



Social Skills Packet

Activities and Worksheets

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Social Skills

Communication Skills

Questionnaire

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Communication Skills Questionnaire

A motivated student becomes a successful learner. I like to ask my new students (or previous students at the start of a new school year) which skills are most important to them, and I also want to find out in which areas they believe they need help. This questionnaire lets students check which skills they'd like to work on in the following categories: conversational skills (e.g., maintaining and shifting eye contact, picking a good topic), practical skills (e.g., asking for help in a store, ordering in a restaurant), non-verbal (e.g., understanding others' personal space, reading facial expressions and body language), dating (e.g., asking someone out, choosing an activity), and conflicts (e.g., handling misunderstandings, sticking up for oneself). The questionnaire lets teachers, speech language pathologists, and therapists know which skills are important to individual students, and gives them insight into which skills their students or clients feel they need help with, at the same time increasing their students' or clients' self-awareness and providing them with information regarding possible skills on which to focus.

Name _____

Date _____

Communication Skills I'd Like To Work On

Put a check next to any skills you'd like to work on:

Conversational Skills

- ___ Starting up a conversation
- ___ Entering a conversation already in progress
- ___ Picking a good topic
- ___ Keeping a conversation going
- ___ Switching topics
- ___ Getting out of a conversation
- ___ Feeling comfortable during conversations
- ___ Maintaining and shifting eye contact during conversations
- ___ Being a good listener
- ___ Balancing taking turns
- ___ Not interrupting
- ___ Handling communication breakdowns

Other:

Practical Skills

- ___ Ordering fast food
- ___ Ordering in a restaurant
- ___ Asking for help in a store
- ___ Setting up a get-together with friends
- ___ Making a formal appointment by phone (e.g., doctor, bank)
- ___ Getting someone's attention
- ___ Leaving a formal message
- ___ Leaving an informal message
- ___ Being introduced / meeting someone
- ___ Making introductions

Other:



Non-Verbal

- ___ “Reading” body language and facial expressions
- ___ Recognizing sarcasm
- ___ Understanding and respecting others’ personal space
- ___ Shifting eye gaze during conversations
- ___ Shaking hands
- ___ Using tone of voice to accurately convey emotions and intentions

Other:

Dating

- ___ Approaching someone
- ___ Asking someone out
- ___ Choosing an activity
- ___ Conversation on a date
- ___ Figuring out if someone’s interested in me
- ___ Figuring out what contact is appropriate
- ___ Letting someone down easy
- ___ Handling rejection

Other:

Conflicts

- ___ Sticking up for myself
- ___ Disagreeing with a friend or sibling (a peer)
- ___ Disagreeing with a parent or teacher (an authority figure)
- ___ Handling it when someone’s mad at me
- ___ Handling it when I’ve made a mistake
- ___ Handling it when I’ve been misunderstood
- ___ Handling it when something’s too difficult

Other:





Social Skills

Being a Good Conversationalist

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Being a Good Conversationalist

Frankly, it's not just individuals on the autism spectrum that could use instruction on being better conversationalists. We all have neurotypical relatives, friends, neighbors, and coworkers who monopolize conversations, or interrupt frequently, or tell long-winded stories with too much detail. Unfortunately, there's usually no comfortable way to let those people in our lives know that they need to change their behaviors. I'm happy to have the chance to work on social niceties and conversation skills with my students. We discuss each aspect of *Being a Good Conversationalist* and practice in a number of ways, sometimes focusing on just one aspect at a time. See therapeutic notes for more details.

Name _____

Date _____

Being a Good Conversationalist

1) Listen more than talk

- % rule
- don't monopolize!
- exceptions to that rule:
informative turns, including narratives and instructions
special events, such as an award presentation or wedding dinner
venting turns

2) Spatial Inclusion

- circles and triangles
- eye contact

3) Conversational Input enjoyed by many people:

- humor
- emotions
- conflicts/struggles
- negative experiences in general
- descriptiveness
- surprises
- extremes
- clarity
- intonation and volume variety
- visuals

4) Ask questions!

- try to be genuinely curious, stop thinking of what you plan to say next
- ask follow-up questions
- open-ended questions are good, such as "how...?" and "why...?"

5) Avoid:

- interrupting
- offending
- insulting
- excluding



Therapeutic Notes: Being a Good Conversationalist

1) Listen more than talk — *Have you ever heard the story of the guy on a first date that spent most of the dinner just listening? Afterward his date told friends what an excellent conversationalist he was. Most people like to talk about themselves and appreciate others who let them do that.*

- *% rule — I explain to my students that if two people are in a conversation then each should be speaking about 50% of the time, with three people each should be speaking about 33% of the time, and so on.*
- *don't monopolize! — I created an activity that keeps track of everyone's conversational turns. During a conversation, students are given a question chip or a comment chip for each turn they take, so that at the end of the conversation students have tangible evidence of how much they talked (longer turns get more chips) compared to others, and also evidence of their own balance of comments vs. questions.*

- *exceptions to that rule:*

informative turns, including narratives and instructions — This applies to situations such as when one person is telling an involved story, or needs to give extensive instructions.

special events, such as an award presentation or wedding dinner — Sometimes people give speeches.

venting turns — When people are going through difficult experiences they may need to vent, while the others mainly listen and give emotional support.

2) Spatial Inclusion

- *circles and triangles — I've taken my students around our school to "hang out" briefly in different spots, like on the stairs, in offices, in the gym, sometimes sitting and sometimes standing, with the goal of arranging ourselves in an appropriate shape for a conversation (triangular for three people, circular for four or more).*
- *eye contact — Everyone should be able to see everyone else's eyes.*

3) Conversational Input enjoyed by many people:

- *humor — Finding out you have the same sense of humor as someone else is a good way to connect.*
- *emotions — A great way to develop intimacy.*
- *conflicts/struggles — People can often relate to similar hardships.*



- negative experiences in general — *It's human nature. I give my students this example: "Which is more interesting? 'Yesterday I went on a roller coaster and it was so much fun I couldn't stop smiling' or 'yesterday I went on a roller coaster and felt so sick when I got off that I threw up on my little brother's sneakers.' "*
- descriptiveness — *Helps your listeners imagine your stories' events.*
- surprises — *People love plot twists.*
- extremes — *Best/worst, favorite/least favorite, out-of-the-ordinary details.*
- clarity — *It's important to give orienting details at the start of narratives.*
- intonation and volume variety — *Keeps your listeners engaged.*
- visuals — *Visuals are often helpful for clarity and interest, and we all know students like to show pictures or videos on their phones.*

4) Ask questions! — *Check out Celeste Headlee's TED Talk "10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation". Honestly, I believe being genuinely curious about your communicative partner is the number one way to be a good conversationalist. She talks about how the skills that make someone a good interviewer also make someone good at conversations. That's why I have my students interview staff members or other students for conversation practice. But, I also teach them to balance questions and comments so a conversation doesn't turn into an interrogation.*

- try to be genuinely curious, stop thinking of what you plan to say next
- ask follow-up questions — *I believe this is key to making the other person feel truly listened to!*
- open-ended questions are good, such as "how...?" and "why...?"

5) Avoid:

- interrupting — *Keep the focus on listening.*
- offending — *Refer to the perspective-taking activity Tact.*
- insulting — *Ditto.*
- excluding — *Avoid excluding spatially or through topic choice.*





Social Skills

Choosing Conversation Topics

Available in the format below:



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Choosing Conversation Topics

When I ask my students which social skills they would like to work on, one of the skills they most frequently mention is choosing topics for conversation. I tell them a good topic should have three characteristics: the conversation participants should find it interesting; they should have it in common, meaning each participant can have something to say about it; and it should be appropriate, meaning non-offensive to everyone in the conversation. An exception to the rule of commonality is when one of the participants is telling a story or informing the others about a topic. There are also exceptions to the rule of appropriateness (also known as “don’t discuss sex, politics, or religion”), depending on with whom you’re talking. For example, I tell my students it can be appropriate to discuss sex with a close family member, friend, or counselor. I use the handout as a checklist. During group sessions, every student and I fill out our own handout. As we go through each topic together, we place a check if we find the topic interesting, if we know something about it and would have something to say about it, and if it’s appropriate for a discussion with our specific group. We place X’s if not. Then we highlight the topics that received checks across the board on everyone’s handout. Those are deemed the good topics, which we’ll then use for conversation. I point out to my students that “good topics” vary depending on who is in a conversation. For example, I don’t find sports interesting, but a different conversation may take place where everyone is interested in sports.

Name _____

Date _____

Choosing Conversation Topics

	Interesting	Common	Appropriate
School			
Work			
Sports			
Fashion			
Weather			
Religion			
Movies			
Sex			
TV shows			
Technology			
Art			
Home design			
Money			
Cars			
Politics			
Holidays			
Drugs			
Other:			





Conversation Skills

Elaboration

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Conversational Elaboration

Helpful to individuals on the autism spectrum and to anyone who wants to improve their conversational skills, this handout explains the importance of elaborating when answering a question and how elaborated answers keep a conversation flowing. Following a written discussion, several answers are provided to the same question and are rated in terms of their elaboration. This handout also serves as a good jumping off point for conversational practice.

Name _____

Date _____

Conversational Elaboration

Your listener needs information.

Your listener wants to fully understand and to hear interesting details.

In conversation, most people want to engage; they want to hear your ideas and understand what you are telling them. They want to know what your opinions are. They want to get to know you. They want the conversation to flow easily. They want to hear your stories, understand your explanations, and consider your point of view.

Elaborate!

Below are ratings on elaboration on a scale from 1–10 (10 is best).

You and your friend are hanging out during lunch and he asks:

“Tell me how your sister’s wedding was”

- 1 — “fine”
- 2 — “fine thanks”
- 3 — “it was pretty good”
- 4 — “it was alright I guess, I liked it”
- 5 — “it was alright, but some parts were boring”
- 6 — “it was alright, but the ceremony was really boring”
- 7 — “the ceremony was boring, but they played good music at the reception”
- 8 — “Oh my god, I practically fell asleep during the ceremony, but I liked the music they played at the reception”
- 9 — “Oh my god, I practically fell asleep during the ceremony, but I liked the music they played at the reception so I had fun dancing. We stayed until almost 2 in the morning!”
- 10 — “I practically fell asleep during the ceremony, it was so long and boring. They played a lot of current songs at the reception, so it was fun dancing and we stayed until almost 2 in the morning! The best part, though, was the food: I ate a 2 pound lobster that was dripping in butter and the wedding cake was my favorite.”

Take a look at which responses above are conversation blockers, and which are conversation extenders by leading easily to questions or comments. For example, in response to the comments in #9, a listener might ask what made the ceremony so boring or what kind of music they played at the reception, or might comment on how late you stayed.





Conversation Skills

**Narratives
Set the Scene**

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Narratives: Set the Scene

Telling stories (narratives) is a big part of conversations, whether telling about a recent trip, recounting an interesting incident observed at school, or describing a weekend event. Students who struggle with organization, perspective taking, or memory issues are often poor storytellers. They neglect to provide necessary details and leave their listeners disoriented. This straightforward worksheet provides educators and speech language pathologists with an easy way to teach students to provide orienting details when starting a simple, conversational story. Students receive visual and kinesthetic prompts to practice this skill. You will find that your students very quickly internalize the simple structure that *Narratives: Set the Scene* provides, establish a mental map, and generalize the skill of “setting the scene” for their stories into their everyday conversations!

Name _____

Date _____

SET THE SCENE!

When you tell a story (something that happened over the weekend, an incident you saw on the news, a plot line in a television episode) your listener needs to be able to imagine (often by visualizing) the context before you “get into” the story.

Start each of the stories below by giving the following information:

_____ **WHEN**

_____ **WHO’S THERE**

_____ **WHERE IS IT TAKING PLACE**

_____ **WHAT ARE PARTICIPANTS DOING at the start**

1. Tell about something that happened over the past weekend.
2. Tell about something you did on a vacation.
3. Tell a story about being sick.
4. Tell a favorite family story.
5. Tell about an episode of your favorite TV show.
6. Tell about a birthday celebration.
7. Tell about an interesting interaction you witnessed at school.
8. Tell about something that happened in your neighborhood.
9. Tell about a current event.
10. Tell something funny that happened to you or a family member.
11. Tell about something that happened during your childhood.
12. Tell about a recent holiday event.



Therapeutic Notes – Narratives: Set the Scene

Function of this worksheet and activity

Narratives: Set the Scene is a great tool for teaching individuals with attention deficit disorders, with any impairment of executive skills functioning, or on the autism spectrum how to start a story in an organized, comprehensive, and communicative partner-friendly manner.

So many of my students with A.S.D. or attention deficit disorders have trouble answering simple requests for information, such as “tell me about your summer” or “tell me about your internship experience.” Often, they will start a story without providing any orienting information, such as where they were, who was with them, or when the event took place. Individuals who struggle with theory of mind have a hard time putting themselves in others’ shoes. So when they tell about something that happened to them, they know what happened, and they struggle to understand and keep in mind just what their listener doesn’t already know, and hence needs to know. I created *Narratives: Set the Scene* to target this deficit, and have found that it provides a simple and tangible way for students to keep in mind what information they need to provide to listeners at the start of a verbal narrative and to practice providing that information.

Suggested procedure

After reading the short introduction to students and further discussing the importance of providing listeners with orienting details at the beginning of stories, I like to give an example. I start a story without providing any establishing elements: “Santa and one of the elves got into a fight”, and tell my students that I left out important information. Then I restart my story, using a pencil to check off each of the four orienting details: (when) “Last December, (who’s there) my brother and I, (where is it taking place) were at the Roosevelt Field Mall, (what are participants doing at the start) doing a little holiday shopping when we saw children lined up to sit on Santa’s lap. All of a sudden, Santa and one of the elves got into a fight.” My students and I then consider how the story is now clear and makes sense.

I erase my check marks and now it’s my students’ turn. I have them choose one of the requests for information (numbered 1-12). When they’re ready I have them start their story and as they provide each orienting detail I check it off. If they need a visual prompt, either to get started or because they have skipped a detail, a simple point to one of the details listed always suffices. Students choose another numbered request for information and continue with the task, relying on fewer and fewer prompts and taking over the responsibility of checking, until they are swiftly able to start their stories with all four orienting details without any kinesthetic or visual cues. I have found that many of my students quickly begin to generalize the skill of “setting the scene” for their narratives into their everyday conversations outside of our speech sessions!



Social Skills

Interviewing Others

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Interviewing Others

As I noted in *Being a Good Conversationalist*, I believe being genuinely interested in finding out about another person is key to being good at conversations. Toward that end, I often have my students interview staff members, high school seniors, and/or family members to work on several conversational skills, especially the ability to follow the interviewee's statements with comments and follow-up questions. I teach my students that this ability serves two important functions: extending conversations and making their communicative partners feel truly listened to. Following are various forms to use for interviews, along with notes on therapeutic intervention.

Name _____

Date _____

Staff Interview Questions

What is your position at (name of school)?

How long have you been at (name of school)?

How many years have you been a (profession)?

What inspired you to become a (profession)?

What tasks and responsibilities do you have here?

Do you find your job interesting?

Is your job stressful?

(for teachers) What subjects do you teach?

(for teachers) Do you enjoy teaching one subject more than others?

Have you worked with age groups other than (current age group)?

How do you handle conflicts between students?

How do you help students when they become upset or sad?

What is your favorite thing about your job?

What is the most difficult part of your job?

How do you feel about the current education system?

What other profession would you have liked to try?

Did you grow up in (current state/region)?

Do you have any pets?

What do you like to do in your free time?

Other questions:



Name _____

Date _____

High School Senior Interview Questions

How long have you attended (name of school)?

What do you like about (name of school)?

What would you change about (name of school) if you could?

If you were in charge, what changes might you make to the education system?

What has been your favorite class at (name of school)?

What has been your least favorite class?

Who is your favorite teacher?

What is your favorite part of the school day?

Do you have a job outside of school?

Do you know what profession you'd like to go into?

Do you know where you will be and what you will be doing next year?

Did you grow up in (current state/region)?

When you can live on your own, where would you choose to live?

What are your hobbies?

What do you like to do for fun?

Do you have any pets?

Who do you live with?

Would you describe yourself as an introvert or extrovert?

What do you most hope to achieve in life?

Other questions:



Post-Interview Evaluation

Thank you for being interviewed and for taking the time to fill out this evaluation!

Your name _____

Student's name _____

Date of interview _____

Please score the following: 3 = great job

2 = pretty good

1 = could use improvement

N/A = didn't notice or not applicable

Did the student ...

arrive on time? ____

make you feel comfortable? ____

use appropriate eye contact? ____

speak using an appropriate rate and volume? ____

use any humor? ____

make the questions clear? ____

clarify any misunderstandings effectively? ____

show interest through facial expression? ____

show interest through body posture? ____

follow up your answers with comments? ____

follow up your answers with other questions? ____

respond during your answers with interjections (e.g., "uh huh", "wow", "okay")? ____

thank you at the end? ____

Comments:



Name _____

Date _____

Family Member Interview

1) Pick 6 – 8 of the following questions to video interview a family member:

- What's your earliest memory?
- Who's your role model?
- You have unlimited money. Where would you go for a two-week vacation?
- If you could tame and live with one wild animal, which would you choose?
- Where's your favorite place to hang out at home?
- Show your favorite outfit and tell why it's your favorite.
- Would you rather be an only child or one of ten?
- Would you rather live somewhere other than (current place)?
- What was your favorite age?
- What's your fantasy job?

2) Come up with two questions of your own to ask:

- Your pick:
- Your pick:

3) Decide in what order you want to ask the questions.

Most Important:

- Follow up your family member's answers with comments or more questions.
- "Why" questions are often good follow-up questions.
- Be curious! If you're genuinely curious your follow-up questions will come more naturally.



Name _____

Date _____

Post-Interview of Family Member Questionnaire

1. Family member interviewed:

- Relation to you?
- Name?
- Age? (if this relative doesn't mind providing)
- Why did you choose this relative?

2. What was the most interesting or surprising thing you found out about your relative?

3. How do you think this relative felt during the interview? Circle the number:

self-conscious	not at all	1	2	3	4 very
bored		1	2	3	4
annoyed		1	2	3	4
happy to have the attention		1	2	3	4

4. Come up with a question you would genuinely like to ask the following:

- the same person you interviewed
- your great-great-grandfather
- your 30-year-old self
- your 5-year-old self
- your celebrity crush
- the current president
- your dog/cat/hamster/snake/ferret/fish
- the bird that sings outside your window
- me



Therapeutic Notes: Interviewing Others

I will often have my students interview a staff member before or instead of interviewing a high school senior only because I can count on my coworkers to be non-judgmental and usually less intimidating. The procedure for interviewing staff members and high school seniors is the same. We start by discussing what makes someone a good conversationalist. I explain the connection between being good at interviewing someone and being good at conversing, in part because I always like my students to know why I assign the tasks I do. We go over the expectations listed on the *Post-Interview Evaluation*, and I let them know that the staff member or senior will be filling this form out after the interview. We role-play approaching the staff member or senior to request an interview and set up a time. I help my students choose which questions they would like to ask, usually ten to twelve, including one or two of their own. In preparation for staff member interviews, I point out that the last four questions listed are good examples of personal questions that are not inappropriately personal. I created the *Family Member Interview* and *Post-Interview of Family Member Questionnaire* during the pandemic when I was conducting all my sessions over Zoom, but of course this task is still practical now that students are back to in-person learning. I emphasize the importance of being curious. Once my students have chosen which questions to ask a staff member, senior, or family member, I have them practice first by asking me the questions, focusing on the skill of following up my answers with comments or additional questions.





Conversation Skills

Entering Conversations

Available in the format below:



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Entering Conversations

This handout provides an outline of the behaviors required to enter an ongoing conversation, including observation, gaining physical proximity, identifying topics, timing, commenting/questioning, determination of acceptance, and exit strategies. The handout can be used for discussion and/or role-play to help individuals on the autism spectrum improve their conversational skills, expand their knowledge of social dynamics, and increase their confidence to initiate interactions.

Name _____

Date _____

Entering Conversations

1) Watch and Listen

- don't stare, just glance occasionally
- can use phone or book as a prop

Reasons to listen in:

- to find out the topic
- to decide if the people may be open to you joining them

2) Physically move a little closer

3) Wait for a pause (don't wait for a "perfect" pause)

4) Make a comment or ask a question on topic

- can do with physical commitment (moving into their space)
- can do without physical commitment

5) Determine if you are being accepted

Signs of acceptance:

- eye contact
- smiling
- talking to you
- physically turning toward you
- opening the "circle"

Note: Don't take it personally if you are not accepted!

This happens approximately 50% of the time for everyone

6) Exit if not accepted

- first, start to look away
- next, start to turn away
- last, walk away, possibly with a casual exit statement



Therapeutic Notes: Entering Conversations

You can find a video demonstrating these steps to enter a conversation on wrongplanet.net “How to Join a Social Circle & Make Friends in a Group”. As is demonstrated in the video, today’s technology really helps individuals on the autism spectrum (as well as all of us!) avoid looking awkward when alone and following step one’s eavesdropping recommendation; it is so common to see people looking at their phones that no one thinks twice. I do recommend to my students that when they follow step four to actually enter the conversation verbally, they might want to start with an apologetic comment such as, “sorry, but I couldn’t help overhearing...”

I also make sure I always discuss handling rejection with my students. I discuss a version of the stereotypical breakup line “it’s not you, it’s me”, namely, “it’s not you, it’s them” so try not to take it personally (unless you should, of course). I feel it can also help, if you believe it would be appropriate in the context you are working with your students, to tell them of your own experiences of rejection. That way they can see that rejection is universal; it doesn’t only happen to people with diagnosed social pragmatic disorders, and they can hopefully learn they are not alone. Harlan Cohen, the author of the wonderful instructional book *The Naked Roommate*, describes the Universal Rejection Truths in his TED Talk “Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable”. He explains how not everyone will like you, purchase your products or services, or want to spend time with you, but some people will. Back to the main message: if you are rejected don’t take it personally. So many of our students have suffered rejection and been bullied. We all do our best to build up their self-esteem, and in doing so, increase the likelihood that they will be more willing to “put themselves out there” to take a social chance.





Social Skills

Post-Conversation Questionnaire

Available in the format below:



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Post-Conversation Questionnaire

I'm always engaging my students in conversations, both natural and "naturalistic". The most natural take place while we walk to my office, or in my office at the start of our sessions. But as every speech language pathologist knows, when given the goal of helping students improve their conversation skills, our conversations during our sessions must often be "naturalistic", meaning semi-artificial. I might target topic shifting, or turn taking, or using a balance of questions and comments, or interpreting non-verbal communication. Following some conversations, I like to have my students fill out this questionnaire. It addresses being curious about your conversational partner, identifying impressions given, and analyzing non-verbal behaviors. For many students it can help to take a look at the questions before the conversation, so they can know what to look out for while conversing. I always task them with paying close attention to only one person during these conversations.

Name _____

Date _____

Post-Conversation Questionnaire

Directions: For each question fill in the name of the person with whom you conversed.

What was the most unexpected thing you found out about _____?

What impression of _____ did the conversation give you?
(name three adjectives)

1.

2.

3.

From non-verbal clues (facial expression, body language, tone of voice, etc.), on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the least and 10 the most, _____ appeared:

_____ relaxed

_____ interested in you

_____ engaging (made you feel connected)

What else would you want to know about _____ that you didn't get a chance to ask?

What impressions of you do you hope the conversation gave _____?
(name two adjectives)

1.

2.

Did you enjoy the conversation? Why or why not?





Social Skills

Tone of Voice

Available in the format below:



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Tone of Voice

Often, when people think of non-verbal communication they think of facial expressions and body language, but don't think of tone of voice. We use tone of voice to express and to interpret emotions and intentions. How you say something can be as important as the words you use. Of course, this is a major reason why the intended message in texts and emails can be misinterpreted. If you want to see a perfect (and hysterical) example of this, check out the YouTube video "Key & Peele: Text Message Confusion". If you'd like to share it with your students, you might want to choose the censored version! When individuals on the autism spectrum struggle with interpreting or effectively using tone of voice it can, unfortunately, be a difficult skill to teach. I've designed an activity that targets both interpretation and use of tone of voice. At the very least, *Tone of Voice* can serve as an evaluation tool. At my school we've had students who came across as rude or whiny, but when we discovered that their tone of voice did not match their intentions we better understood how to respond.

Name _____

Date _____

Tone of Voice

Changing our tone of voice is another way we communicate non-verbally.

How we say something can be as important as what we say.

For example saying, "Thanks so much for the beautiful card!" in a sarcastic tone of voice means you're not thankful and you didn't think the card was beautiful.

Here are some emotions we can express through our tone of voice:

happiness	frustration	despair
anger	elation	annoyance
sadness	disgust	surprise
fear	pride	relief
anxiety	embarrassment	jealousy
boredom	confusion	suspicion
disappointment	sarcasm	shock

Directions: Take turns choosing three of the emotions listed above. Write them down on a piece of paper, numbered 1–3, but don't let anyone else see them. Now record yourself saying one of the sentences below using a different tone of voice each time to convey your chosen three emotions. Say your chosen sentence exactly as written below; do not add any words. Then play the audio recording for others, and see if they can guess which emotions you tried to convey. They may need to hear each one more than once.

Sentences to record:

I saw my ex, Juan, at Sara's party last night.

My mom said I cannot go camping with you this weekend.

Did you see Ty when you were at the mall?

Isabelle showed up this morning at my door.

I got the tickets for the show, and they cost \$36 each.

I don't know if you met my girlfriend Riley.

My brother ended up winning the spelling bee at his school.

You need to finish your art project before I come over on Wednesday.



Social Skills

Kinesics

Interest vs. Disinterest

Available in the format below:



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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”.





Social Skills

Interpreting Non-Verbal Communication Homework

Available in the format below:



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Interpreting Non-Verbal Communication Homework

Individuals on the autism spectrum are typically not adept at interpreting non-verbal communication. This is partly due to the fact that they usually do not observe others' behaviors nearly as often or as intently as neurotypical individuals do. That's why I give my students the homework task of observing others and interpreting non-verbal behaviors. I teach my students that "non-verbal communication" includes facial expression, body language, and tone of voice, and we work on interpretation in a number of ways before I give them the homework assignment. We may practice identifying non-verbal signs of various emotions in videos (such as clips of sitcoms, dramas, or reality TV) with the sound turned off. We use the activity *Tone of Voice* to work on using and interpreting tone of voice. We may use *Kinesics: Interest vs. Disinterest* to learn how non-verbal behaviors can indicate interest or a lack of interest. Notably, while the "Looking Out for Others' Feelings Homework" in *Developing Empathy* tasks students with guessing the perspectives of others mainly from context, *Interpreting Non-Verbal Communication Homework* tasks students with interpreting others' perspectives from non-verbal behaviors. The last question of this homework task is significant because while it's important to start observing others more regularly (which I hope the assignment encourages) and to accurately identify how another person is feeling, it's equally important to respond in a helpful manner to another's feelings.

Name _____

Due Date _____

Interpreting Non-Verbal Communication Homework

Where?

When?

What was the situation? (examples: eating dinner with your parents, answering questions during global history class, waiting in line for popcorn at a movie theater)

Whose non-verbal behaviors did you observe?

Describe that person's non-verbal behaviors (may include eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, actions):

By interpreting those non-verbal behaviors you believe that person felt:
(state emotions)

... and thought:

Did you do anything in response to your interpretation?

Examples:

- tried to build up someone's confidence who appeared nervous
- attempted to calm someone who appeared stressed
- asked someone who appeared angry if everything was okay





Social Skills

Impressions and Altruism

Available in the format below:



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Impressions and Altruism

I speak to my students often about altruism. I give them two reasons they should be altruistic: first, being kind to people and animals is the right thing to do, and second, it's in their self-interest. I tell them they will benefit from being kind. It will give others a good impression of them, which can lead to friendships, romantic relationships, comfortable interactions with acquaintances and strangers, and professional connections and promotions. The *Impressions and Altruism* activity also considers the other person's feelings in various situations. Given five straightforward social interactions, students take turns rolling a die to find out with whom they are interacting. They then answer five questions involving what they can say or do so that both they and the other person in the interaction can benefit. Note that in some situations what can benefit the other person is of less importance, such as when interacting with a job interviewer or a doctor.

Name _____

Date _____

Impressions and Altruism

Directions: For each of the following scenarios, roll a die to determine who is in the situation with you. Then answer each of the following questions:

- How do you want the other person to feel? (name feelings)
- What do you want the other person to have? (name nouns or verbs)
- What impression do you want to give? (name adjectives)
- What do you want from the other person? (name nouns or verbs)
- What can you say or do to achieve the above?

After you aced your algebra exam, you're speaking with:

- 1 — your friend who struggles with math
- 2 — your algebra teacher
- 3 — your dad who's an accountant
- 4 — your tutor
- 5 — your mom who won't let you use your phone past 9 p.m.
- 6 — a job interviewer for a cashier job

You are asked, "Tell me about yourself" by:

- 1 — your grandma
- 2 — a job interviewer
- 3 — your long-lost identical twin
- 4 — your doctor
- 5 — your date during the first time you're going out
- 6 — your date's scary-looking dad



You have a really bad sunburn and are speaking with:

- 1 — a dermatologist at your appointment
- 2 — a burn victim in the dermatologist's waiting room
- 3 — your mom who told you to use sunscreen but you didn't
- 4 — your friend who had talked you into using olive oil to get a better tan
- 5 — your grandma who keeps trying to hug you
- 6 — a new neighbor who offers you a homemade salve

You are asked, "What do you hope you get for your birthday?" by:

- 1 — your mom
- 2 — your teacher
- 3 — your friend who's broke
- 4 — your grandma who lives in a senior residence
- 5 — your ten-year-old brother
- 6 — your divorced dad's new boyfriend

You caused a minor car accident and are speaking with:

- 1 — your mom when you get home
- 2 — your dad in the passenger seat
- 3 — a police officer that arrived on the scene
- 4 — the person driving the other car
- 5 — the paramedic tending to your broken arm
- 6 — your teenaged child in the future





Social Skills

Reader Presupposition

Complaint Letters

Available in the format below:



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Reader Presupposition: Complaint Letters

This activity is unlike any I've found available for perspective taking and is one of my very favorites! It addresses the intricacies of writing while keeping your reader in mind, and the all-important skill of modifying your wording to give another person a targeted impression of you, all while working on a practical high-level life skill. It also combines writing skills and social skills. It begins with an actual complaint letter email requesting monetary compensation, extensive therapy notes on how to conduct the activity (including sentence by sentence interpretation of the effectiveness of the sample complaint letter's wording), and novel situations from which students must write their own complaint letters. When writing their complaint letters, students are tasked with choosing both semantic content and wording that will give their readers two targeted impressions of them: honest and reasonable. I have watched many of my students notably improve their perspective taking skills to a more sophisticated level from this activity. (Plus teenagers love being given not only permission, but also the expectation, to complain!)

Name _____

Date _____

Sample Letter

To Whom It May Concern,

I stayed at the Rolling Thunder Inn South in Boise, Idaho last week, from April 16–21. My brother and sister-in-law stayed in the room next to mine for the same five nights. My bill may be under my brother's name: William Stevens. When we checked in Sunday night, April 16, we were quoted a price of \$79.99. All three of us remember that quote. I specifically remember thinking, "okay, my total will be \$400 for the five nights". The morning we checked out, our bills reflected the price of \$89.99 per night. We brought this discrepancy to the attention of the hotel's staff, but were told that since we had signed a paper the night we arrived that had the \$89.99 price on it, we were responsible for that price.

I am asking that we receive a refund for the difference between our quoted price and the price we were charged for two reasons. First, although I understand that a signature is legally binding, I would like you to consider that we arrived at the hotel close to midnight after driving for fourteen hours, and were extremely motivated to finish the check-in process quickly since we were all exhausted, and did not notice the small printed price on the form we signed. And, it was your staff's mistake to print a different price on that form than the price they quoted to us seconds earlier. Second, my brother, sister-in-law, and I have all stayed at your hotel previously. My brother's daughter (my niece) lives two miles from your hotel, and so we planned to continue staying at your hotel every time we visit her in Boise. If we do not receive a refund of \$50 each (one refund for me and one for my brother and sister-in-law) we will not stay at your hotel again. Your hotel will essentially lose hundreds or thousands of dollars over time if you choose not to honor the price you quoted us the night we arrived.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Lisa Thompkins

Therapeutic Notes

Reader Presupposition: Complaint Letters

I use this activity to work on listener/reader presupposition. In earlier therapy sessions, I've discussed with my students the importance of always considering your communicative partner's perspective and adjusting your words and behaviors accordingly for two reasons. I explain that it's important to be altruistic and be kind to others, and it's also important to look out for yourself by giving others the best possible impression of you. This activity focuses on the latter.

I start this activity off by telling my students that this is an actual complaint email I sent (I've used pseudonyms here). I explain that whenever we speak or write to someone, we need to consider how our words affect them, and in cases where we are making a request we need to particularly consider how everything we say gives the other person an impression of us. In this situation, where I am requesting compensation, there are two impressions of myself I want to give: **honest** and **reasonable**.

To Whom It May Concern, (I explain to my students that since the Rolling Thunder Inn is a hotel chain, I looked up an email address on their website for customer service. Also "To Whom It May Concern" is the appropriate opening to use when you don't know the name of the person you are addressing.)

I stayed at the Rolling Thunder Inn South in Boise, Idaho last week, from April 16–21. My brother and sister-in-law stayed in the room next to mine for the same five nights. My bill may be under my brother's name: William Stevens. *(I explain that I provide these specific pieces of information because the first thing the person who receives this email will do is check Rolling Thunder Inn's records to verify my stay there.)* When we checked in Sunday night, April 16, we were quoted a price of \$79.99. All three of us remember that quote. I specifically remember thinking, "okay, my total will be \$400 for the five nights". *(The previous two sentences help make me seem **honest**; by discovering these details about my thought process, the reader can now relate to my story.)* The morning we checked out, our bills reflected the price of \$89.99 per night. We brought this discrepancy *(I make sure my students know this word and see how it makes note of the staff's mistake)* to the attention of the hotel's staff, but were told that since we had signed a paper the night we arrived that had the \$89.99 price on it, we were responsible for that price. *(I explain that the first paragraph should give all the background information, and must be clear while providing specific information.)*



I am asking that we receive a refund for the difference between our quoted price and the price we were charged for two reasons. *(I emphasize that the second paragraph begins with my request.)* First, although I understand that a signature is legally binding, (I ask my students why they think I provided evidence here against my position. We connect this technique to writing a persuasive essay where you choose to mention an argument your opposition would propose and then dispute it. But, much more importantly, I explain that admitting evidence against my position makes me come across as **reasonable**.) I would like you to consider that we arrived at the hotel close to midnight after driving for fourteen hours, and were extremely motivated to finish the check-in process quickly since we were all exhausted, and did not notice the small printed price on the form we signed. *(I tell my students that here is where I try the “pity approach”, and I often read the preceding lines in a pitiful tone for their amusement. I also point out that I made sure to mention the small size of the printed price.)* And, it was your staff’s mistake to print a different price on that form than the price they quoted to us seconds earlier. *(I note that I made sure to point out the error the hotel staff made.)* Second, my brother, sister-in-law, and I have all stayed at your hotel previously. My brother’s daughter (my niece) lives two miles from your hotel, and so we planned to continue staying at your hotel every time we visit her in Boise. If we do not receive a refund of \$50 each (one refund for me and one for my brother and sister-in-law) we will not stay at your hotel again. Your hotel will essentially lose hundreds or thousands of dollars over time if you choose not to honor the price you quoted us the night we arrived. *(I explain to my students that here is where I threaten the hotel chain, and that it’s okay to make this type of threat, that usually a monetary threat is the type of threat a company will respond to, and that it’s important to word it politely. I also discuss that my use of the word “honor” is a psychological strategy that could make the receiver of this email feel dishonorable if he or she doesn’t grant me the refund.)*

Thank you for your consideration of my request. *(Again, I emphasize the importance of being polite: because it’s good to be kind to others [altruism], and because it makes me come across as **reasonable** which would make the email’s receiver more likely to give me a refund [self-interest]).*

Sincerely,

Lisa Thompkins



When we finish I ask my students if they think I received the refund. (I did!) One of my students was clever enough to deduce that I had received the refund because, as he put it, “if you hadn’t, you wouldn’t have had us do this activity.”

The next activity is to have students write their own letters, keeping in mind their goals: to describe the given situations clearly, and to come across as **honest** and **reasonable**. Included are two given situations.

Notes for California Pizza Kitchen complaint letter:

Students must choose whether they want to ask for \$200 to replace the boots or \$35 to have them cleaned. We discuss the advantage and disadvantage of each choice:

Asking for \$200 — The restaurant chain would be less likely to proffer the higher sum of money, but then you would be able to replace the boots.

Asking for \$35 — The restaurant chain would be more likely to proffer this small sum of money, but your boots may not end up salvaged.

Notes for Green Valley movie theater complaint letter:

Students must choose what kind of compensation they want to request.

Since it’s implied in the situation that the student and his/her friend do not plan to return to Green Valley anytime soon, I emphasize the importance of including in the complaint letter the fact that the town of Green Valley is a four-hour car ride away and its local movie theater is not part of a chain near their hometown; hence, movie coupons would be valueless.

Name _____

Date _____

Directions: Write a two-paragraph letter of complaint/request.

Your situation:

You and your family celebrated your mom's birthday at the California Pizza Kitchen in Westbury, Long Island this past Saturday night. During the meal, your waiter accidentally spilled a glass of Coke on you, soaking your shirt and pants. He apologized profusely, and the manager came over. She offered to pay to have your clothes dry cleaned, but you declined since you were wearing a "run-of-the-mill" flannel top and old jeans. Also, you thought the Coke would come out when you washed your clothes, and it did. So instead the manager gave you and your family free desserts at the end of the meal.

However, what you didn't realize until you got home later that evening was that you were wearing your new suede boots, and the Coke that spilled onto your boots ruined the suede. You feel you should be compensated, because it was the waiter's fault, not yours, that the suede got ruined. Your boots cost \$200 and you still have the receipt. You called two different dry cleaners and were told by both that it would cost \$35 to have your boots cleaned, but there was no guarantee that the suede could be salvaged.

Write the letter:

The first paragraph should describe the events. (*what happened*)

The second paragraph should start with your request for compensation, and then should include the reasons why you believe your request should be granted. (*why they should give you what you are requesting*)



Name _____

Date _____

Directions: Write a two-paragraph letter of complaint/request.

Your situation:

You and your friend took a weekend trip to the small town of Green Valley. You left Friday evening and drove four hours to get to the Green Valley Motel. You had a good time, visiting shops and eating out, until Sunday afternoon when you and your friend went to the local movie theater and bought two overpriced tickets (\$21 each!) to see the latest action movie. For the first five minutes of the movie the sound wasn't working, and then for the next twenty minutes, although the sound was on, there was a vertical line going down the middle of the screen. By then you both felt the movie experience had been ruined, and you went to the box office to get a refund. The teenager in the box office said that he could not give you a refund, and that you would have to speak to the manager who was currently at another movie theater, a fifteen-minute drive away.

You drove to the other theater to speak to the manager, but much to your surprise he said he wouldn't give you a refund, and would only offer you each a coupon to see a different movie. He wouldn't give in, even after you and your friend explained that you had already seen every other movie playing at the two small theaters, and you couldn't use the coupon another day since you were leaving Green Valley that evening and lived four hours away!

Write the letter:

The first paragraph should describe the events. (*what happened*)

The second paragraph should start with your request for compensation, and then should include the reasons why you believe your request should be granted. (*why they should give you what you are requesting*)





Social Skills

Understanding Others

Reference Sheet

Available in the format below:



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Understanding Others Reference Sheet

A few years ago I was driving home from work, thinking about how I'm frequently asking my students on the autism spectrum, "How do you think so-and-so was feeling in this or that situation?" And I was thinking about how much they struggle to answer that question. I realized that I'm asking them to give me information on exactly what they don't know. Wouldn't it be helpful to provide some knowledge, some information that neurotypical individuals know instinctively, before I ask them to identify or predict others' perceptions? So I created a reference sheet of common feelings and perceptions during social interactions, and I've found that many of my students benefit tremendously by having this information on hand when I give them perspective-taking tasks. I've provided three social situations with which to use the reference sheet, but the sheet can be helpful as a reference whenever students are asked to discuss others' points of view.

Name _____

Date _____

Understanding Others Reference Sheet

Top 6 Negative Experiences in Social Interactions

- Having another person think poorly of them (especially looking stupid)
- Being disliked
- Having another person mad at them
- Being rejected/excluded
- Being embarrassed / Loss of privacy
- Hurting someone's feelings (leads to feelings of guilt)

Top 6 Positive Experiences in Social Interactions

- Feeling accepted
- Feeling admired
- Feeling valued
- Enjoying time with another person
- Making someone feel good
- Helping someone out of a bad situation

Top 8 Ways to Make People Feel Good Socially

- Make them feel valued by acknowledging their feelings
- Make them feel accepted by including them socially
- Make them feel accepted by forgiving them
- Make them feel admired by complimenting them
- Build their confidence by encouraging them
- Make them feel important by asking questions about them
- Make them feel valued by expressing your care/concern
- Spend time with them doing something fun or relaxing



Name _____

Date _____

Peter had trouble making friends in school. Some of the other kids would say mean things to him under their breath so that teachers and other adults wouldn't hear. His one friend Molly tried to make him feel better and forget about the other kids. One day Peter had to give a presentation to his class. He heard some of the other students whispering "loser" as he walked to the front of the classroom.



What might Peter be thinking and feeling?

What might Molly be thinking and feeling?

What could Molly do to make Peter feel better?



Name _____

Date _____

Kami worked very hard in her three anthropology courses at college and got one B and two A's. She found out about an internship position at the local museum, and even though she's very shy she set up an interview appointment. When she arrived for her interview, she discovered her outgoing, pretty sister Julie showed up to interview for the same internship!



What might Kami be thinking and feeling?

What might Julie be thinking and feeling?

What could either of them do to make the other feel better?



Name _____

Date _____

Denny and Rick are best friends. They go to a party together one Friday night. At the party, two women come over to where Denny and Rick are sitting. Both women make almost all their eye contact with Denny, and laugh at his jokes. They ask Denny questions about himself, and nod and smile at his answers. They barely acknowledge Rick. Then, one of the women says, "There's going to be an outdoor concert tomorrow night at Haven Park. Why don't we all meet up there, around 8 PM?"



What might Rick be thinking and feeling?

What might Denny be thinking and feeling?

What could Rick do in the moment or later?

What could Denny do in the moment or later?





Social Skills

Developing Empathy

Available in the format below:



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Developing Empathy

This is one of my favorite activities and one that I've found to be highly effective at establishing perspective taking and developing empathy through conversational practice. It starts with an extensive discussion of the importance of empathy followed by comprehensive explanations for the terms "spatial inclusion", "conversational participation", "social distress", and "mood". Students can then practice social observation and determination of others' perspectives by using the handout created for use in sessions, and can learn to generalize by using the homework handout for real-world practice. Included are therapeutic notes on how to best use the materials along with suggestions for modified activities.

Looking Out for Others' Feelings in Conversations

Philosophy:

It's important to look out for others' feelings for two reasons: for their benefit and for your benefit. Treating others with kindness and protecting them from harm is the right thing to do. At the same time, when you treat others well, they will want to spend time with you, will treat you with kindness in return, and will try to protect you from harm.

Physical harm is easy to spot, but social/emotional harm is more subtle and much more difficult to recognize. People are generally social animals and want to feel socially accepted. Conversations can be complicated social interactions. Many dynamics happening during conversations may cause people some amount of emotional discomfort or distress. In order to look out for others' feelings, you need to observe people closely and pay attention to their facial expressions, body language, and voice to try to determine how they are feeling. You also need to analyze the ongoing circumstances that could hurt other people's feelings or cause them any kind of distress. Then, you can avoid causing others discomfort or distress, and may even be able to help them if something or someone else is causing them distress.

Terms and Discussion:

Spatial inclusion: means feeling socially included through spatial positions and body language. In a conversational group, spatial inclusion occurs when each person can see each other person and no one is behind another's back. Socially inclusive conversational groups are typically circular whether sitting or standing (or triangular when there are three people talking). Make sure your body is not blocking anyone and that you can see everyone's face.

Conversational participation: refers to being able to participate in a conversation. Ideally, everyone in a conversation should be able to talk for a fair amount of time, whether commenting or asking questions. Of course, sometimes it's okay for participants to speak for more than their "fair amount". It's fine if sometimes a conversation focuses more on one particular person, when, for example, that person is telling about a recent vacation, is teaching the others a skill, or is discussing a personal hardship and the other people are providing sympathy. But generally, in a conversation between two people, each person should speak for about half of the time, in a conversation between three people, each should speak for about one third of the time, and so on. People typically want to feel listened to, liked, and appreciated.

The following circumstances can block conversational participation:

- being interrupted
- receiving poor responses to participation
- another participant unfairly monopolizing the conversation
- an unfamiliar topic
- unfamiliar references (i.e., some of the other participants bring up unfamiliar information, names, or words, without explanations)



Social distress: refers to emotional distress related to social interaction. As stated earlier, conversations are complicated social interactions. Many social dynamics occur during conversations beyond a simple exchange of information and ideas. Conversation participants can feel accepted or rejected, liked or disliked, trusted or mistrusted, angered or soothed, humored or disappointed. People often cover up negative feelings, especially during social interactions, for a variety of reasons. This is why, in order to look out for others' feelings during conversations, it is necessary to observe participants closely and to be aware of the dynamics occurring during conversations.

The following circumstances can cause social distress:

- being spatially excluded
- being conversationally excluded (due to unfamiliar references, poor responses, or interruptions)
- finding out about social exclusion (e.g., hearing about a party to which you were not invited)
- an offensive topic or statement
- having a secret revealed
- TMI: "too much information" (hearing another's personal information that makes you feel uncomfortable)
- being insulted:
 - directly
 - indirectly (toward a group to which you belong)
 - passive-aggressively (in the form of a joke or phony compliment)

Mood: refers to an emotional state. Often, a person's mood may have little or nothing to do with the present social situation. For instance, a person may be in a bad mood because of an argument that took place earlier in the day, because the rainy weather makes him feel gloomy, or because he ate too many carbohydrates and his blood sugar level has dropped. But much of the time we do have emotional reactions to ongoing social circumstances. In a single conversation, social dynamics could cause a person to feel momentarily angered, then relieved, then happy, then insulted, and so on. As stated earlier, people often don't want to reveal their negative feelings during social interactions. So you will need to look for clues to determine how others are feeling. Non-verbal clues can reveal emotions. These include facial expressions, body language, and voice.

The following may be signs of negative emotions:

- facial expressions
 - a lack of smiling
 - avoiding eye contact
 - eyebrows pointing up in the middle or creased in between
 - lips held tightly together
- body language
 - arms crossed
 - biting nails
 - head down
- voice
 - volume increasing or decreasing
 - higher or lower than normal pitch, strained tone
 - flat intonation

Name _____

Date _____

Looking Out for Others' Feelings

Directions:

- 1) After being assigned a person to look out for, fill that person's name into every blank on this page.
- 2) During a conversation, pay attention to that person: his/her spatial inclusion, his/her conversational participation, possible instances of distress to him/her and the causes, and his/her mood.
- 3) After the conversation answer the questions below.
- 4) Discuss your answers with your assigned person to see if he/she did feel the way you believe he/she felt.

Person you are looking out for: _____

Did _____ feel socially included spatially? ____ yes ____ no

Did _____ get a chance to participate in the conversation?

____ yes

____ no if no, why not?

Did anything happen that may have caused _____ to feel any distress during the conversation?

____ no

____ yes if yes, what happened?

What kind of mood do you think _____ was in for most of the conversation?

What made you think that?

What could you have done to make things better for _____?



Name _____

Due Date _____

Looking Out for Others' Feelings Homework

Directions: Use "Terms and Discussion" section to review definitions of terms and possible causes of distress and participation blocks. Observe casual conversations (in school, at home, anywhere) and pay attention to others' experiences and feelings during those social interactions. See if you notice any instances when a person was spatially excluded, lacked conversational participation, or may have experienced some distress during a conversation. Fill in at least one of the following.

Note: you can use pseudonyms in place of real names if you prefer.

1. _____ (person's name) was spatially excluded during a conversation in/at _____ (location or context).

Describe the spatial exclusion you observed and whether or not it was resolved:

2. _____ (person's name) demonstrated reduced conversational participation in/at _____ (location or context).

Describe possible cause(s) of the reduced conversational participation:

3. _____ (person's name) may have experienced some distress during a conversation in/at _____ (location or context).

Describe situation and possible cause(s) of distress:



Therapeutic Notes: Developing Empathy

I have found this exercise to be one of the most beneficial I've ever done with my students. Students who need to work on their social skills, including many children and individuals on the autism spectrum, often require concrete discussion and practice regarding awareness of others' thoughts and feelings as distinct from their own (theory of mind), and this exercise works directly on those skills. Many activities can be derived from these worksheets. Every element could be worked on extensively separately, such as spatial inclusion, or reading non-verbal communication clues. Elements could be worked on prior, after, or in conjunction with this exercise. When I have the conversation with my students during which they look out for one another's feelings, I do things to deliberately cause the students some distress, such as interrupt them, spatially exclude them, etc. I do this because a short, innocuous conversation won't typically cause the participants much distress, and one of the goals of the exercise is for students to be able to spot one another's distress. Of course, I do this exercise with students with whom I have established a nice rapport, I usually tell them I plan to cause them some distress, and I engage in annoying behaviors with a shared sense of humor. The homework sheet is a very important component of this lesson, since generalization of social skills into real life contexts is integral. When you discuss with students their observations recorded on the homework sheet, I would recommend asking what, if anything, they did to help out the other person(s), and if they did nothing, what they think they could have done, or would do if they find themselves in a similar situation in the future, to help.





Social Skills

Perspective Taking

Homework Assignment

Available in the format below:



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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.





Social Skills

Polite Wording

Available in the format below:



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Polite Wording

This straightforward worksheet works on listener presupposition and perspective taking skills. It begins with a written discussion of thinking about your listener before speaking and why it's important to modify your requests and comments in order to get the best results. It provides examples of polite phrases to add to requests and opinion statements, followed by several sentences into which students can incorporate those phrases. This activity gives students practice at modifying their wording while considering their listeners' feelings.

Name _____

Date _____

Adjusting Your Wording to Fit the Situation

How we say something is often as important as what we say.

We should try to predict how our listener would react to what we say.

Choose your wording carefully to get the best reaction.

In some situations, being assertive is best.

In many other situations, being gentle is best.

Think of situations where it is best to use gentle wording. **Discuss.**

Here are some words/phrases that “soften” your requests and opinions:

“I think”	“I believe”	“perhaps”	“maybe”	“might”	“could”
“it might be a good idea”	“try to”	“please”	“can”	“if”	“would”
“often”	“sometimes”	“it may be”	“it could be”	“I’d appreciate it if”	

Soften the following requests and opinions:

1. Move your book off the table.
2. Give me a pencil.
3. Let me speak.
4. I have the best solution.
5. He definitely cheated.
6. Take this to Larry.
7. Talk to your girlfriend again.
8. Women are more nurturing than men.
9. New York is the best city in the world.
10. Buy me new sneakers.
11. I want French fries and an iced tea.



Adjusting Your Wording to Fit the Situation

Answer Key

How we say something is often as important as what we say.
We should try to predict how our listener would react to what we say.
Choose your wording carefully to get the best reaction.
In some situations, being assertive is best.
In many other situations, being gentle is best.

Think of situations where it is best to use gentle wording. **Discuss.**

(Note: After hearing from your students, you can point out that each of the eleven sentences below can be categorized as either a request or comment/opinion. You can discuss how softening requests will often make the person you are talking to more amenable to fulfilling your request, and how softening an opinion makes your listener less likely to view you as antagonistic and therefore less likely to respond defensively.)

Here are some words/phrases that “soften” your requests and opinions:

“I think”	“I believe”	“perhaps”	“maybe”	“might”	“could”
“it might be a good idea”	“try to”	“please”	“can”	“if”	“would”
“often”	“sometimes”	“it may be”	“it could be”	“I’d appreciate it if”	

Soften the following requests and opinions:

(Note: Answers provided are samples.)

1. Could you please move your book off the table.
2. I’d appreciate it if you would give me a pencil.
3. Please try to let me speak.
4. I believe I may have the best solution.
5. I think he may have cheated.
6. Could you please take this to Larry?
7. Perhaps try talking to your girlfriend again.
8. I feel that women are sometimes more nurturing than men.
9. I believe that New York is the best city in the world.
10. Would you please buy new sneakers for me?
11. I would like French fries and an iced tea, thank you.



Social Skills

Tact

Available in the format below:



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Tact

Tact requires putting yourself in someone else's shoes and seeing things from his or her perspective. This handout works directly on the ability to understand others' points of view, to evaluate statements' properties of offensiveness, bragging, inappropriateness, over-generalization and prejudice. Students are presented with a list of nineteen statements to use for discussion regarding the tactless elements of each, and, more specifically, how each statement could make another person feel. Includes an answer key.

Name _____

Date _____

Being Tactful

Directions: What is insensitive about each of the following statements?

1. I would never put one of my parents in a nursing home.
2. Are you scared to walk around your neighborhood?
3. Our president is an idiot!
4. If I ended up being a waiter I would feel like a total failure.
5. My parents just bought a new projector for our theater room.
6. Women are the worst drivers.
7. Are you going to Amy's party this Saturday?
8. Halloween is for babies.
9. You thought that test was hard??
10. Jesus Christ is my personal savior.
11. After my cruise to the Bahamas, I'm going skiing in Switzerland.
12. If my boss asks me one more stupid question I'm going to strangle him.
13. I'm so glad I'm not crippled.
14. I would never take medication for depression.
15. People can't understand what I'm saying because of my high intelligence.
16. I usually hang with college kids.
17. That test was so easy!
18. There are a lot of Jews moving into my neighborhood.
19. Did you hear that Danny's mom is gay?



Being Tactful — Answer Key

Directions: What is insensitive about each of the following statements?

1. I would never put one of my parents in a nursing home.

Implies that someone who has done this is uncaring.

2. Are you scared to walk around your neighborhood?

Implies that the person you are talking to lives in a “bad” neighborhood.

3. Our president is an idiot!

You usually shouldn’t discuss politics, religion, or sex.

4. If I ended up being a waiter I would feel like a total failure.

What if the person you are talking to or one of his or her loved ones is a waiter or waitress?

5. My parents just bought a new projector for our theater room.

You are bragging about your or your family’s wealth.

6. Women are the worst drivers.

You just insulted half the population.

7. Are you going to Amy’s party this Saturday?

What if the person you are talking to wasn’t invited?

8. Halloween is for babies.

What if the person you are talking to enjoys Halloween?

You just implied that he or she is immature.

9. You thought that test was hard??

You just implied that the person you are talking to is dumb.

10. Jesus Christ is my personal savior.

See number three.



- 11.** After my cruise to the Bahamas, I'm going skiing in Switzerland.
Again, sounds like bragging about your wealth. Also, this can make someone feel bad if he or she cannot afford to go anywhere.
- 12.** If my boss asks me one more stupid question I'm going to strangle him.
It is very unprofessional to badmouth anyone at your job, and you should never verbalize a threat, even when joking.
- 13.** I'm so glad I'm not crippled.
What if the person you are talking to has a loved one who is disabled?
- 14.** I would never take medication for depression.
Implies that someone who takes medication for depression is weak or misguided.
- 15.** People can't understand what I'm saying because of my high intelligence.
Bragging about your intelligence while insulting others' intelligence is pretty obnoxious!
- 16.** I usually hang with college kids.
Implies that the person you are talking to is not mature enough for you.
- 17.** That test was so easy!
This statement is bragging and also could make anyone who didn't find the test easy feel dumb.
- 18.** There are a lot of Jews moving into my neighborhood.
Even if it's true, why are you mentioning it? This statement implies anti-Semitism.
- 19.** Did you hear that Danny's mom is gay?
Even if it's true, why are you gossiping? Also, this statement implies that there's something wrong with, or at the very least noteworthy about, being gay.



Social Skills

Speaking to Different Communicative Partners

Available in the format below:



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Speaking to Different Communicative Partners

Adjusting to your communicative partner is an important skill with which individuals on the autism spectrum often struggle. Keeping your listeners in mind (listener presupposition) in terms of what information they need or don't need, and how your words give them a specific impression of you, is essential to successful communication. These worksheets work directly on improving listener presupposition skills. Students write down hypothetical verbal answers to various questions, without knowing to whom they are speaking, (I fold under the bottom of the page so students don't see Step B yet). They then go back and choose which parts of their answers they would keep or omit, given the identity of their listeners, including a new friend, a job interviewer, a grandparent, etc. Choices made can then be discussed and modified. Three separate worksheets ensure improvement of your students' perspective taking and listener presupposition skills.

Name _____

Date _____

Speaking to Different Communicative Partners — 1

Step A: Write out answers to the following requests for information:

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

2. Tell me about your school.

3. What do you want to do for your future career and why?

Step B: Now go back and **highlight** all the information you would want to give to a job interviewer and underline all the information you would want to give to a new friend. (Note: you may overlap highlights and underlines.)

Step C: Discuss choices, including why you would give some info to a new friend that you wouldn't give to a job interviewer, and vice versa.



Name _____

Date _____

Speaking to Different Communicative Partners — 2

Step A: Write out answers to the following requests for information:

1. What is your greatest strength?

2. What is your greatest weakness?

3. What is the toughest problem you've had to face and how did you overcome it?

Step B: Now go back and **highlight** all the information you would want to give to a job interviewer and underline all the information you would want to give to your mom/dad/sibling/grandparent (choose one).

(Note: you may overlap highlights and underlines.)

Step C: Discuss why you made the choices you made.



Name _____

Date _____

Speaking to Different Communicative Partners — 3

We always need to modify what we say depending on to whom we are speaking. We have to think about the needs of that person and how he or she should be treated, and we also need to think about what kind of impression we want to make on that person, i.e., how we want them to view us.

Step A: Write out answers to the following questions. Keep in mind to whom you are speaking and what kind of impression you want them to have of you.

1. A new friend asks you to tell a little about yourself.

2. Your grandparent asks you to tell about school.

3. A job interviewer asks what you want to do for your future career and why.



4. A new coworker asks what you think is your greatest strength.

5. A tutor/teacher/therapist (choose one) asks what's your greatest weakness.

6. Your best friend asks what is the toughest problem you've ever had to face and how did you handle it.

Step B: Discuss why you decided to include the information that you did.

Step C: Discuss what kind of impression you wanted to make, and also how you thought about the needs of each of your listeners.





Conversation Skills

Time Sensitivity

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Conversational Time Sensitivity

One of the most common conversational errors made by individuals on the autism spectrum (and many neurotypical individuals!) is overextending their conversational turns. Many factors can be involved in this kind of mistake, including limited listener presupposition skills, deficient perspective taking, and trouble evaluating a communicative partner's interest level. This activity provides practice with determining an appropriate time period for a conversational turn by taking into account the context and the conversational partner, and then conveying assigned semantic content accurately within that time period.

Following a written discussion on the need to be sensitive to a listener's time limit, students roll a die to be assigned hypothetical content (what to say) and a context (to whom they are speaking and in what situation). After considering the context, students estimate an appropriate time period, and then practice providing their assigned content within that time period. This social skills activity works on increasing students' awareness of their listener's needs (listener presupposition) and improving their ability to limit the time they use to convey their content in order to best fit those needs. I recommend combining this activity with *Kinesics: Interest vs. Disinterest* and *Editing Verbal Narratives*, as all three address the need to limit content in order to best suit the needs of communicative partners.

Name _____

Date _____

TIME SENSITIVE TALKING

Often, we need to modify how we're going to say something depending on how much time we have to speak. We need to be sensitive to our listener's time limit. Maybe our listener is busy. Maybe he/she has to go somewhere. Maybe he/she has a lot of tasks to get done. Maybe he/she wants to talk to others. Maybe he/she is getting bored because you are going into too much detail.

Roll the die to find out what you need to say (the content). If you roll a two, three, or four you will need to fill in the blank. Then roll the die again to find out to whom and in what situation you will be speaking. First estimate for how many seconds you should speak given the context and explain why. Then say what you need to say within that time frame.

Content: What You Need to Say

- 1) Tell about your weekend
- 2) Describe how to _____
- 3) Explain why you _____
- 4) List the advantages of _____
- 5) Tell about your best friend
- 6) Describe your most difficult school assignment

Context: To Whom You Are Talking and the Situation

- 1) Your school principal stops to chat in the hallway between classes
- 2) Your host/hostess at a party
- 3) A job interviewer asks you for the information
- 4) Your mom while she's driving you to soccer practice
- 5) Your guidance counselor in the school cafeteria
- 6) Your cousin at a family wedding



Conversation Skills

Editing Verbal Narratives

Available in the format below:



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Editing Verbal Narratives

So many of my students on the autism spectrum have trouble editing themselves when they're telling me about a vacation they went on or their favorite video game, as examples, often providing too many details because they're not keeping their listener in mind. I have found that these worksheets work directly and effectively on this issue. Students are provided with a written example of a verbal narrative, and must delete details in order to best serve a given listener and context (employing listener presupposition). We then discuss all the choices made, such as how one portion could be interesting to a listener and therefore kept in, while another portion is redundant or too detailed and should be omitted. Also included are discussion notes for therapeutic intervention, along with a reproducible form with a blank narrative portion. If students agree, we audiotape narratives (theirs or others') in conversations, transcribe them onto the reproducible forms, and then use that content for analysis.

Name _____

Date _____

Remember: When telling a story, you want to make it clear and interesting for your listener. You don't want your listener to be confused or bored.

Who are you telling the story to?

What is the context?

Directions: Cross out irrelevant and unnecessary details.

"Over the summer I went to this camp in the Poconos called Mountain Spring Camp. It was about ten miles past the town of Buckwheat off Route 62. You go down into a valley and then up beyond a bunch of cornfields until you start to climb up a very steep mountain road. I slept in a cabin with twelve other kids, and this one kid, Sam, snored so loudly every night that I had a hard time sleeping. I would always try to fall asleep before the snoring started, but Sam always fell asleep before me. Ughh! That part was awful! Every morning, after getting very little sleep, I would go kayaking on the lake. It was so beautiful, with tall pine trees surrounding the lake and hawks flying overhead, and afterwards we would all jump into the icy, cold water. I'd say the water temperature was like 65 degrees, even though the air temperature was in the 80s. After our swim, we'd all be starving and they always served giant breakfasts, with scrambled eggs or fried eggs, bacon and sausage, banana pancakes, and the most delicious honey-flavored butter. My first counselor was pretty nice, but they got a bad stomach flu two weeks into the session, and they had to go back home to New Jersey, I think they came from a town called Cherry Hill. The replacement counselor was kinda mean and hated being asked any questions so we all tried to keep our mouths shut and not ask any questions. The best part of camp was archery. I got pretty good at it and even won the archery contest! I found out that the feather part of the arrows comes from a special kind of red-tailed cardinal that lives in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado. It used to live in Utah, but I think there aren't any more there because all the eagles in Utah killed them off or chased them into the other states I guess. So that's what I did over the summer."

Discussion for Summer Camp Verbal Narrative

Note: Of course choices regarding what to include and what to omit depend in part on the listeners' interests. As one possible guideline, I have crossed out phrases and sentences I recommend my students omit, followed by a discussion in parentheses, and recommend keeping the remaining phrases and sentences, followed by the rationale in parentheses.

Who are you telling the story to? My speech therapist

What is the context? During my first individual session of a new school year she says, "so tell me all about your summer!"

"Over the summer I went to this camp in the Poconos called Mountain Spring Camp. (good beginning, includes basic information) ~~It was about ten miles past the town of Buckwheat off Route 62. You go down into a valley and then up beyond a bunch of cornfields until you start to climb up a very steep mountain road. (I tell my students that these details are not of interest, unless I lived near to the camp and then perhaps I'd be interested in how far past the town of Buckwheat the camp is located)~~ I slept in a cabin with twelve other kids, (paints a picture for your listener) and this one kid, Sam, snored so loudly every night that I had a hard time sleeping. I would always try to fall asleep before the snoring started, but Sam always fell asleep before me. (this is interesting and comical!) Ughh! That part was awful! (I tell my students that emotions make a story impactful) Every morning, ~~after getting very little sleep, (unnecessary/obvious)~~ I would go kayaking on the lake. It was so beautiful, with tall pine trees surrounding the lake and hawks flying overhead, and afterwards we would all jump into the icy, cold water. (Nice description) ~~I'd say the water temperature was like 65 degrees, even though the air temperature was in the 80s. (too much detail)~~ After our swim, we'd all be starving and they always served giant breakfasts, ~~with scrambled eggs or fried eggs, bacon and sausage, banana pancakes, and the most delicious honey-flavored butter. (too much detail—I have my students guess which specific food items to leave in if they were to leave in any—the answer is the banana pancakes and honey-flavored butter. They are interesting because they are out of the ordinary)~~ My first counselor was pretty nice, but ("but" is a transition word that introduces a contrast, and contrasting or conflicting information is often interesting) ~~they got a bad stomach flu (gross details are interesting!)~~ two weeks



into the session, and they had to go back home to New Jersey, I think they came from a town called Cherry Hill. *(I tell my students where the counselor came from is not an interesting detail, unless they came from someplace unusual such as New Zealand or Peru)* The replacement counselor was kinda mean and hated being asked any questions *(negative experiences are often interesting)* so we all tried to keep our mouths shut and not ask any questions. *(redundant)* The best part of camp was archery. *(best and worst features are usually interesting)* I got pretty good at it and even won the archery contest! *(noteworthy)* I found out that the feather part of the arrows comes from a special kind of red-tailed cardinal that lives in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado. It used to live in Utah, but I think there aren't any more there because all the eagles in Utah killed them off or chased them into the other states I guess. *(too much detail unless your listener is an ornithologist)* So that's what I did over the summer." *(even though this is redundant, it's an appropriate way to end a story)*



Name _____

Date _____

Remember: When telling a story, you want to make it clear and interesting for your listener. You don't want your listener to be confused or bored.

Who are you telling the story to?

What is the context?

Directions: Cross out irrelevant and unnecessary details.





Social Skills

Greetings

Available in the format below:



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Greetings

Neurotypical individuals closely observe other humans literally from birth. Individuals on the autism spectrum typically observe others much less often—one of the reasons they are usually significantly less aware of social customs. Greeting others is not as simple as it would seem. Take the example of two men passing each other at work. The social norm could be a quick nod in greeting if they were acquaintances. A verbal “good morning” could actually be judged as a little odd. Students on the spectrum can use this reference sheet to become familiar with the many choices of greetings, as well as the contexts in which to use them when paired with discussion.

Name _____

Date _____

Greetings Reference Sheet

Initiate or Be Reciprocal

Greeting

“Hi”

“Hey” (informal)

“What’s up” (to a peer)

“Hello”

“Good morning”

“Good afternoon”

“How are you?” (rhetorical)

“How’s it going?” (rhetorical)

“Hi + (name)”

“Hey + (name)”

eye contact and nod or smile (to an acquaintance / passing by after previously greeted)

Additional: Greeting on Mondays

“How was your weekend?”

“Did you have a good weekend?”

“Did you do anything fun over the weekend?” (to a friendly acquaintance or friend)

“You look like how I feel” (to a close friend)

Leaving

“Bye”

“Goodbye”

“See you later”

“Talk to you later”

“Catch you later” (informal / to a peer)

“Later” (informal / to a peer)

“See you tomorrow”

“Have a good day”

“Bye + (name)”

“Okay, bye”

eye contact and brief wave (to an acquaintance)

Additional: Leaving on Fridays

“See you Monday”

“Have a good weekend”

“Enjoy your weekend”

“Have any plans for the weekend?” (to a friendly acquaintance)

“Anything fun happening this weekend?” (to a friend)





Social Skills

Getting Someone's Attention

Available in the format below:



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Getting Someone's Attention

Many skills that may seem simple are not so simple for individuals with impaired social skills. That's one reason I like to take my students out on walks, and if possible, into stores or restaurants. Functioning in the "real world" involves many more social skills than coming to my office for sessions. I've discovered issues on walks that I wouldn't have observed in my office, such as the time a student walked behind me instead of alongside. Or the time I took who I thought were two conversationally sophisticated students (based on my talks with them) for a walk and finally shut up. I soon discovered they couldn't say two words to each other; despite my eventual attempts at prompting some conversation, the three of us continued the walk in silence. It was eye opening, and led to a focus on some new, much needed goals. Something as seemingly simple as getting someone's attention involves much more than you may initially think. I realized this when I observed one of my students, (a student that I believed had pretty appropriate social skills), tasked with getting the attention of a teacher. This student went to the teacher's classroom and called out from the doorway, even though the teacher was 20 feet away and in the middle of speaking to a coworker. I have my students practice the skill of approaching staff members after discussing all the possible variables, including an open vs. closed door, the staff member on the phone, in an in-person conversation, reading or writing, conducting a class, or in the hallway. I then give my students the following form in an envelope, and ask them to deliver it to specific staff members. When my coworkers return the filled-out forms, I find out for which aspects of gaining someone's attention my students need more intervention. Also, I'll go over the staff members' evaluations with the students I think would be receptive to the direct critique.

Hi! The student that hand delivered this note to you is working on communication skills including getting someone's attention appropriately.

Would you kindly answer the questions below and return to me?

Your name: _____

Student's name: _____ (if known)

Date: _____

Yes

No

Did the student knock (if needed)?

Did the student look you in the eye?

Did the student say, "Excuse me"?

Did the student use your name?

Did the student say, "This is from _____"?

Was the student an appropriate distance from you when first speaking?

Did the student get your attention appropriately, i.e., by waiting for you to make eye contact and showing signs you can now be addressed if you were talking to a coworker or on the phone?

Comments?

Thank you! From _____





Social Skills

Restaurant Etiquette

Available in the format below:



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Restaurant Etiquette

This activity addresses a life skill adolescents may not have much experience with yet, at least not for certain aspects including making a reservation and getting the check. Eating out is a social experience even when dining alone, because it still involves interacting with servers and possibly hosts/hostesses, cashiers, and busboys. Therefore, it requires perspective taking. With that in mind, I like to discuss how behaviors can affect others, such as why it's not a good idea to arrive at a restaurant close to closing time, or why politeness matters.

Name _____

Date _____

Restaurant Etiquette

Making a reservation:

- When calling, ask for a time and tell how many people: “Hi, I’d like to make a reservation for 7:30 this evening for four people.”

Q: *In what situations should you make a reservation?*

Arriving:

- Arrive with most or all of your people (your party).
- Be aware of closing times—don’t arrive close to closing time.
- Approach host/hostess, make eye contact, say, “Hi, table for ____ (number), please.” or if you’ve made a reservation say “Hi, I have a reservation for ____ (your name).”

Q: *What do you do if not everyone in your party has arrived yet?*

Being seated:

- Follow the host/hostess to the table and say “thank you” when you get to the table.

Q: *What do you do if you don’t like where you’re seated? (How picky is too picky?)*

Ordering:

- Make eye contact.
- Be polite: “Can I have ...” “I would like ...” “Please” “Thank you”
- Try to order everything together (except dessert).
- Don’t say you’re allergic to a certain food when the truth is you just don’t like it.
- Thank busboys or servers each time they bring something, including water and bread.

Q: *Can you ask to switch something, like French fries with your meal instead of rice?*

Eating the meal:

Q: *How could you handle the following situations?*

- you are brought the wrong food
- you are unhappy with your food
- you find a bug or a hair in your food
- you need to get your server’s attention
- you drop a utensil on the floor
- you knock over your drink
- you are celebrating the birthday of one of the people at your table
- the server spills food or a drink on you
- there’s a long line of people waiting for a table watching you eat

Paying:

- To get the bill make eye contact with your server and mouth “check” while making a writing motion in the air with one hand.
- At some restaurants, like diners, you bring the bill to the cash register and pay.
- At other restaurants, you leave your money or card in the check holder and place it at the edge of the table.

Q: *What if you and your friends want to split the bill?*

Q: *How much should you tip?*

Q: *What are the different ways to leave a tip?*





Social Skills

Answering Job Interview Questions

Available in the format below:



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Answering Job Interview Questions

This worksheet provides a detailed guide to answering the top four most commonly asked questions in job interviews. It gives step-by-step directions and includes lots of example answers. The worksheet also describes how to use listener presupposition: thinking about the perspective of your communicative partner, in this case the job interviewer, when responding to questions. More specifically, it encourages students to think about what impressions they want the interviewer to have of them, and then explains how to answer to give those targeted impressions. After going over the worksheet together, we use role-play to practice.

Name _____

Date _____

Answering Job Interview Questions

Answering: **“Tell me a little about yourself”**

Your answer should show the interviewer that you possess the qualities they want in an employee.

These are some of the qualities that make a good worker:

Hardworking
Organized
Flexible
Punctual
Kind/Friendly
Energetic
Calm
Respectful
Curious
Mature
Responsible/Reliable
Attentive
Patient
Disciplined
Steadfast
Creative

- Directions: **1)** Highlight the qualities above that you believe you possess.
 2) For each highlighted quality, state an example to demonstrate.

Examples:

“I’m always punctual. I make sure I leave my apartment early enough so I can be on time even if the subway is running late.”

“I’m flexible. When I work on group projects in school, I’m okay with doing tasks the way the other students want to, even if it’s not always the way I would prefer.”

- 3)** Name two activities you like to do in your free time that demonstrate at least one of the above qualities.

Examples:

“I’ve been studying ballet since I was five years old.” (shows you are disciplined and steadfast)

“My family and I foster kittens to socialize them and help them be adoptable.” (shows you are patient, responsible, and kind)

Now answer the question “tell me a little about yourself” with:

- general info (your grade, where you live and/or go to school)
- one or two qualities you possess with examples (#2 above)
- two activities you like to do in your free time (#3 above)



Answering: **“What would you say are your greatest strengths?”**

Basically describe two or three qualities you possess (that you have not already mentioned) along with examples that demonstrate those qualities. (more of #2 above)

Answering the difficult question: **“What is your biggest weakness?”**

Be prepared with an answer to this question!

State a real weakness, and then include a “but” with a compensation or strategy.

Some ideas:

- “I’m 16, so I don’t have much work experience. **But** I’m a fast learner.”
- “I’m 16, so I don’t have a lot of work experience. **But** through my high school I’ve gotten experience one morning a week at different jobs since my freshman year.”
- “I don’t have the greatest memory, **but** I’ve learned to write down information and keep very organized.”
- “Sometimes I may need directions clarified, **but** I make sure to ask right away if I don’t understand something fully. I’ll never pretend I know what to do if I don’t, because I want to make sure I get things done the right way.”

Answering: **“Why do you want to work here?”**

Do your research ahead of time so you know some information about the place you’re applying to!

Start your answer with how the job will benefit you.

Some ideas:

- “I’m hoping to work in the field of education in my future, so I believe that being a camp counselor will give me excellent experience working with kids.”
- “I believe working at your law firm will show me the ins and outs of how a law firm functions, and will help me decide if becoming a lawyer is really for me.”

Finish your answer with how hiring you will benefit them.

Some ideas:

- “I believe that my creativity could bring some fresh ideas to your store.” (better have at least one idea ready in case they ask!)
- “I feel that my organizational skills would make me well suited to working on your filing system and doing whatever clerical tasks you give me.”

***Special note:** It’s okay to take a couple moments to think before answering questions, and don’t worry about looking nervous. Interviewers expect applicants to be a little nervous and taking time to think just shows that you care about doing well.





Social Skills

Passive Aggression

Available in the format below:



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Passive Aggression

It is very difficult to deal with passive aggression from others. But I like to help students learn how to spot it and how to deal with it, because passive aggressive comments and behaviors are hostile and my students don't deserve hostility. We start by discussing the name: "aggressive" referring to active hostility and "passive" because the perpetrator wants to engage in belligerent behaviors without being called out. I give my students examples of insults that sound like compliments, such as "I love that top on you—you don't look so fat in it". Then, for each example listed we discuss how it is hostile (the aggression—often an implied insult or an attempt to embarrass) and how the perpetrator tries to mask the hostility (the passive nature). We then discuss how to handle the comment or behavior. I encourage my students to calmly call the other person on the hostility for two reasons: first, I want them to stand up for themselves, and second, getting called on can discourage the perpetrator from attempting passive aggressive comments and behaviors moving forward. Of course, there can be various circumstances that would deter my students from speaking up, and they need to do what works best for them in any situation.

Name _____

Date _____

Spotting and Dealing with Passive Aggressive Comments and Behaviors

Directions: Discuss patterns of passive aggressive acts and making a decision to react. Then, discuss the passive aggressive nature of each of the following and effective ways to deal with each.

1. You and your friend are walking through a mall. Your friend says, “Oh, those two girls we just passed are so mean! They were making fun of your pants!”
2. Your family recently was able to move from a small home into a bigger place. Your friend says, “You must be so happy in your new home—your other place was tiny. I know you’re relieved to be in a bigger home.”
3. After getting test results back in class, a classmate glances at your test and says to you, “I give you a lot of credit! I know Earth Science doesn’t come easily to you, so you must have put in a lot of study time to pull off that 88 you got!”
4. A coworker says to you in front of other coworkers, “Hey, good job dealing with that student. I don’t know why he always gives you such a hard time!”
5. You are 5’2” tall. A 5’9” friend tells you, “You are so lucky! It must be nice to be able to always fit into small spaces. I have to scrunch up my legs to fit.”
6. You deal with frequent breakouts and today you have a major zit right in the middle of your forehead. At lunch, a clear-skinned classmate says to you in front of several other classmates, “Remind me to give you the number of my dermatologist. She’s great and will clear you up in no time.”
7. In gym class, one of the hottest students (whom you secretly have a crush on) hangs out with you throughout the whole period. When the bell rings, your best friend (who knows about your crush) walks by and, in view of your crush, gives you a big smile and a thumbs-up.
8. You got the worst haircut, but at a party the next night no one sees it since you’ve so expertly hidden it under your new cap. A friend (who was with you when you got the haircut) takes the cap off your head at the party to try on and after seeing your face says, “oh no, sorry! I totally forgot!”

