

# **FOSTERING PLAY AND FRIENDSHIP SKILLS IN YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS**

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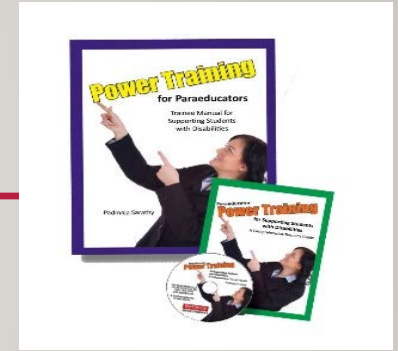
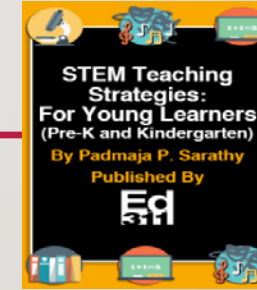
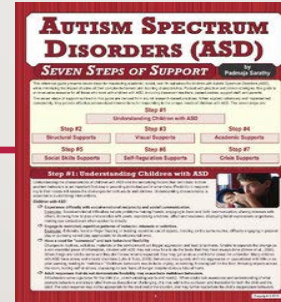
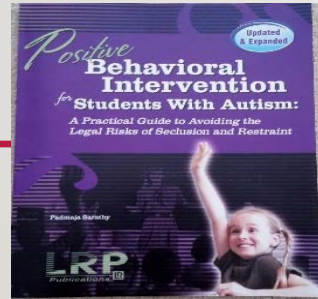


# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Promote play, social-interaction and friendship skills in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in inclusive settings:
  - Learn how to set up the environment (social and physical) to increase peer social interactions.
  - Learn how to use classroom routines and activities as opportunities to facilitate friendship and social skills.
  - Using video modeling, peer-mentoring, prompting, optimal paraeducator support and scripted stories to teach targeted social skills.

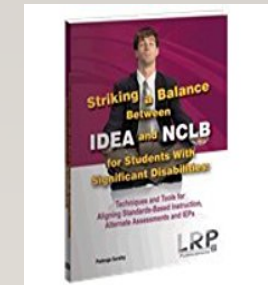
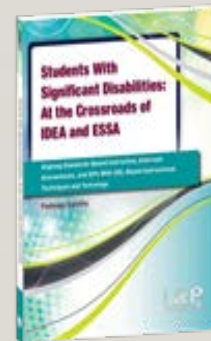


# Sarathy's Publications: Books and Quick Reference Guides



## Focus Areas

- Autism: Behavior Interventions, Support Strategies, Music CD - Transitions
- Early Childhood: Transition, Parent Guide and STEM Teaching Strategies
- Executive Function
- Paraeducator Training Guide and DVD
- Severe and Multiple Disabilities
- Significant Disabilities and ESSA



Out of print

# CHILD CHARACTERISTICS - IMPACT

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Children with autism face difficulties in learning how to play and socialize with peers:

- Social-emotional reciprocity
  - Joint attention
  - Spontaneous imitation
- Seeking out peers spontaneously to share joy and interest
- Developing peer relationships - conveying and interpreting social-communication cues.
- Pursuing varied, imaginative play appropriate for developmental level.

# Social-Emotional and Communication Challenges



Making eye-to-eye gaze



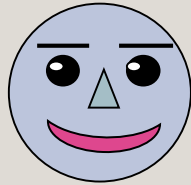
Lack of social and emotional reciprocity

**Reading Body Language**

Lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people



**Following Rules of Conversation**



**Reading Facial Expression**



**Grasping Hidden Meaning of Words**

**Understanding Sarcasm**

# BARRIERS TO INTERACTION IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

Being in the same physical space as their peers is not often sufficient to promote social interaction for children with severe disabilities.

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- **Environmental Barriers**

- Activities not always promoting but limiting social interactions
- Centers promoting individual play versus group play
- Toys and materials for individual use

- **Peer-Related Barriers**

- Peers need coaching

- **Adult Support-related Barriers**

- Proximity Issues
- Prompting Issues



# TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS

- Results of a study comparing the perceptions of teachers and parents on the importance of friendship and other learning outcomes in children with ASD: (Petrina et al., 2017)
- Friendship was ranked as less important than social skills and emotional development by both teachers and parents.
- Special ed. teachers ranked core deficit areas of ASD (social skills, friendship, and emotional development) as higher in priority where as mainstream teachers ranked intellectual and academic skills as higher priorities.
- Significant disparity between teacher and parent perceptions in the areas of friendship, emotional development and social skills.
- Indicates need for alignment of school and parent priorities. (Petrina et al., 2017)

# BENEFITS OF PLAY AND INTERACTION WITH PEERS

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- Play helps children to acquire many interrelated skills for social competence and forming meaningful friendships:
  - Learn to communicate effectively
  - Solve problems
  - Negotiate and compromise
  - Understand the feelings and perspectives of others
  - Work out emotional conflicts



# SOCIAL COMPETENCE ATTAINABLE

- Based on research, with planned and systematic opportunities:
  - Children on the autism spectrum disorders can be taught the appropriate skills necessary to initiate positive interactions and build friendships.
  - Making environmental arrangements to increase social interaction.
  - Willing and accepting peers to practice the skills with will facilitate the process.
  - Carefully choreographing paraeducator (and adult) role in facilitating friendships and social and group interaction skills
  - Embedding lots of social interactions throughout the day to practice the targeted skills.
- Improved social competence is likely to yield many other benefits.

# PROMOTE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: ENVIRONMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS

- Set up the environment to increase social interaction skills.
- Provide group social skills coaching:
  - Teach all children social interaction skills in the context of activities or play themes that attract children's attention: During Center time (Block Play, Housekeeping/Dramatic Play, Art, etc.) Snack time, Recess time.
- Teach children with autism the skills needed to play and interact with the other children.
- Involve peers (without disabilities) in peer-mediated interventions
  - Teach socially competent peers the skills needed to initiate interactions with those with limited social skills (Odom and colleagues 1999).
  - Give time and attention to children when they are playing together.
  - Position children to encourage interaction.

# ENVIRONMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS<sub>2</sub>

- Preplan for environmental changes and adaptations to maximize and promote positive peer interactions.
- Look at your:
  - Classroom activities that are open and available.
  - Classroom materials that are available.
  - Group composition.
- Limit the number of centers available.
  - Increase the number of children at each center to improve the likelihood of positive social interactions.
- Make sure children with good social skills are grouped with children less skilled socially.

(Bovey & Strain, <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb6.pdf>)

# ENVIRONMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS<sub>3</sub>

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- Keep toys and materials novel and interesting.
  - Include toys and materials of interest to target children.
- Use toys and materials with high social value – promote cooperation and sharing.
  - Replace toys and materials made for individual use with toys and materials made for cooperative use to help increase opportunities for positive social interactions.

(Bovey & Strain, www. <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb6.pdf>)

Examples: Replace Sit and Spin, small puzzles, painting easels with rocking boat, giant floor puzzles, mural painting requiring cooperative use, a group writing/ drawing center, group water/sand play with children to face each other, etc.



# KEY SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS

**What are key skills useful for interacting with peers and building social relationships?**

- Skills for play entry
- Skills for maintaining play and forming friendships
- Skills for sharing and cooperating

(Bovey & Strain, [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/what\\_works.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/what_works.html))

# PROMOTING SOCIAL INTERACTION

- Use role-play and rehearsal to teach how to:

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  - Get a friend's attention
  - Share objects
  - Ask peers to share objects
  - Provide a play idea to a peer
  - Say something nice to a friend (Bovey & Strain [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/what\\_works.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/what_works.html))
- The goal of social skills training is to get them to initiate more appropriately (not so much to get them to initiate more frequently).

# USING CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DAILY ROUTINES

- **Plan or Design Activities that Support Peer Interactions.**
  - Examine daily routines and activities to identify jobs or tasks that adults are doing that children could do:
    - Assist with snack
    - Gather book bags with a peer
    - Distribute art materials.
  - Add steps to activities that would support peer interactions:
    - Pair students during a music or music-movement activity
    - Play games that require partnering with each other follow the leader through an obstacle course
    - Have to invite a friend to play during center time



# PEER-MEDIATED INTERVENTIONS

- Teach socially competent children to use incidental teaching strategies with peers (with social skills difficulties) - Odom and colleagues, 1999.
- Let these children keep track of interactions (e.g., chart with checks or stickers).
- Train several peers to use incidental teaching strategies.
- Assign children buddies during centers and teach them to stay and play with and talk to their buddy.
  - Change buddy assignments frequently. (Laushey and Heflin, 2000)
- Recruit and train peers to assist students using (AAC) communication devices.



# COACHING FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

- Use role play and rehearsal during circle time and story time to teach the skills:
  - Explain the skill
  - Demonstrate the correct way to use it
  - Demonstrate an incorrect way and let the children figure out the missing step
  - Have children practice a skill with an adult
  - Let a child practice with another child
  - Provide positive feedback and attention on use of the skills

# PERSONALIZED ADAPTATIONS AND ASSISTANCE

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- Provide additional assistance to children as needed to ensure that peer social interactions are successful. For example:
  - Modeling
  - Specific visual/verbal cues (e.g., Remember to tap him on the shoulder)
  - Physical assistance
- Provide specific positive feedback and attention to children who are playing together and engaging in positive social interactions.
- Offer personalized adaptations and support to individual students based on their strengths, preferences and needs.
- Use friendship facilitating strategies and not behavior management strategies

# **SOCIAL INTERACTION: PEER-MENTORING**

- The results of a research study implementing peer support intervention with collaborative planning showed that it led to substantive increase in interactions:

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  - Increased Student Communication for All Students
  - Increased Peer Interactions
  - Viewed Positively by Staff and Students (Biggs, 2018. CEC Presentation)
- Make peer support arrangements within the inclusive setting.
- Arrange for peer network arrangements across non-academic settings.
- One or more peers without disabilities providing ongoing academic and social support to student with disabilities. (Biggs, 2018. CEC Presentation)

# SOCIAL NARRATIVES

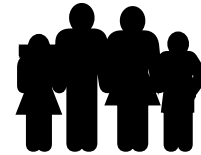
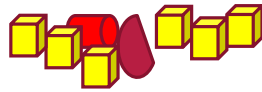
- Social narratives (similar to Social Stories™) use visually represented stories to describe social situations and socially appropriate responses or behaviors.
- An intervention strategy to help children with ASD to improve social skills
  - Depict social situations, highlight the relevant physical and social cues.
  - Provide examples of appropriate ways for the student to respond.
  - They are Individualized, taught through direct instruction. (Wragge, 2011).
- **An evidence-based strategy** from studies targeting children ranging in age from early childhood to middle school, (NPDC on ASD, 2010)
- **Autism Internet Modules (<http://autisminternetmodules.org>) provides guidelines with examples of how to construct Social Narratives.**

**Social Narrative - Sample Pages**

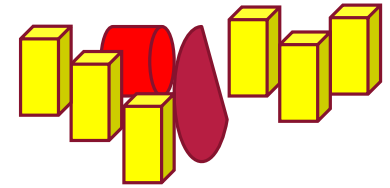


**HAPPY PLAY**

**A STORY TO TEACH  
SOCIAL SKILLS**



**When I use my  
pictures and words to  
ask to play, everyone  
is happy.**



**Everyone is happy.**



# PROMPTING STRATEGIES

- Prompt children to engage in positive social interactions throughout the day.

Specific prompting strategies include:

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- **Behavioral Momentum:**

- Using several easy requests (**High Probability Requests**) or tasks to build the child's confidence and increase the likelihood that he or she will respond to the more difficult task. ( E.g., “Carl, Touch your nose, Touch your mouth”, etc.)
- Follow with a more difficult request (e.g., “Carl, come here and play with (or work with) Robert.”)

- **Priming:**

- Provide the children with ideas of how to participate in social activities before the child begins the play situation (e.g., “Carl, who are you going to ask to play with at center time?” or “Bobby, can you ask Ahmad to play with you?”). (Bovey & Strain, 2005 What Works Brief)

# PROMPTING: BENEFITS AND EVIDENCE

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- Research has shown that by using systematic prompting and acknowledgment the number of positive social interactions can be significantly increased.
- Additionally, these increases occur rapidly and can be maintained when intervention is gradually faded.
- Research also suggests that this increase in the frequency of peer interactions can lead to greater acceptance of the child by his or her peers
- Also, leads to improved social and emotional development for the child.

( Bovey & Strain, 2005)

# PARAEDUCATOR/ADULT SUPPORT

- Over 400,000 paraeducators are employed nationally to assist students receiving special education services (Carter et al., 2015).
- Studies have indicated the presence of paraprofessional support in inclusive settings can be associated with poor social outcomes (Causton-Theoharis, 2009).
  - Proximity issues; over-prompting and adult dependence issues; etc.
- Paraeducators need to play a facilitator role in inclusive settings to help students to work together and to promote social interactions.
- Most paraprofessionals receive very little formal training and ongoing guidance.
- Training paraeducators in the implementation of peer support arrangements is critical to deliver optimal support students with ASD in inclusive settings. (Sarathy, 2012)



# VIDEO MODELING TO TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

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- Video modeling involves demonstrating desired behaviors and role-playing through video images. The student with ASD watches the video that demonstrates the target behavior and then is asked to imitate the behavior.
- Make use of Video Modeling to teach conversational skills and social skills.
  - e.g., spontaneous greetings, play behaviors, etc.
- Video modeling is a natural fit for students with ASD who are typically visual learners.

# IMPLEMENTING VIDEO MODELING INTERVENTION

- The video modeling intervention, combining peer support and prompting strategies involve the following steps as suggested by Oglive, C. (2011).
  - Create the video, simple and short with clear steps, focusing on the desired behavior.
  - Introduce the skill to the student and peer mentor
  - Review the steps of the skill
  - Show the video model to the student and peer mentor
  - Have the student practice with his/her peer mentor
  - Review the steps of the skill
  - Gather data, assess and reflect.



# GUIDELINES - IMPLEMENTING INTERVENTIONS

- Focus on children with social interaction difficulties without singling them out.
- Teach peers to be supportive and willing partners.
- Focus on specific behaviors key to social interactions.
- Gather data on peer interactions by careful observation.
- Use a team approach in identifying target behaviors.
- Monitor interventions and make changes as needed.
- Try one intervention at a time and try interventions in multiple locations to help with generalization (classroom, playground, etc.)
- Get the team involved in implementing interventions.



# MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

- Monitor playtime for naturally occurring positive peer social interactions.

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- Provide cueing by reminding children to:
  - Play together.
  - Converse with each other during meal times.
  - Share with their friends.
  - Be persistent.
  - Use scaffolding techniques.
- Embed social interactions throughout the day by providing additional opportunities.

## REFERENCES

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- Bovey & Strain, 2005. Strategies for Increasing Peer Social Interactions: Prompting and Acknowledgment, Brief # 17 ([www.csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefwwn17.pdf](http://www.csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefwwn17.pdf))
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# WEB RESOURCES

- Autism Internet Modules: <http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/>
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning website: (<http://csefel.uiuc.edu>).
- **Using Classroom Activities and Routines as Opportunities to Support Peer Interaction** by T. Bovey, P. Strain, Brief # 5 (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb5.pdf>).
- **Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions** by T. Bovey, P. Strain Brief # 6 (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb6.pdf>).
- National Professional Development Center (NPDC) on ASD, 2010. Evidence-based Practice: Social Narratives. <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/social-narratives>
- Integrated Play Group (IPG) model (Guided participation in IPG) by Pamela Wolfberg, Autism Institute on Peer Groups and Play ([www.autisminstitute.com](http://www.autisminstitute.com))
- Friend to Friend (F2F) Models: Programs for peers including the focus child ([www.friend2friendsociety.org](http://www.friend2friendsociety.org)); Presentations to peers on autism using puppets and simulation games

## **April is Autism Awareness Month.**

Let us resolve to better understand children with ASD and guide them to engage with peers, and have fun playing and gaining friends.

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**A SPECIAL THANKS TO ABLENET  
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