Promoting Positive Social Interactions Between Students with ASD and Their Peers
Objectives

- Participants will:
  - Review assessment techniques for social interaction
  - Learn evidence-based practices to support social interactions utilizing peers in natural settings across the grade span
  - Plan for social interaction opportunities utilizing peer supports in your school.
Disabilities and Friendships

Studies have concluded:

- Individuals with ASD experience more loneliness than nondisabled peers. (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000)
- Students with ASD would like more satisfying social peer interactions, but do not know how to do so. (Bauminger, Shulman, & Agam, 2003)
Middle school students surveyed (Han & Chadsey, 2004) reported they would like to be friends with students with disabilities, but they do not have friends with significant disabilities because:

- They do not see them
- When they do see them, there is a paraeducator or other adult with them
Assessment

- Objective data on social strengths and social skills deficits
  - Compare with social skills of age-appropriate peers
- Direct observations
  - Observe skills across contexts
  - People, places, and tasks

Heflin & Alaimo (2007)
Assessment

Assessment Observations:

- **Natural environments**: Do not alter activities or routines nor cause student to interact with others.

- **Behavioral Sampling**: Evaluators set up situations that make the student want to interact.

- **Elicited Responses**: Assess the student’s ability to respond to a variety of tasks

Heflin & Alaimo (2007)
# Autism Social Skills Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Area</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invites Peers to Join Him/Her in Activities</td>
<td>N S O V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joined Activities With Peers</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes Turns During Games and Activities</td>
<td>N S O V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains Personal Hygiene</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacts With Peers During Unstructured Activities</td>
<td>N S O V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacts With Peers During Structured Activities</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks Questions to Request Information About a Person</td>
<td>N S O V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks Questions to Request Information About a Topic</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in One-On-One Social Interactions With Peers</td>
<td>N S O V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bellini (2006)
What are we looking for?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social interaction</strong></td>
<td>One student acknowledging another using verbal or nonverbal communicative behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation initiations</strong></td>
<td>New comments preceded by at least 5 seconds without an interaction or reflecting a change in conversation topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction partners</strong></td>
<td>People with whom the student is interaction, such as peers, teachers, paraeducators, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peers contacted</strong></td>
<td>Number of different peers involved in social contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer proximity</strong></td>
<td>Sitting directly next to or within 3 feet of a classmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social contacts</strong></td>
<td>Interactions with peers without disabilities within the context of an activity lasting x minutes or longer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)
What do social interactions look like?

- Will change based on setting
  - In English class vs. in the cafeteria
- Will change based on activity
  - In class: Lecture, group work, independent work
- What are students talking about?
  - What’s going on in class? Upcoming school events? Other students? Pop culture?
- Make “normative comparisons” to gauge appropriateness of student interactions and goals.

Adapted from Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)
Identify target skills

- Address IEP goals through embedded supports in natural environments
  - Use an IEP matrix to determine where goals could be addressed
- Other skills that would be helpful for students to be successful in that setting
  - Use ecological inventory to determine what skills the student needs in that environment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Home room</th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Clubs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer questions using AAC device posed by peers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for needed assistance from peers and adults</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctly answers content related questions posed by peers and adults</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds appropriately to social greetings from peers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)
What skills can be targeted during lunch?

- **Self-help**
  - Packing/unpacking lunch
  - Exchange of money or number
  - Traveling to/from cafeteria

- **Communication**
  - Making choices/rejecting/requesting/commenting
  - Expressing lunch number/name/class

- **Social interaction**
  - Conversations with peers
  - Social “rules” and routine of cafeteria
    - How to get tray, food, washing hands; trading food, asking for condiments, where to sit
### Ecological Inventory

**Environment:** 4<sup>th</sup> Grade General Education  
**Sub environment:** cafeteria

| Performance of peer/person without disabilities | Performance of student with disabilities.  
(+) Performed Correct  
(-) Performed Incorrect | Instructional Decision  
Teach (T)  
Adapt (A)  
Support (S) | Skill Instruction, Adaptation, or Support Needed |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students walk in line to cafeteria with class</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scripts with questions reviewed prior to lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks question about what is in lunch box</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Peer prompt (verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to question</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Peer prompt (verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughs with peer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Peer prompt (verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks to lunch line</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers question re: choice of food</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds “thank you”</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Peer prompt (verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks to table</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sits by classmate</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on preference of food</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Topic cards on table. Peer mediated interaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Social Interaction Skills

- **Early childhood skills:**
  - Organize play (make suggestions for play activity)
  - Sharing
  - Provide assistance
  - Provide appropriate affection and praise

- **Older students:**
  - Initiate and respond to interaction
  - Keep an interaction ongoing
  - Giving/accepting compliments
  - Taking turns and sharing
Social skill deficits for students have been identified as one of the following:

**Skill acquisition deficit: absence of a particular skill or behavior**

Requires us to systematically teach the skills!

**Performance deficit: skill or behavior is present, but not demonstrated or performed**

Requires us to enhance performance of existing skills and removing barriers that impede that performance!
Link to effective teaching strategies

- **Skill deficit**
  - Directly teach social skills
  - Teach peers techniques to increase duration and frequency of peer interactions

- **Performance deficits**
  - Overcome barriers that inhibit use of these skills in peer social situations
    - Use reinforcement
    - Environmental arrangement
    - Incorporate special interest into activities

Koegel, Vernon, Koegel, Koegel, & Paullin, (2012)
What strategy do you currently use to assess social interaction skills of students with ASD?

Which one discussed here could you try?
Where and who?

- Social interventions are most effective when implemented in natural and inclusive settings.
- The most effective outcomes occur when both student with ASD and peers are targeted together.
Peer support strategies

- Peer mediated interventions
  - General
  - Stay Play Talk
  - Peer Networks
Steps to Peer Mediated Intervention

1. Select peers
2. Train peers
3. Support peers
4. Plan for implementation
5. Implementation
6. Generalization

Data collection throughout!

Adapted from Neitzel (2008)
Selecting Peers

- Good social skills
- Well-liked by peers
- Willing to participate

- Clubs
- Volunteers
- Teacher nomination

Neitzel (2008)
Training peers

- Discuss similarities and differences between target student and trained peers.
- Discuss target student’s form(s) of communication
- Likes and dislikes
- “Look, wait, and listen”
- Role play
  - Teacher provides feedback and reinforcement

Neitzel (2008)
Planning for Implementation: Activities

- Provide opportunities
  - Small group work
  - Classroom seating
  - Centers
  - Special areas/enrichment
  - Games (card games and board games)

What current classroom activities provide opportunities for social interaction?

Neitzel (2008)
Planning for implementation: Materials

Early childhood – Focus on materials/activities that involve sharing and exchanging materials

- Sand table
- Doll house and people
- Car garage
- Farm animals and blocks
- Play doh
- Puppet show

Neitzel (2008)
Planning for implementation: Materials

School age

- Topic cards
  - Developed by peers
  - Age-appropriate
  - May focus on interests
- Funny photos or pictures
- Magazines
- Restaurant guides
- Frisbee

Neitzel (2008)
Stay, Play, Talk (English, Goldstein, & Shafer, 1997)

- Stay – Stay in same area
- Play – Join in activity, offer toys
- Talk – Talk about what they are playing with or pretending. Even if buddy does not talk back, you can talk to him.
• Reinforcement
  - Is provided to students when they are observed staying with, playing with, & talking with a peer buddy.

• This strategy creates multiple opportunities to increase social skills & build friendships.

English, Goldstein, & Shafer (1997)
Stay Play Talk: Steps

- Initial assessment of social interactions in the classroom
- Pretraining/sensitization lesson
- Train 3 buddy steps (stay, play, talk)
- Pair trained peer with student with ASD for at least 3 activities across the day
- Provide reminders and positive reinforcement
- Evaluate the effectiveness

English, Goldstein, & Shafer (1997)
Supporting Peers

Early Childhood

• Frequent monitoring
• If no interaction for 30 sec, provide prompt
  o Specific instructions ("Try talking about the zebra").
  o Subtle instructions ("It’s your turn")
  o Picture cues
  o Gestures
• Reinforcement for those who do Stay-Play-Talk
• Peer networks (Carter & Hughes, 2007)

• Weekly problem solving meetings
  o Encourage peer involvement and input
  o Adults conducts session
  o Assess previous weeks’ interactions
  o Modify schedule as needed
  o Identify target skills
  o Discuss strategies
  o Role play or model strategies as needed
  o Informally assess peer satisfaction
  o Reinforce peer participation
Supporting Peers

School age

• Frequent monitoring

• Regular feedback
  - End of activity/class period
  - Weekly problem solving meetings

• Instruction on prompting
  - Verbal
  - Written
  - Picture cues
Supporting Peer Interactions

- Model ways for students to interact
- Highlight similarities among students
- Redirect questions and conversations to other students
- Identify and reinforce student strengths
- Assign responsibilities that encourage interaction
- Increase physical proximity

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)
Extending interactions across the day:

- Natural settings
- 2-3 routines/day
- Choice of activities
- Use 5-8 games rotated every 3-4 months
- Consistently keep 4-6 trained peers
- Last at least 10 min

Neitzel (2008)
How do I know if it’s working?

- Data collection throughout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Looking at peer</th>
<th>Starting conversation</th>
<th>Taking turns</th>
<th>Exchanging materials</th>
<th>Requesting items</th>
<th>Initiating interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Keep in mind...

- PMI alone is not sufficient to sustain inclusive placement.
  - Consider careful planning, collaboration, and effective instruction
- PMI does not eliminate the need for adult support.
- PMI is not automatic.
  - Takes more than seating students next to each other.
  - Requires careful planning as well as ongoing adult support and monitoring.

Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)
Remember the steps...

- Select peers
- Train peers
- Support peers
- Plan for implementation
- Implementation
- Generalization
- Data collection throughout!
Next Steps

- If you do not have a PMI program in place:
  - What will be your first step to building a program?
- If you currently have a PMI program in place:
  - What steps are currently implemented?
  - What steps need to be implemented?
  - What information/resources do you need to take your program to the next level?
Any great ideas?

Which of these strategies are you currently using?

How could these strategies be used to support peer interactions in general access settings?
Resources

- LASARD Social Interaction Module: http://www.laqitm.org/
- National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders- Evidence based practice briefs can be found at: http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/


