



Social Skills

Kinesics

Interest vs. Disinterest

Available in the format below:



Learn Quickly!
Learn For Life!

© 2015 Lisa Flowers



Kinesics: Interest vs. Disinterest

Individuals on the autism spectrum typically have difficulty noticing and interpreting non-verbal cues, and consequently often try to engage in conversations past their communicative partners' interest or time limits. This activity directly works on the skills of observation and interpretation. Students are given a checklist of behaviors of interest and disinterest, including open body posture, varied intonation, flat affect, and levels of eye contact, and are tasked with observing and tallying these behaviors, thereby making kinesics tangible and helping them determine whether or not to continue conversations and interactions. This material includes comprehensive therapeutic notes and directions, providing extensive suggestions on how to best conduct activities including improving generalization to real life social interactions.

Name _____

Date _____

Signs of Interest/Disinterest Checklist

Name of communicative partner observed _____

Relationship to communication initiator _____

Context/Setting _____

Signs of Interest		Signs of Disinterest
_____ maintains eye contact		_____ fleeting or no eye contact
_____ face and body turned toward		_____ face and body turned away
_____ open posture		_____ closed posture
_____ varied facial expressions		_____ flat affect
_____ frequent smiles and/or nods		_____ infrequent or no smiles or nods
_____ varied intonation		_____ monotone voice
_____ asks questions/makes comments		_____ few or no questions/comments
_____ often interjects ("uh-huh", "okay")		_____ infrequently or never interjects
_____ isn't doing anything else (gives conversation full attention)		_____ engaging in other actions (looks at papers, checks watch)

Do you think _____ was interested in conversing?

What did you observe that makes you think that? _____

If you think he/she was not interested, what reason(s) may he/she have had for not wanting to converse at that time? _____



Therapeutic Intervention

Kinesics: Interest vs. Disinterest

Notes: This activity gives students practice at observing and identifying signs of interest and disinterest, which will consequently improve their ability to determine how long to engage in conversations and interactions. Using a checklist for signs of interest and disinterest, students are tasked with observing natural conversations and interactions. The checklist requires students to pay attention to specific signs, thereby making social cues more concrete, tangible, and quantifiable. The checklist further makes clear the connection between those social cues and determination of another person's desire to engage or continue in a conversation or interaction.

Directions: Prior to use, therapists should review checklist terms, such as “open posture” and “flat affect” with students. This activity can then be employed in different ways. I typically start by having my students observe me interacting with fellow staff members. I give them a clipboard for the checklist sheet and they follow me to different coworkers' offices, where I start up and engage in conversations with a coworker while my students observe the conversation and check off the coworker's behaviors. Afterwards, we discuss their observations and resulting determination of the coworker's interest in conversing. I usually prep my coworkers ahead of time for several reasons. First, I want to make sure they will be available at certain times. Second, I often ask some of my coworkers to pretend they don't want to talk with me. Most of my coworkers are extremely kind and polite; hence without asking them ahead of time to act like they don't want to engage, my students would never get the chance to observe signs of disinterest. (Note: this tactic doesn't work well with coworkers who are bad actors!) Third, it helps to prep coworkers ahead of time so they don't wonder why my students are observing them while checking off behaviors on a clip-boarded sheet. I like to utilize this activity in this way so that students can focus all their attention on observing social cues, rather than having to observe and check off signs while conversing themselves. Once students become more adept and quicker at observing signs of interest and disinterest, they can work at paying attention to those signs during their own conversations. The checklist can also be utilized when observing conversations occurring in natural settings, or on reality TV shows, or on YouTube videos. It can help to turn off the volume so students can really focus on the non-verbal social cues. Lastly, when teaching students how to put into practice their skill at determining interest and disinterest, it's important to provide instruction on ways to end interactions smoothly, such as by using a closing comment like “you look busy—we'll catch up later”.

