

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

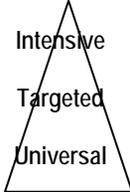
education/support component have been shown to be more effective, and interventions that are adapted and targeted to meet individual or group needs have shown the most success (Hemmeter, 2005; NASP, 2002).

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

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Program	Publisher	Level of Intervention 	Target Population	Type of research conducted (Stringent research-research design, random assignment; Research – mixed method, random sampling; Applied with Fidelity – outcome measures)	Research Sample
S.S. Grin (Social Skills Group Intervention) <i>Summary:</i> This intervention is designed to be a general social skills intervention for small groups that can be applied to many social concerns.	3-C Institute for Social Development: http://www.3cisid.com/index.php	Targeted	Grades K-5	Stringent Research	3 rd graders with significant peer relationship difficulties
Social Stories <i>Summary:</i> A social story is a short story that has been written to help a person with Autism understand social situations.	The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding: http://www.thegraycenter.org/Social_Stories.htm	Intensive	Children diagnosed with Autism	Applied with Fidelity	Children diagnosed with Autism
Incredible Years: Dina Dinosaur Curriculum <i>Summary:</i> The Dinosaur child training curriculum strengthens children's social and emotional competencies such as understanding and communicating feelings, using effective problem solving strategies, managing anger, practicing friendship and conversational skills, as well as appropriate classroom behaviors.	Incredible Years: http://www.incredibleyears.com	Universal Targeted Intensive	Ages 4-8	Stringent Research	Multiple studies with ages 4-8 with varying levels of conduct disorder; Prevention studies also completed for ages 4-8
Learning for Life <i>Summary:</i> This program series offers seven programs to help children navigate social issues, improve self-confidence, motivation, and self esteem: Seekers (K-2 nd grade), Discoverers (3 rd -4 th grade), Challengers (5 th -6 th grade), Builders (7 th -8 th grade), and Navigators (9 th -12 th grade)	www.learning-for-life.org	Universal Targeted	Grades K-12	Research	2,500 2 nd , 4 th , and 6 th graders across the United States
Primary Mental Health Project (PMHP) <i>Summary:</i> An early detection/prevention program, PMHP addresses emotional and behavioral problems (e.g., aggression and withdrawal) that interfere with effective learning. The program uses play and relationship techniques to resolve home and school difficulties.	Sharing Success Programs network: http://www.sharingsuccess.org/code/eptw/profiles/48.html	Targeted Intensive	Grades K-3	Research	Multiple studies with elementary students across the United States.
Skillstreaming <i>Summary:</i> Addresses the social skill needs of students who display aggression, immaturity, withdrawal, or other problem behaviors. It is designed to help youngsters develop competence in dealing with interpersonal conflicts, learn to use self-control, and contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere.	Research Press: http://www.skillstreaming.com/	Targeted Intensive	Grades K-12	All levels of research: Stringent Research Research Applied with Fidelity	Multiple studies over 30 years with all age groups and grades focusing mostly on students with problem behaviors

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/>

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What Works Clearinghouse: <http://www.w-w-c.org/>

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