD through role-play, modelling and games.
  - Improvements in the group's social interactions

## What is Social Skills Training?

- o Direct instruction
  - teaching specific social skills
- o Many models focus on the following
  - Identification and rationale of skill in need of developing
  - Modeling of these skills
  - Role play the skill
  - Provide feedback about performing
    - Could there be other ways to show the skill?
  - Transfer training to learn how and when to use the skill in vivo
  - (MacKay et al. 2007)

## The Pilot Program



- o This training program incorporated key aspects from previously developed social skills programs using cognitive-behavioural framework (Baker, 2005; McAfee, 2002)
- o The program was modified to suit the needs/goals of the participants and had an emphasis on visual aids and prompts.
- o 8 sessions, 90 minutes with 15 minute break
- o Aim of group was to develop cohesion and bonding (through shared experiences and activities)

### Participant Selection and Screening

- o Screening occurred prior to the pilot program beginning
- o A significant stakeholder (key worker from day program) or primary carer completed the following pre and post pilot program:
  - o Quality of Life Evaluation Scale
  - o Social Skills Checklist (Goldstein, 1987)
- o Qualitative information about specific social skill deficits
- o Many of the clients chosen to participate did not have an identifiable significant person or friend

### Participants



- o Adolescent males
- 2 participants – Autistic Disorder
- 1 participant – Asperger's Syndrome
- 1 participant – Dysthymic disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder

\*\* facilitators of the pilot program took into consideration each participants level of cognitive functioning when designing sessions.

### Case study

- o Male
- o Late adolescents
- o ASD
- o Attends day program
- o Verbal
- o History of family violence
- o Social skill deficits – emotional recognition and regulation, first impressions, initiating and maintaining conversation, problem-solving skills

### Overview of sessions

- o Team building exercises
- o Direct instruction
- o Concrete language and examples utilised
- o Home mission
- o Continued involvement of carer or stakeholder

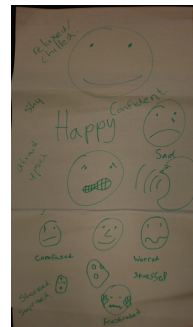
### Session 1

- o Introductions
- o Group rules
- o Agenda for each session

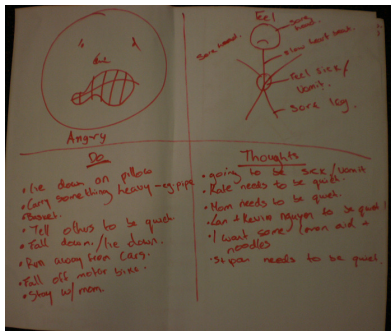


### Emotion Recognition

- o Labelling and identifying emotions
- o Modelling and role play these (non verbal facial expressions and body language)
- o Introduced connection between our thinking, feeling and behaviour



### Case Example



### Session 2

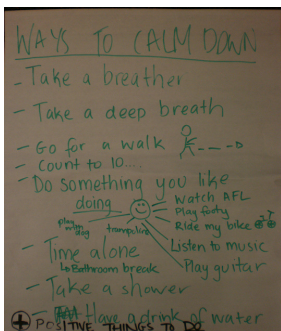
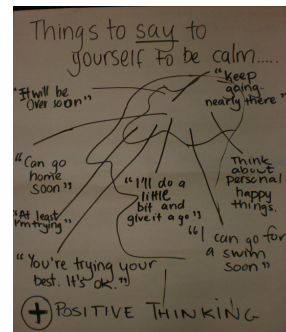
#### Emotion Regulation

- Managing emotions using
  - positive thinking – thoughts to stay calm
  - relaxation exercises – release/tension exercises, deep breathing
  - guided visualisation
  - lifestyle choices



### Case Example

- Deep breathing
- Identified physiological triggers



### Session 3 and 4

#### Conversation skills

- Being a good listener
- Initiating and maintaining conversations
- First impressions
- Appropriate conversation topics



### Case Example

- o Good questions
- o Social story
- o Circle of friends – safe and unsafe topics of conversation

### Good Questions

I can use these good questions when talking to people for the first time:

- ✓ What?
  - What footy team do you support?
  - What kinds of food do you like?
- ✓ Where?
  - Where do you live?
  - Where do you like to eat out?
- ✓ Who?
  - Who is your favourite football player?

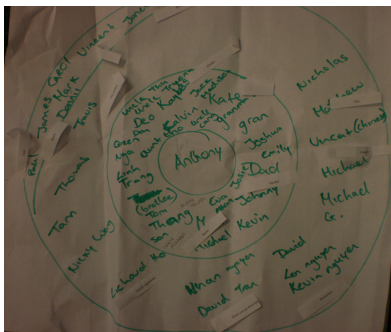
### Good Questions

- ✓ Do?
  - Do you have any brothers or sisters?
  - Do you like to play guitar here?
  - Do you like this weather?
- ✓ When?
  - When is your birthday?
  - When was the last time you were happy?



When I these questions it will make people I meet happy and they will want to talk with me.

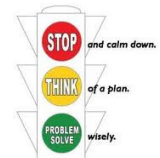
### Case Example



### Session 5

#### Problem solving

- o What is respect? How do we show we respect others?
- o Working in a group – negotiating and compromise
- o Communication styles – assertive, aggressive and passive
- o Stop, think, do problem solving framework



### Case Example

**Evaluating situations that have caused embarrassment**

How do you respond when?

1. You are given a compliment on your appearance?  
Thank you!
2. You are told that your work is not good enough?  
I am trying my best
3. Your mum says that she does not like you to eat?  
That's fine, I like my food!
4. You are annoyed by someone making noise on the bus?  
Paul should be quiet please
5. You feel angry with a friend for shouting at you?  
Stop shouting, stop shouting, a hearing will be held!

**Stop and Think. The problem is....**

What do I need to do to solve this problem?

**Three choices**

**The best choice**

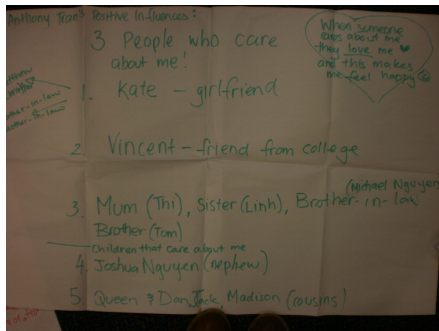
### Session 6

#### Bullying and Peer Pressure

- o Defining:
  - o a friend and friendliness
  - o a bully
  - o teasing
  - o joking
  - o peer pressure
- o What to do if you experience teasing, peer pressure, bullying
- o Positive relationships



### Case Example



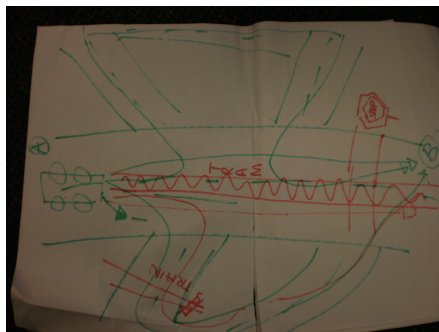
### Session 7

#### Resilience and self esteem

- o What is resilience
- o How we cope with stressors
- o Its OK to make mistakes
- o Positivity and Compliments
- o 3 wishes



### Case Example

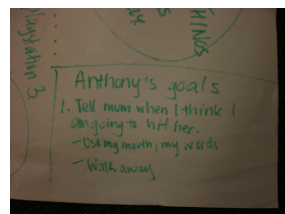
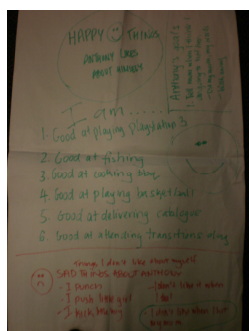


### Session 8

- o Putting-it-all together
- o Review of previous sessions
- o Personal Plan
- o Evaluations
- o Certificate Ceremony
- o Dinner



### Case Example



### Post Social Skills

- o Post-intervention evaluation
- o Comparison between pre and post social skills intervention



## Pre and Post Test Results

### Quality of Life Questionnaire

An Increase in the following was observed post test;

- o Ability to make decisions
- o Attempt new tasks and learn new skills
- o Relationship with family, peers, community and friends
- o Participation in activities of choice
- o Ability to express personal preference
- o Engage in leisure activities with peers
- o Satisfaction with current living situation
- o Self confidence, independence and happiness
- o Emotional stability, health and well-being
- o Compassion and respect towards staff

**"Overall quality of life was better as result of social skills group"**

## Pre and Post Test Results

### Social skills checklist

An Improvement in the following skills was observed on post test;

- o Asking a question and asking for help
- o Saying thank you and apologising
- o Introducing self and others
- o Giving instructions-explain how to do a task
- o Dealing with and expressing emotions Self reward
- o Helping and sharing with others
- o Teasing and making complaint
- o Stands up for a friend
- o Listening to others
- o Occupies self to relieve boredom

## Reflections...

Positive aspects...

- o Consistency –facilitators, format, venue
- o 2 participants who have attended all sessions
- o Regular feedback from carer about interventions being applied
- o Flexible approach to sessions – constant assessment of client's skills

Negative aspects...

- o Lack of generalisation of skills
- o Some stakeholders/carers have not been invested in assisting home missions
- o Dynamics of the group (personality, idiosyncrasies)
- o Systemic and familial issues



## Where to from here?

- o More involvement for stakeholders and carers
  - o Specific program for them to facilitate teaching of skills in vivo
- E.g. key worker indicating that teaching these skills goes beyond their training

The importance of social skills;

- o Take for granted the level of complexity involved in being 'competent'

Generalisation can be difficult to achieve

- o Research has shown students only maintain the skills that were specifically targeted (White, Koenig, & Scahill, 2007).



If you would like more information or references contact  
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## Questions

