



RMIT University Social Skills Training Groups: Program Information

This social skills program is an eight-week group training program for children aged nine to twelve with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). The program has been developed to teach and practice those skills in which children with ASDs need extra assistance. Early sessions focus on non-verbal communication, such as eye contact, body language, tone of voice and facial expression. Children learn to pay attention to these skills to solve every day social problem-solving tasks through group discussion, teamwork, and role play. There are several key components of this program that are outlined briefly below.

Verbal and non-verbal communication sends important messages to others

A major theme running through the program is that people form an impression of us based on the messages we communicate to them, and that people communicate these messages in a number of ways. For example, if we don't look at someone when they're talking to us, they might interpret that we are being rude or disinterested.

Use the cues for clues

This technique teaches children to look at a series of different "cues" for clues about how a person is feeling. Firstly, children are reminded that there are many different ways that people can communicate their feelings and ideas. The most obvious way is through words, but sometimes words don't give us the full story about the message that someone is trying to get across. We have to use different cues (such as eye contact, body language, tone of voice, facial expression) for clues about how a person might be feeling.

The Social Detective

As children progress through the sessions, and become more adept at using the cues for clues, the Social Detective method is introduced. This technique teaches children to identify a "social problem" (e.g. being teased, asking to join in, giving invitations) and come up with several possible ways they could solve the problem. Taking into account the consequences of each solution, they are instructed to choose the best solution. In the social skills training sessions, solutions will be acted out in a role-play situation with group leaders. By the end of the program, it is hoped that the children will be able to apply the Social Detective method to their everyday problems.

Homework

An important component of the program is the weekly homework. Each week children will be asked to complete a number of tasks. Most weeks will include a social experiment, which is a practical component that allows children to practice the skills learned by interacting with another person at home, school, or in the community. The homework is an application of skills learned in the sessions, and children will be asked to practice their skills on various people. It may be useful to inform family members, teachers, and other significant people in the child's life about their participation in the program, so that they are aware that they may be the object of your child's homework practice. To ensure success, children need lots of practice and encouragement in using their techniques.

Want more information?

Groups run during school terms. For more information, or to place your child on the waiting list, please contact the Clinic Assistant at RMIT Psychology Clinic on 9925 7603 or email clinic@rmit.edu.au

