Resources - Social Skills Curricula & Programs

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A variety of social skills interventions, strategies, and programs exist to help schools with the task of teaching children and adolescents social and interpersonal behaviors. Social skills interventions that incorporate social and emotional learning skills have proved to be particularly effective in improving students' attitudes towards school, feeling more connected to school, having more positive attitudes towards themselves and others, reducing conduct problems, decreasing emotional distress (e.g., anxiety, depressive symptoms), and significantly improving academic grades (i.e., 11 percentile points higher on academic achievement measures; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Nevertheless, there has been some concern about the ability of this type of instruction to generalize to the real life situations where these skills should be employed. For a more detailed description of social skills instruction generally including the purposes, nature, and research see the Strategy Brief on Social Skills Instruction.

Considerations for Choosing and Implementing a Social Skills Program

When considering a social skills curriculum or teaching strategies, in addition to age or grade appropriateness, consider whether these issues are addressed (Otten and Tuttle, 2011):

- Social skills are often taught through a combination of large group instruction, small skill groups, and individual social skills instruction. Does the program or curriculum provide this flexibility?
- Evidence-based social skills programs will always include direct instruction, modeling, role-playing the skill, practicing the skill in different settings, and performance feedback. Are these types of delivery methods provided or possible?
- Performance deficits, skill deficits, and fluency deficits need to be determined when choosing social skills programming. Does the program distinguish these and provide strategies to address each?
- Self-management without any or minimal cues and prompts is the eventual goal of social skills instruction. Does the program lead to effective self-management?

Below are examples of well-known readily available, and widely used social skills instruction programs. They are intended to illustrate the types of curricula and programs available. Several of these have been identified as being effective, although the level of research support for effectiveness varies. The programs also vary in terms of the targeted skills and intended grade levels included in each curriculum. These programs are representative examples of the variety of programs available. No endorsement of specific programs should be implied.

The ACCEPTS Program

ACCEPTS (A Curriculum for Children's Effective Peer and Teacher Skills) is a program for teaching classroom and peer-to-peer social skills to children with or without disabilities. The program includes a nine-step instructional procedure that can be taught in one-to-one, small group, or large-group settings. ACCEPTS provides peer-to-peer skills, skills for relating to adults, and self-management skills (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2002). Additionally, the program incorporates direct instruction and classroom behavior manage-ment principles (Pro-Ed Incorporated, 2012). Specific skills that are encompassed in the program include classroom skills (e.g., listening to the teacher, following classroom rules), basic interaction skills (e.g., eye contact, tone of voice, listen-ing, answering, taking turns during conversations), getting along skills (e.g., using polite words, sharing), making friends skills (e.g., good grooming, smiling), and coping skills (e.g., expressing anger in a healthy way, responding when things do not go right, how to respond when someone tries to hurt you; Pro-Ed Incorpo-rated, 2012). For more information on the ACCEPTS Program:
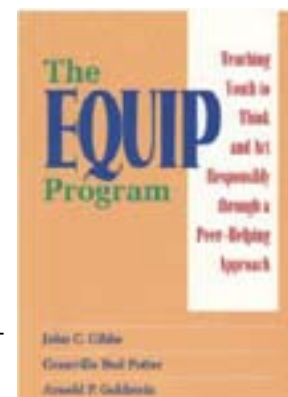http://www.proedinc.com/customer/productView.aspx?ID=625
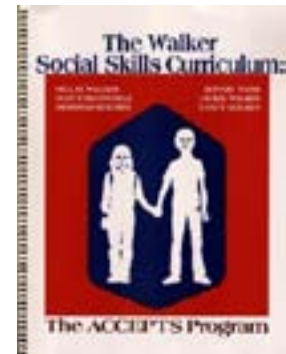
Connecting with Others

This program focuses on teacher-student interactions in order to encourage students to adopt positive pro-social skills. The 30-program curriculum is con-trived of six separate focus areas, including concept of self and others, socializa-tion, problem solving/conflict resolution, communication, sharing, and caring/ empathy (Richardson, Tolson, Huang, & Lee, 2009). The teacher/instructor follows each specific lesson, which includes all materials needed and provides goals and objectives for each lesson. During the lesson, prompting and feedback is provided to encourage students through a series of guided questions. Fol-lowing the lesson, the teacher checks for understanding through guided and independent activities. The guided activities include group work with other peers while the independent activity allows the teacher to assess each individual student's skills and understanding (Richardson et al., 2009). For more informa-tion: https://www.researchpress.com/books/474/connecting-others
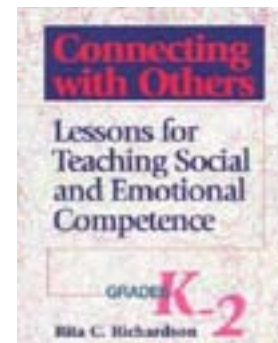
The EQUIP Program

The EQUIP program is aimed toward antisocial or behavior disordered adolescents through a three-part intervention method. According to NASP (2002), the approach includes training in moral judgment, anger management/ correction of thinking errors, and pro-social skills. The program is based on cog-nitive behavioral therapy (CBT) principles and initially aims to cultivate a posi-tive peer culture through group meetings. The How I Think (HIT) questionnaire, assesses cognitive thinking errors related to being "Self-Centered", "Blaming Others", "Assuming the Worst", and "Minimizing/Mislabeling". Correcting think-ing errors which obscure and prevent the development of positive peer relation-ships is a core component of instilling pro-social skills. During EQUIP Meetings, students are provided with tools to improve moral judgment, anger manage-

ment, and social interaction skills (Gibbs, Potter, DiBiase, & Devlin, 2008).

After the implementation of the program in a Minnesota correctional facility for juvenile offenders, recidivism rates dropped from 53% to 21%. The authors further suggest that when using EQUIP as an intervention for particularly violent youth, it may need to be enhanced with other perspective-taking and empathy skill interventions. For more information on The EQUIP Program, visit: http://www.research-press.com/scripts/product.asp?item=4848#5134.

The PATHS Curriculum

The PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) model is based on the ABCD (Affective-Behavioral-Cognitive-Dynamic) model of development, which posits that each of these components is integrated and important for healthy social-emotional functioning. Children's coping skills also arise from training that includes affective, behavioral, and cognitive regulation (Kam, Greenberg, & Kusche, 2004). Additionally, PATHS includes lessons for elementary school students involving self-control, feelings, and problem-solving. Many of the units also include an animal analogy to help develop conceptual understanding (e.g. a turtle in the self-control unit). According to Kam et al. (2004), PATHS operates under four assumptions:
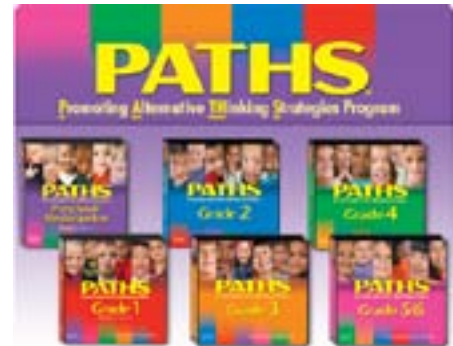
- Children's ability to understand and discuss emotions is related to both communication and self-control
- Children's ability to manage, understand, and discuss emotions operates is dependent upon development and socialization.
- Children's ability to understand their own emotions, as well as others emotions, is a critical tool in problem-solving.
- The school environment serves as a developmental and social ecology that can facilitate change

The Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development (2012) notes that the PATHS curriculum has been shown to significantly increase children's ability to develop effective, alternative solutions, decrease the percentage of aggressive/violent solutions, and increase children's understanding and recognition of emotions. Similarly, teachers indicate that when following the implementation of the program, children are more likely to demonstrate self-control and to tolerate frustration using effective conflict resolution strategies. Cognitive assessments also suggest that students show improvements in executive functioning. Regarding more severe symptoms, students have shown decreased levels of externalizing symptoms (i.e., aggressive and disruptive behavior), internalizing symptoms (i.e., withdrawal, anxiety, sadness), and improvements in engagement and attention. These results have held across samples of urban and rural children, as well as students in special education.

Please see the following resource for more information regarding PATHS:
http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/paths.html

The PREPARE Curriculum

The PREPARE curriculum focuses on teaching pro-social competencies designed for use with middle school and high school students. PREPARE includes a series of 10 course-length interventions grouped into three areas: reducing aggression, reducing stress, and reducing prejudice (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2002). The PREPARE curriculum is appropriate for students who are deficient in pro-social skills, particularly those who are aggressive or withdrawn. This curriculum is based on the notion that aggressive behavior is learned behavior that has been used frequently and reinforced in certain youths' lives. The reinforcement of aggressive behavior over time results in behaviors that are difficult to change (Goldstein, 1988).
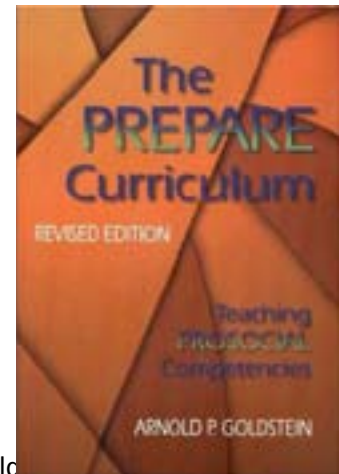
The program was developed through researching relevant literature, as well as consultation with teachers and other youth-care professionals (Gold.........The offerings of the PREPARE curriculum include: 1) Interpersonal Skills Training, 2) Anger Control Training, 3) Moral Reasoning Training, 4) Problem-solving Training, 5) Empathy Training, 6) Social Perception Training, 7) Anxiety Management, 8) Cooperation Training, 9) Building a Pro-social Support Group, and 10) Understanding and Using Group Processes (Goldstein, 2010). Additionally, in delivering the PREPARE curriculum teachers must consider performance versus skill deficits, classroom management, enhancing motivation, and generalization and transfer of skills. Evaluations conducted by the curriculum developers have suggested that the PREPARE curriculum increases pro-social competencies in highly aggressive adolescents (Goldstein, 2010).

For more information on the PREPARE curriculum:

http://www.researchpress.com/scripts/product.asp?item=5063

Second Step

The Second Step program specifically aims to prevent or reduce aggression, violence, and substance abuse through the promotion of the attitudes and social and problem-solving skills that are linked to interpersonal and academic success (Committee for Children, 2011). In this way, the program seeks to promote the socio-emotional skills that predict student success in school and in life (Committee for Children, 2008). For school age children, Second Step draws on developmental research that incorporates a risk and protective factors framework (Committee for Children, 2011). Additionally, this program rests on the foundation that interventions that target core risk and protective factors can simultaneously address multiple skill areas, reducing the need for a separate program for each presenting issue. Similar risk and protective factors have been found to be related to substance abuse, violence, delinquency, and school failure (Committee for Children, 2008). Above all, the program maintains that good social skills protect youth from becoming involved in substance abuse, violence, and delinquency, and promotes academic success. In addition, developing and maintaining social skills often coincide with positive relationships with school staff and peers. These school relationships foster a sense of school connectedness that has been shown to reduce students' risk of dropping out of school (Committee for Children, 2008).

In a recent study, Brown, Jimerson, Dowdy, Gonzalez, and Stewart (2012) found support for program implementation in a diverse sample of preschool through fourth grade English Language Learner children

from low-income homes. The program demonstrated significant increases in social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk following the use of Second Step. Holsen, Smith, and Frey (2008) also conducted a study on the effectiveness of Second Step for fifth and sixth grade students in 11 Norwegian schools. Both boys and girls in fifth and sixth grade showed improvements in social competence. Boys in sixth grade also reported reductions in externalizing behavior compared to control students. Despite these positive results, no improvements were reported for internalizing behaviors. Still, teachers in Norway have indicated that the program had a positive impact on their teaching techniques and broader social behavior. Teachers also reported being more aware of student needs and problems following the implementation of the program (Larsen & Samdal, 2009). These studies highlight the effectiveness of the program in increasing social-emotional awareness and decreasing externalizing behaviors in nontraditional samples of diverse children, which speaks to its utility across audiences.

See the following resource for an example of the scope and sequence of lessons for the middle school: http://www.cfchildren.org/Portals/0/SS_MS/MS_DOC/MS_Scope_Sequence_SS.pdf

Skillstreaming

Skillstreaming is a social skills training program that is modeled on the premise that social and problem-solving deficits lead to problem behavior through social learning (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). The Skillstreaming curriculum materials are available in early childhood, elementary, and adolescent versions and are appropriate for students displaying aggression, immaturity, withdrawal, and other problem behaviors (For each social skill instruction includes modeling, role playing, feedback, and training for generalization; Sheridan et al., 2011). A new Skillstreaming resource specifically for students with autism will also be published soon. All skills are ideally presented in a small group format (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). School psychologists, parents, social workers and other school personnel, as well as the children themselves complete behavior ratings checklists prior to the intervention. Follow up checklists are employed after students have mastered the designated skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). Sheridan et al. (2011) describes that once a skill topic is developed and rules are generated for the group, nine steps guide the implementation of Skillstreaming lessons. The steps include:
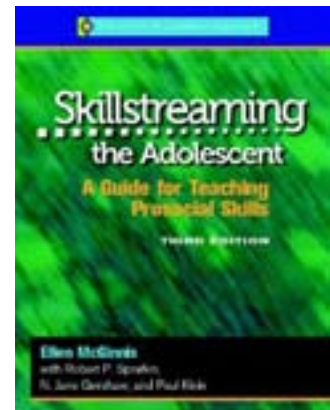
- Operationalizing the social skill
- Instructor modeling two examples of the skils
- Students sharing an incident related to the skill in which they have struggled
- Specific students are asked to role play their scenarios
- One students is asked to role play the primary character
- Once other actors are chosen, the main character is asked to verbalize his or her actions
- After the role play, the co-actors and other students provide feedback
- The main character responds to the feedback
- Homework is assigned so that students can practice the skills in natural settings
- Homework tasks become more complex over time
- Students are rewarded for mastering a particular skill
- Another student is chosen to be the main character for the role play and the previous eight steps are repeated

Sheridan et al. (2011) evaluated the Skillstreaming and its impact on four skill sets (i.e., listening, following directions, problem-solving, and knowing when to tell) in a sample of 657 adolescents. Previous

research had frequently utilized small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of program effects to diverse populations. Results from the investigation suggested that all four skills improved, as well as ratings of pro-social behaviors obtained from teachers and mental health staff, although results were moderated by the child's grade and preprogram pro-social functioning. Furthermore, according to Sheridan et al. (2011), Skillstreaming is a particularly promising program because it includes five effective elements cited in the literature (i.e. collaborative, targets early childhood, flexibility across settings and populations, generalized effects beyond setting, and evaluations of effectiveness. For more information regarding Skillstreaming, the website is accessible at: http://www.skillstreaming.com/

Stop and Think Social Skills Program, "Project Achieve"

This program is part of Project ACHIEVE, which according to the Project ACHIEVE website (2010), is an evidence-based school improvement and effectiveness program that focuses on academic and social-emotional/behavioral progress of students. The Stop and Think Social Skills Program teaches students interpersonal, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills through the use of four "Stop & Think" levels. The program can be used for students Pre-K though grade eight, and has been shown to increase productive classroom interactions, help students to be more successful, and decrease office referrals (Project ACHIEVE, 2010). For more information on Project ACHIEVE and the Stop and Think Program, visit: http://projectachieve.us/home.html .
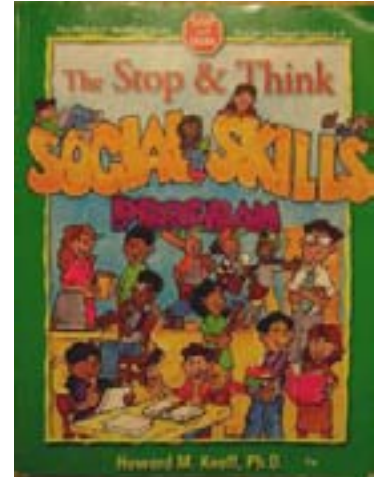
Super Skills

Used primarily with students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), this program does not have a plethora of empirical research behind it but ongoing research shows promise. The curriculum is based on 30 lessons in four areas of social skills: fundamental skills (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, voice volume and tone), social initiation skills (e.g., greeting and starting a conversation), getting along with others (e.g., recognizing teasing, negotiating, reciprocity, irony, and adjusting one's mood to match others), and social response skills (e.g. acknowledging others, following directions, offering encouragement, and reading body language; Coucouvanis & Myles, 2005). The author of Super Skills: A Social Skills Group Program for Children with Asperger Syndrome, High-Functioning Autism and Related Challenges, Judith Coucouvanis, states several unique features of the program in her 2005 book:
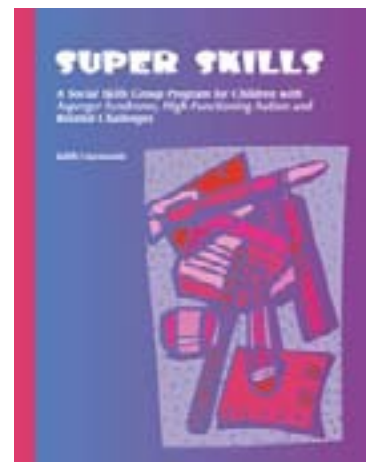
- Super Skills builds upon strengths while teaching pro-social exchanges with evenly matched peer partners
- Unscrambles each social skill into separate and tangible actions that have meaning for every student
- Orchestrates the right mix of role-plays and practice activities
- Creates a nonthreatening environment
- Encourages new social behavior and mutually satisfying relationships (p. 5)

This program is designed to be flexible and easy to administer. Teachers, psychologists, or any other personnel may be the group leader, while it is beneficial to have additional instructor support (i.e. a

co-leader) for first time leaders (Coucouvanis & Myles, 2005). Because children with ASD often miss out on the opportunity to socialize with peers, this program is focused on granting those children equal opportunities. Through modeling, rehearsal, and practice activities, these children are guided through the basic principles of social skills, ultimately encouraging one another to branch out and practice these new skills until they become natural (Coucouvanis & Myles, 2005). For more information regarding Super Skills curriculum, see Coucouvanis & Myles, 2005.

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.
See also the Related Strategy Brief:

Strawhun, J., O'Connor, A., Norris, L., & Peterson, R. L. (2014, September). Social skills instruction. Strategy brief. Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. http://k12engagement.unl.edu/social-skills-instruction.

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