



Social Skills

Perspective Taking

Homework Assignment

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Perspective Taking Homework Assignment

Observation is key to improving social awareness and subsequent social functioning. This homework assignment begins with a comprehensive discussion on the development of perspective taking and follows with a homework sheet that assigns students or clients the task of noticing social interactions and speculating on the emotional effect of those interactions on the participants. The discussion and assignment work together to improve students' social awareness, perspective taking skills, and the development of empathy.

Name _____

Due Date _____

Put Yourself in Someone Else's Shoes

Situation 1

where:

when:

context (people involved and situation):

If I were in _____'s shoes I would feel:

Situation 2

where:

when:

context (people involved and situation):

If I were in _____'s shoes I would feel:

I may have been able to help _____ in Situation ____ by
(doing what?):



Therapeutic Notes: Perspective Taking Homework

Developing empathy is not an easy task for many of my students on the autism spectrum (or even for teenagers in general!) I believe observation is key. Individuals on the autism spectrum do not naturally observe others' facial expressions, body language, actions, or interactions nearly as often, as attentively, or as effectively as neurotypical individuals do. If this kind of observation does not come naturally to my students, then we have to start artificially—in the form of an assigned task. Practice, coupled with motivation stemming from discussions on the possible benefits derived from “reading” others, improves observation frequency and skill. And the ability to observe others goes hand-in-hand with developing insight into others' thoughts, feelings, and motivations, in other words: perspective taking!

Now, as a speech language pathologist working at a Regents high school, I infrequently give my students homework, and when I do I give homework that requires a minimum amount of effort, since I know that they receive a lot of homework from their academic courses. But after working with my students on observation skills, such as Michelle Garcia Winner's “Thinking with Your Eyes”, and after discussing perspective taking and empathy with them, I often give them the preceding assignment. I explain that I want them to observe the people around them, in class, at home, outdoors, in restaurants, etc., and to take note of instances when someone was emotionally affected by events, especially when negatively affected. We discuss the types of events that could cause a person to have a negative emotional reaction, such as being interrupted during a class discussion or overlooked from a social invitation. We specifically discuss that many instances are subtle and that often the people affected may not show outward signs of distress. Then I give them the due date, tell them they can use pseudonyms if they prefer, and send them on their way.

When they turn in the assignment, they share their descriptions of the two situations with the other students in our speech language session, along with their ideas of how they could have helped the affected individual (the secondary yet important piece of learning to empathize!) and then we discuss. One pattern I've observed is that very often my students write about situations where the negative effect is obvious, such as someone getting yelled at. We then review possible subtle effects, and I may have them redo the assignment or simply discuss on the spot a subtler situation that they've observed. Interestingly, I once had a particularly egocentric student write about situations where he himself was the injured party, and the two people he used as examples of being negatively affected were two people he thought felt bad for him on his behalf. Obviously, I had sent this student out to do the assignment without sufficient explanation and discussion. After further discussion, I had him redo the assignment and he did much better the second time around.

