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Foundations

Developing Social & Emotional Wellbeing in Early Childhood

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CHILDREN'S SERVICES MAGAZINE

Contents

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Custom photographs were taken by Limelight Creative Media and subjects were situated under cover for sun protection. This may not always be apparent as lighting techniques were used to ensure high quality images. Stock photographs are also utilised for this publication.

From the Editor

This issue is about building positive relationships with and among children. Early childhood experiences and relationships shape our sense of self and influence our capacity for positive social interactions later in life.

In each issue of *Foundations*, we aim to include articles about supporting social and emotional wellbeing in all children, as well as material on working with those who have additional needs. In this edition you will find a range of articles and activities about children's social interactions, including a piece focussing on the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders.

On the back page of this issue, we have also featured a list of telephone services and web links that may be useful in supporting your work with children and families.

The *Foundations* team has recently been collecting feedback from service providers about our publication. On behalf of the team I would like to thank all those services and individuals who completed and returned a form and those who agreed to participate in focus groups. We do understand that our data collection and follow up calls took place at a very busy time of the year, so we are particularly grateful to those who were able to share their impressions with us.

We hope you will enjoy reading this edition and that you may find some helpful tips here to share with colleagues and families.

Karen Stafford
Program Manager
Everymind

Karen Stafford

"A child can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer."

Author Unknown

Children's Social Interactions

The social interactions of babies and young children help them learn about the world and develop their own social skills. These skills are important to our mental health and wellbeing throughout life, because they help us to develop meaningful relationships and to get help and support when needed.

Babies

Babies engage in social interactions from birth, communicating mainly with their mother or primary carers. When carers are attuned to the baby's cues, such as crying and body language, and are responsive to his or her needs, the child can develop secure attachment relationships. These early experiences of attachment lay the foundations for the child's model of future relationships and social interaction.

Toddlers

Babies and toddlers gradually extend their interactions and build relationships beyond their immediate family and carers. They observe other people to see how relationships and social situations work. Toddlers often play alongside each other rather than interacting directly, but they are still watching and imitating the actions of others. Toddlers try out their emerging social skills and learn from the reactions of other children and adults. They still use lots of non-verbal communication, but gradually add words and phrases as language develops.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers develop a greater capacity to interact with others in ways that are considered socially acceptable within their culture. They still play alone at times, but also start to play more cooperatively and develop early friendships. Preschoolers can use language more effectively to express themselves and negotiate with others and they can also start to play structured games. They need positive adult guidance to help them learn how to manage new or difficult situations. Dress-ups and dramatic play can help children explore various scenarios: going to the shop, seeing the doctor, visiting another family.

Something to think about ...

How might cultural and language differences between the children's services environment and home environment be reflected in a preschooler's social interactions? How could staff best support the child's social interactions and development while in the service?

Key Social Skills

From their earliest relationships, children learn about the basic elements of positive interaction, such as smiling, making eye contact (when culturally appropriate), listening to others, making sounds or words, and using appropriate movements and body language.

Toddlers and preschoolers, who are interacting more actively with their peers and with adults, build on these basic elements to develop additional skills:

- expressing their emotions and ideas
- negotiating with other people to have needs or wants met
- developing and maintaining friendships
- resolving conflict with adults or peers
- being assertive but not aggressive, *eg* standing up for oneself
- including others, sharing and taking turns
- approaching and joining in with a group
- understanding other people's experiences and showing empathy.

Fostering Positive Social Interactions

When families and carers are attuned to the cues of babies and children and are responsive to their needs, this helps the child to learn about social interactions and relationships. This means getting to know individual babies and children and allowing time for warm and meaningful interactions. Even routine tasks like nappy changing can be an opportunity for social interaction.

Be a role model, showing children the words and tone and body language that you want them to use. We can apply this to everything from how we chat with colleagues, to how we interact with parents and families, and how we guide children's activities.

Observe children's interactions over the day and provide specific feedback through your words and through modelling. For example, you might show a shy preschooler what to say and do when they want to join in. Take the time to acknowledge positive interactions. Set up opportunities for imaginative play and role-playing.

You might also like to think about how you set up your environment and program over a day, to make sure there is plenty of time and space for both solitary activities and group activities. The team exercise on the next page will help you develop your ideas further.

References:

Fostering Children's Relationships. From *Putting Children First*, the magazine of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), Issue 29, March 2009.

http://www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Fostering_children's_relationships_Mar09.pdf

TEAM Activity: Fostering Positive Social Interactions

Many of the practices you use in your service will already be designed to foster positive social interactions with children, or to allow time and space for interaction.

As a team, work through the following list to talk about what you currently do in your service and any other approaches you might like to try.

Model positive language and social skills during your day-to-day interactions with children and with adults.	
Incorporate warm and positive social interaction into routine tasks such as nappy change, meals, packing up, *etc*.	
Provide direct and specific guidance about children's social interactions, including praising positive behaviour.	
Allow plenty of time and space in your program for group play and imaginative play among older children.	
Give children opportunities to interact with their peers and also with children of different ages and skills.	
Provide some structured activities that show or encourage positive interactions, such as games, dress-ups, stories.	
Show children what to say and do in order to join in with a group, if they seem to need support to do so.	
Help older children learn about the feelings and perspectives of other children during play and interaction.	
Help older children learn to share and take turns, during their general play and through games or activities.	
Talk to children about ways to manage anger or frustration in socially acceptable ways.	
Help children to resolve conflict fairly. Where possible, involve the children in solving the problem themselves.	
Other:	

CHILDREN'S Activity: Teddy Tales

Building Social Connections

Karen Bradbury from Paterson Preschool shares one of her strategies to help children build a sense of social connection, history, familiarity and friendship at the service.

Suzie is a Teddy Tales traveller. Suzie is a Teddy bear, the perfect size for hugs and cuddles by a preschooler. Each week she joins a preschool family for a visit to experience all the things that the family does during the week.

Suzie has a sleeping bag and a journal for families to record her adventures in. Through sharing Suzie's adventures the children find out a lot about their peers.

When Suzie returns to the preschool the children gather together and read through the journal, discussing what has been shared by the family. They also revisit Suzie's past adventures. Often there is a recurring pattern, for example Suzie attends a lot of sport with older siblings on the weekend and lots of birthday parties.

Teddy Tales is an engaging way to help children get to know one another, to recognise similar interests and also to build a sense of community and belonging. The journal has documented multiple adventures within families, often over a number of years, as siblings move through the centre. Staff have used Suzie's adventures to draw children together in new friendships as their interests are revealed.

Teddy Tales has been used as an alternative to *news* time which often saw children bringing in a toy but revealing little of their other interests and activities. For families, it helps to create a safe, comfortable way to introduce themselves and get to know their preschool community better. ●

What Captures Play?

By Pam Linke

Play is an important component of children's learning. It provides a wonderful forum for social interaction and the exploration of both social and emotional skills. In this article Pam Linke asks us to consider the staff member's role in children's play. Pam is a Parenting and Early Childhood Consultant. She is also the immediate past National President of the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health and is on the National and State executives of Early Childhood Australia.

The value of play to children's development is well known. Play is the way that children learn:

- physically through using their arms and fingers, legs and whole bodies
- socially through having to take turns, share, consider others, work out rules of games
- cognitively as they learn language to interact, think about patterns, sizes, shapes and numbers as they draw, build, dig, pour and generally manipulate things
- and emotionally as they play out their feelings when they are happy, sad, worried or angry.

The way children learn best from play is when they can *own* it, when it is not 'captured' in some way. Even as adults we do not like our play being captured. We usually don't like it when someone tells us how to do it better, or joins in and changes the rules or suggests a different game – whatever it is we are playing or doing. Yet often we capture children's play in these and other ways albeit with the best motivation of being helpful.

The concept of captured play was developed by an American psychologist, Dr James Garbarino who says that "we as caring and knowledgeable adults need to be guarantors and monitor ...as we serve as advocates for free play in the lives of children....We want them to be free to play."

So how do adults 'capture' young children's play? There are many ways.

Think of a group of small boys making up rules for a game. They take a long time making up the rules so it looks as if they will never get to the game. An adult comes along and suggests some rules to help them get on with the game. But the adult doesn't realise that making up rules *is* the game. Learning about rules is important for children and this is one of the ways they do it.

Or think of a young girl making with blocks a building that looks too curved to be a real building. An adult comes along and says: "If you place the blocks neatly on top of one another, your building will stand taller." The young girl says: "But I was building a rainbow."

Or think of a group of pre-schoolers mixing paints. Would you be tempted to say as one adult did: "Don't mix the paints, you won't have nice colours." What if the children replied: "We are making purple." The end colour may not be purple but the children were having fun together and learning a lot about colours. Most importantly they were enjoying each others' company and the relationships that they share.

Or think of a baby practising to achieve a new skill. 'Capturing' play might mean:

- taking over and doing some of it for her
- taking away what she is doing and giving her something different to do
- putting a barrier in her way to see what she will do
- changing the activity in some way *eg* this is what you do with a ball
- or moving her away to have lunch or a nappy change.

These are common examples and sometimes there is a place for them. If a child is getting upset and frustrated while trying something difficult, he might need a bit of help. If a child is doing something that might be dangerous he might need to do something different. If a child is getting tired of doing something that is no longer a challenge he might like an achievable barrier to overcome.

"If you can imagine it,
you can achieve it;
if you can dream it,
you can become it."
William Arthur Ward

The secret in all of this is to watch the baby or child and respond to how he is feeling and what he wants or needs from you. If you are unsure it is usually helpful just to say what you see. "I can see you are making a tall building." "I can see you are trying very hard to draw that." "I can see you are enjoying pushing the ball." Allow yourself to be guided by the child's reaction to your statement.

Play can be captured when things go wrong in children's lives. I was once asked to see a young boy who was always drawing very violent drawings. His teacher could not see any reason for this, and the boy was usually gentle and friendly with other people.

When I talked with his mother she told me that he had a medical condition which meant regular and painful treatment. He understood that he had to have the treatment and never complained. It seemed that the drawings were his way of expressing his feelings about what was happening to him.

Fortunately he had a sensitive teacher who did not try to prevent his drawing but instead realised that he was using his drawings to express himself. It opened the way for him to talk about his feelings and the drawings became less angry and more imaginative.

We all acknowledge the importance of play, but do we always acknowledge that play can be captured? We need to remember always to respect children's ownership of their play and to remember that they live in an adult world, a world of rules and "don't do that" and "this is how you do this" and "it's time to go now." Play is children's time for being children, as long as it is free play.

In the words of Kenneth Graham from *The Wind in the Willows* – "There is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply *messing about* ....." ●

References:

Garbarino, J. and Todd Manly, J. (1996). Free play and captured play: releasing the healing power. *International Play Journal*, 4, 123-132.

Building Relationships

Caring and consistent interactions with responsive adults are essential to healthy child development, including social and emotional development. Social and emotional development in the early years lays the foundations for our later mental health and wellbeing.

Positive early relationships can contribute to:

- developing a positive sense of self
- acquiring effective social skills
- understanding and managing emotions; and
- moral development.

Because social interactions are so important to our early development and wellbeing, building strong relationships with children lies at the heart of good early childhood practice. Early relationships help to shape a child's sense of self and provide a model on which future relationships may be built. A warm trusting relationship with family and other carers can tell children that they are liked, cared about and valued.

When a person has experienced good relationships and positive social and emotional development in early childhood, they are more likely as adults to be able to understand and manage their own behaviour and interact with others in ways that promote positive relationships.

How do staff build relationships with children?

Children's services staff can create opportunities throughout the day for meaningful social interactions with children, allowing the development of positive relationships over time. This can be done by taking the time to have warm and caring interactions with babies and children during their play and exploration as well as during routine tasks.

In the context of a busy day, this may mean making a conscious effort to allow the time and space for such relationships to develop. It can be helpful to discuss this idea as a team and to develop practical strategies that will allow staff to make relationships a high priority. Service Directors may also be able to manage staff rosters in such a way that a child has a chance to develop a special relationship with one or two carers in the service.

Getting to know children well as individuals is the key to developing strong relationships. Talk with the child's family to share important information about children's preferences, play styles and interests. You can then build these into your program and your social interactions with that child. This will enrich the time you spend together and help to strengthen your relationship.

Some other ideas that will help relationships to flourish include:

- Be prepared to spend time playing, laughing and talking with children on their terms, rather than talking *at* them or on their behalf.
- Take the time to stop and really listen to children's perspectives and their stories about what has happened at home or in the community.
- Ask questions of children that reflect their own experiences and interests, prompt them for more information.
- Be prepared to share some of your own experiences and views with children as a way of encouraging two-way communication.
- Appreciate the importance of quiet moments in the relationship – this can be just sitting together quietly, being in tune with each other's mood and activities to build a sense of companionship.
- Show empathy and respect for children and be responsive to their needs for support or additional guidance when necessary.
- Build on children's feelings of group identity and belonging in your service by providing group activities and talking about children's connections and friendships.
- Aim for consistency of care practices with the home environment, so that the child feels comfortable in the service environment.
- Work with children and families in ways that acknowledge and respect diversity, to promote a sense of belonging.

Something to think about …

How many opportunities have you taken in the last few days to have a lengthy conversation with an individual child?

What have you found out about the likes, dislikes and preferences of a child that you didn't know before?

How can staff support children in building relationships with peers?

Staff can support children's developing relationships with one another by providing the necessary physical and emotional environments, so that children have opportunities to interact and learn from each other.

Having opportunities to engage in group activities helps children to learn how to share time, space, resources and attention. They develop important prosocial skills, such as the capacity to share, take turns, develop empathy and respond to the needs of others.

Just being near other children is not enough. Children need to engage with others in the presence of adults who can guide their early explorations and social interactions.

The strategies used to guide social interactions could include:

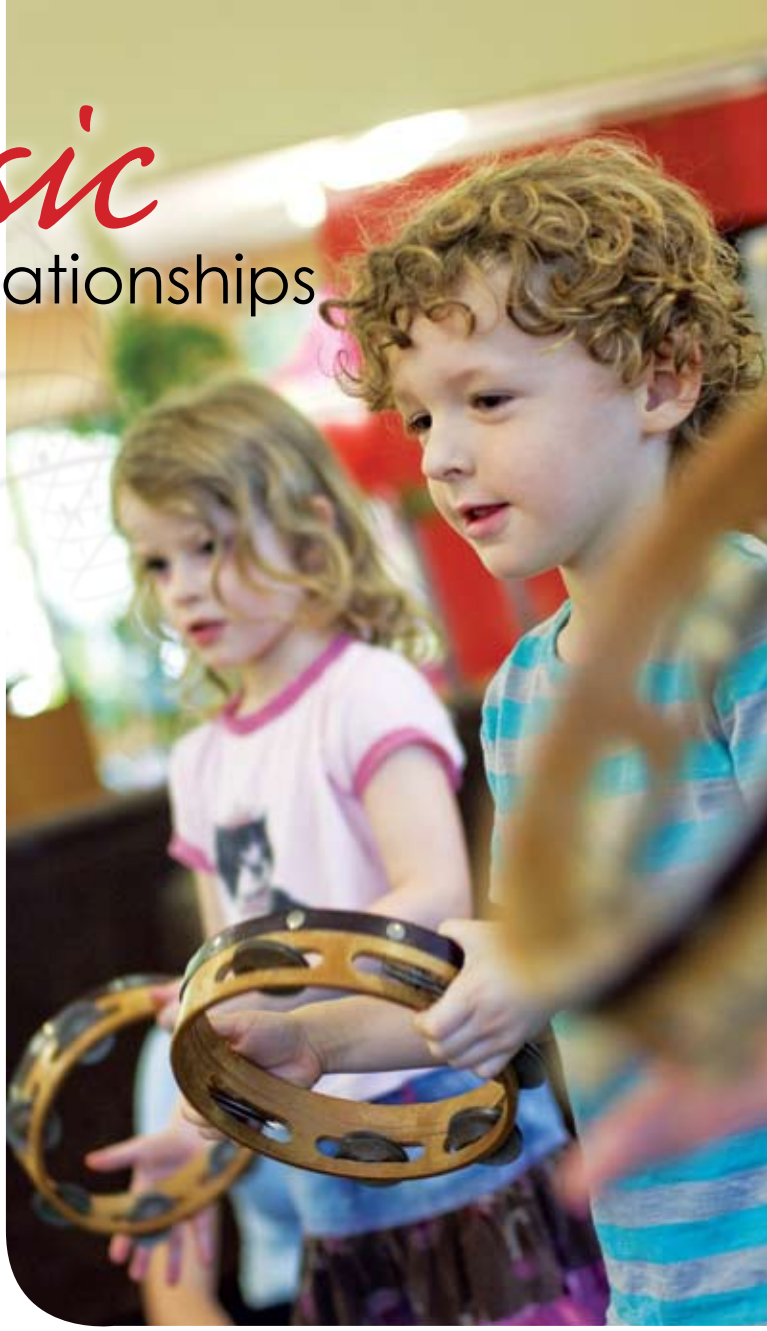
- modelling or demonstrating social skills, and providing opportunities for children to practice and try out these skills
- discussing or explaining the social situation, providing a commentary about what is happening
- reflecting with children on a social situation or a recent interaction, including identifying any differences or areas of uncertainty about the situation. This reflection may help children to consolidate their learning and identify key principles of social interaction.
- acknowledging that these skills are still emerging in young children. Sometimes skills need to be broken down into smaller tasks and expectations need to be adjusted to suit the child's individual circumstances.

The way you use these strategies will depend on the age and stage of development of the children you are working with. You may also need to adapt your approach to suit different temperaments and communication styles. A child who is shy and uncertain will need different guidance from one who is socially confident and outgoing.

You may also like to let families know about any emerging friendships a child is developing. Sometimes there are opportunities for families to support these relationships outside the service, for example through joint visits to the park, or invitations to birthday parties or other events.

Our relationships and exchanges with others form the basis for living and working cooperatively. Through their early experiences of supportive relationships, children have the opportunity to appreciate the value of positive relationships and to develop social skills that will help them throughout life. ●

Using Music to Build Relationships



By Lynette Stagg

Lynette is a Children's Services teacher for TAFE NSW. With a background in music and movement for young children, and a professional interest in social and emotional wellbeing, she has found that music can provide opportunities for self-expression, emotional empowerment and social skills development.

Music can provide a strong vehicle for supporting children in building relationships with their peers. Below are some suggestions for easy musical moments that can be used in planned or spontaneous experiences.

When using music as a way to build relationships, smaller groups of 6-8 children work best. This allows each child to develop confidence and feel comfortable to engage with their peers and express themselves freely.

Sometimes children prefer not to participate actively and their choice should be respected. Offer ways for them to be involved indirectly, such as selecting a piece of music, deciding which instruments to use, or turning the music down in a game. As they build confidence they may join in when they are ready.

Building a sense of self and a feeling of belonging

- Incorporate children's names into songs, for example using the tune to *Bee Bee Bumble Bee*. For instance, sing variations such as: "Jack can clap while we count to three", or "Can you sing your name to me?"
- Use the song *Bounce High Bounce Low*. Sing the song as children roll a ball to each other and the group says the child's name.
- Put photos of children and staff into a treasure box. Pick a photo and hold it up while singing: "I wonder what your name is?" This helps children to use and learn names.
- Help children learn to recognise their printed name prior to starting school, by holding up a name card and singing: "Look who's here, it's our friend …."

  Children can assist each other during this song. Do this even for those who are absent on the day. Often children will remind you that someone is away or sick, helping them develop connections with and empathy for their peers. Members of the group will know that they are valued, even when they're away.

Exploring diversity and individuality

Sing: “I see some children who have brown eyes, have brown eyes, have brown eyes, I see some children who have brown eyes, who are they?”

During this song children will look at themselves and each other, then they can name the others in their group to whom the song applies. You can use many variants of this: “I see some children who are wearing green …” You can also incorporate home languages for the names of body parts, colours *etc*.

Incorporate puppets with diverse skin tones to introduce songs and rhymes, helping children to explore diversity in a positive way. For example, use finger puppets of various ages, sizes, skin tones, and genders. They can be dressed in contemporary clothing, school uniforms, police uniforms or other costumes.

Introduce a puppet with a short story, then introduce a song. Encourage the group to collaborate to extend the story and then add more songs or rhymes.

CHILDREN’S **Activity:**

Resources: 1 drum and a beater and a finger puppet

Holding up the puppet, make up a name and a rhyme together, such as:

“Dean, Dean, dressed in green, went to the shop to buy some beans. How many beans did he buy?”

Hit the drum for a number of beats (under 5 to start with). Children listen and count the beats, to guess the number. Then clap and count the number as a group. Individual children can have a few turns on the drum. Encourage slow beats and suggest a number limit to stay under.

This one is often a favourite for children as they seem to really enjoy the challenge of listening and counting together.

Fostering collaboration and togetherness

- During music group, play games that encourage cooperation, turn taking and sharing rather than competition.
- Have children hold onto colourful scarves, a parachute or piece of fabric, or a *rainbow ring* made of materials of different colours and textures, emphasising how this brings all the participants together.
- Use games in which children can suggest their own ideas to be taken up by the group, building children’s self-esteem and their capacity for cooperation and negotiation.

CHILDREN'S Activity:

Resources: a rainbow ring, or coloured scarves tied to a central point.

Stand or sit in a circle facing toward the centre, with everyone holding onto the ring or their scarves. Sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* as a group. Ask children for suggestions and engage in some actions or some dramatic play on your journey. "Where can we row to? What can we see around us? Who is standing on the riverbank?" Document the activity and extend it each time. You can often add other stories and songs linked back to this original journey.

Using Instruments and Props

Being able to choose from a variety of instruments and props can be empowering for children. You can use items to help you lead the group, then have children take turns in leading.

Make a collection of props and items which can be used to enhance music groups. Apart from a range of instruments, you might also use bowls, stones, clapping sticks, flowing scarves, and various items from different cultures, which children can use to enhance their musical experience. Children can also bring in objects they value to share with the group.

Ensure that music learning centres are available inside and outside, making use of a variety of materials, so children can explore on their own or with another until they get used to group situations.

CHILDREN'S Activity:

"Music is the universal language of mankind."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Outre-Mer

Resources: a variety of percussion instruments and items from around the world; a puppet.

Allow children to choose an instrument or item that they can play. Encourage them to explore the sound and how they might use it.

Talk about playing loudly, playing quietly, and stopping. Introduce the puppet as the conductor. Have the puppet give children a signal to start play, stop play, play loudly and play softly.

After the educator has lead the children through this process a few times, invite children to take turns using the puppet as the conductor. It is amazing to see the empowerment children can experience during this musical activity. It's great for those who use languages other than English, because they can communicate effectively with other members and gain a sense of belonging.

Social Skills in Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

By Dr Sandra Heriot (University of Sydney)
and Dr Michelle Wong

Developing effective social skills is an important aspect of development in all children and contributes to positive self-esteem and wellbeing. Social skills are also important for mental health and wellbeing later in life, as they contribute to successful social interactions and the ability to maintain positive relationships.

Noah is four and goes to preschool two days a week. He seems quiet and often plays alone. Sometimes he communicates in a way that others think is unusual. Noah doesn't seem to be developing any specific friendships with other children.

Unlike many of his peers, Noah doesn't engage in imaginative play or story telling. He seems to have difficulty understanding and following instructions, and needs lots of support at transition times or when there is a change in routine.

Noah's parents talk to their GP, who refers Noah to a paediatrician. The doctor says that further observation and assessment is needed, but that Noah may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

One of the key characteristics of children and adolescents with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is that they have difficulties with social interactions.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are disorders of development in which the person experiences lifelong difficulties in three areas:

1. Social interaction
2. Imagination
3. Communication

Autism Spectrum Disorders include Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder and Atypical Autism. The word 'spectrum' is used because the type and severity of the difficulties experienced vary from person to person.

People with ASD find it hard to understand and cope with their social environment. They have difficulty picking up and responding to the social cues of other people and keeping up a conversation, sharing and listening to the other person. These difficulties with social interaction can occur independently of any problems in their cognitive functioning.

Children with ASD show relationships with their peers and adults that are not developmentally appropriate. They may show little or no interest in interacting with others and be unable to share in other people's enjoyment and interests. They appear socially awkward and fail to use the appropriate body language, facial expression or eye contact for a given situation.

Children with ASD may be unable to understand or consider the feelings and thoughts of other people. This is sometimes described as a deficit in 'theory of mind'. These children cannot easily 'put themselves in someone else's shoes' and may not understand why another person acts or responds in a particular way.

Many children with ASD become socially isolated, which can be difficult for parents and carers. Some children have no interest in interacting with other people. Others will approach their peers with the right intentions but are not sure how to make contact or don't have the required skills. Those with ASD may be ignored, left out, teased or bullied and as a result can become wary of approaching other children.

Social Skills Programs

There is increasing awareness of the value of social skills training, both for children with and without ASD. This means there are now more social skills programs and other resources available for parents, carers, clinicians and teachers who work with children who have ASD.

Such programs cover the skills needed for playing, having conversations and managing difficult social situations. Most have been developed as general programs to help all children, while some have been developed specifically for children with ASD. These take into account the learning styles and social difficulties particular to these disorders.

In developing strategies to support a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, children's services staff will find it helpful to work closely with the family and with a child psychologist or early intervention support agency. The child's behaviour needs to be observed carefully to identify what specific skills should be supported.

When choosing social skills to teach, consideration is given to whether the expected skills are developmentally appropriate for the child, given their age and stage of development. Do other children at a similar stage display the same skills?

Breaking a skill down into parts will help to identify any prerequisite skills that may need to be taught before moving on to more complex ones. For example, to teach a child to have a conversation, she must first know how to greet people, how to string words together to form a comment or question, and how to take turns in a conversation.

Social Stories

'Social Stories' and 'Comic Strip Conversations' are examples of teaching methods developed specifically for children with ASD. They can be used by health professionals, parents, teachers or others who work with a child or young person.

Social stories are short descriptions that show a confusing or complex social situation in a concrete way, written according to specific guidelines. Social stories describe social cues and the thoughts and reactions of other people, and suggest ways in which one could behave in the situation. They are particularly useful for providing information about new social situations.

Carol Gray, the developer of social stories, has edited some widely-available books that include several sample stories, and a guide to developing your own social stories to assist a child.

Social stories can provide missing information for the child and help them to better understand relationships and social interactions. When a child understands social situations better, they can learn socially accepted ways to interact with others and also use stories to recognise their own accomplishments. This can help children to become calmer and less anxious, leading to positive self-esteem and greater independence.

Comic strip conversations are simple drawings that can help children with ASD to understand the meaning of a conversation and develop skills in expressing themselves. Line drawings are used to represent two people having a conversation. The comic strip is illustrated in real time, with the conversation happening between the child with ASD and another person.

In comic strip conversations, speech bubbles represent what is being said, while thought bubbles show the likely thoughts of a person. This helps to illustrate the perspectives of different people and improve the child's understanding of conversations. The bubbles may be coloured to show how people in the conversation are feeling. For example, yellow might mean that a person is happy, blue may mean they are upset.

Comic book conversations are well-suited for use with older children who have developed reading skills. However, carers of younger children could also try reading the conversation aloud with the child, while showing them the pictures and talking about the feelings of the characters.

Other Considerations

When children or young people with ASD can understand and use certain social skills in one setting, they may still find it hard to transfer these skills to a more natural context.

For example, a child who learns a skill while working with a health professional might have difficulty applying that skill in real-life situations at preschool or at home. It is important that children with ASD have opportunities to practice the skills they learn across a number of different situations, working with different people to assist in this process.

To best support a child with ASD, a close partnership will be needed between the family, children's services staff and health professionals. Ideally, all of the adults who care for and support the child should use similar tools to help him or her learn about social skills.

Adults will also need to consistently model the desired social interactions and can help by showing and describing exactly how to identify social cues and body language. Often we take these cues for granted, but some children, including those with ASD, can benefit from having them pointed out.
For example: "Noah, see how Melissa is smiling and reaching out to you with her arm? She wants you to come and join in with the other children …"

A close partnership is needed between the family, children's services staff and health professionals

Encouraging positive social interaction and developmentally-appropriate skills is not only important for children with ASD, but for the positive development of all children. With support and guidance from adults, other children can also benefit from their interactions and friendships with those who have ASD. Such interactions encourage a greater understanding of social diversity and the capacity to be inclusive of the needs of other people. ●

Resources:

Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT): www.autismspectrum.org.au

Resource list at:
http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=147&Itemid=622

www.autismspectrum.org.au

Useful Links and Help Lines

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care	www.snaicc.asn.au
Childhood trauma, loss and grief	www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au
Children of parents with mental illness	www.copmi.net.au
Children's health fact sheets	www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets
Community Services, NSW	www.community.nsw.gov.au
Domestic violence line NSW	1800 656 463
Lifeline - telephone counselling	13 11 14
Mental Health Services, NSW Health	www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnemh
Parent Line - advice and referral	1300 1300 52
Parenting resources and information	www.raisingchildren.net.au

THIS MAGAZINE BELONGS TO:

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT

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This magazine is produced for children's services staff, with children's services staff. If you would like to contribute to this magazine by sharing your experiences with us please contact the institute at: **everymind@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au**

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