Evidence Based Practices in School Mental Health: Social Skills

Social skills are important for everyone and critical to successful functioning in life. Mental health professionals practicing in schools have the ability to teach social skills to students who have difficulties with social interactions in comparison to their peers. There are many social skills programs available for sale, therefore what should a school mental health professional look for when examining these curriculums?

Background Information
Though the debate goes back and forth—is it the family or the school’s job to teach a child social skills?—the reality is that educators and mental health professionals in schools need to be continually reinforcing positive social skills through direct and indirect instruction (NASP, 2002). An increased number of children are coming to school without the adequate repertoire of social skills required to help them strengthen interpersonal relationships and facilitate success in school (Knoff, 2002; MASP, 2002). Due to this increase, it is imperative that school professionals partner with families to facilitate this social learning process.

So, that being said, what are the elements of effective social skills interventions?

To begin with, the most effective social skills programs are comprised of two key elements: “a teaching process that uses a behavior/social learning approach and a universal language or set of steps that facilitates the learning of the new behavior” (NASP, 2002). In addition, a systematic approach is also essential to the social and emotional learning process, and it is critical that supportive and responsive relationships are in place to help the student as they learn the skills (Hemmeter, 2005).

Other key elements to keep in mind when looking at social skills programs are training and support for parents and the comprehensiveness of the program. In research, programs with a parent education/support component have been shown to be more effective, and interventions that are adapted and targeted to meet individual or group needs have shown the most success (Hemmeter, 2005; NASP, 2002).

Disclaimer
The information gathered for this evidence-based practice sheet is a summary of common practices and definitions found in recent literature. This summary is by no means a comprehensive representation of all information, definitions, programs, and standards to be found. The listing of a specific program within this sheet does not constitute as an endorsement from CDE for the program.

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Level of Intervention</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Type of research conducted (Stringent research – research design, random assignment; Research – mixed method, random sampling; Applied with Fidelity – outcome measures)</th>
<th>Research Sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>S.S. Grin (Social Skills Group Intervention)</td>
<td>3-C Institute for Social Development: <a href="http://www.3cisd.com/index.php">http://www.3cisd.com/index.php</a></td>
<td>Targeted</td>
<td>Grades K-5</td>
<td>Stringent Research</td>
<td>3rd graders with significant peer relationship difficulties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Stories</td>
<td>The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding: <a href="http://www.thegraycenter.org/Social_Stories.htm">http://www.thegraycenter.org/Social_Stories.htm</a></td>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>Children diagnosed with Autism</td>
<td>Applied with Fidelity</td>
<td>Children diagnosed with Autism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incredible Years: Dina Dinosaur Curriculum</td>
<td>Incredible Years: <a href="http://www.incredibleyears.com">http://www.incredibleyears.com</a></td>
<td>Universal Targeted Intensive</td>
<td>Ages 4-8</td>
<td>Stringent Research</td>
<td>Multiple studies with ages 4-8 with varying levels of conduct disorder; Prevention studies also completed for ages 4-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning for Life</td>
<td><a href="http://www.learning-for-life.org">www.learning-for-life.org</a></td>
<td>Universal Targeted</td>
<td>Grades K-12</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2,500 2nd, 4th, and 6th graders across the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skillstreaming</td>
<td>Research Press: <a href="http://www.skillstreaming.com/">http://www.skillstreaming.com/</a></td>
<td>Targeted Intensive</td>
<td>Grades K-12</td>
<td>All levels of research: Stringent Research Research Applied with Fidelity</td>
<td>Multiple studies over 30 years with all age groups and grades focusing mostly on students with problem behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resources

Hamilton Fish Institute: http://hamfish.org/programs/
Incredible Years: Dina Dinosaur Classroom: http://www.incredibleyears.com/index.htm
NASP Center: http://www.naspcenter.org/factsheets/
Promising Practices Network: http://www.promisingpractices.net/
What Works Clearinghouse: http://www.w-w-c.org/

References