



OKLAHOMA AUTISM NETWORK

The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

ON A ROAD TO... SOMEWHERE? ANYWHERE?
AND HOW ON EARTH DO WE GET THERE??
**CREATING A ROAD OF POSSIBILITIES IN
THE MIDDLE CHILDHOOD YEARS**

CONNECTION, FRIENDSHIPS AND JOY
WEBINAR WORKSHEET

About this Webinar:

This webinar dives into the significance of joy and friendship in the lives of our loved ones with ASD. Specifically, we will explore the role that executive function plays as the behavioral building blocks of friendship. We will also highlight skills to consider when building capacity and confidence in regard to friendships during the middle childhood years.

Purpose of this Worksheet:

This worksheet is a tool you can use during the webinar to take notes about how you can apply the information you learn. There is also a resource guide for parents and professionals to refer to when creating an intentional plan to build opportunities and skills related to social relationships.

The content included is general information and is not specific medical or behavioral advice. The information provided may not work for every child with autism or their family. We recommend working closely with your child's doctor(s), therapist(s), and/or educator to discuss how the ideas shared may be individualized to meet your child's needs. If you have an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

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PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

When thinking about how to set your child up for success when practicing friendship-related skills, it may be helpful to have a framework of questions to consider. Here are some themes and questions to help you consider the moments, people, and activities that your child currently enjoys and finds personally motivating.

<p>Strengths</p> <p><i>What are my child's strengths?</i></p> <p><i>What comes easily for my child?</i></p> <p><i>What is working well for my child?</i></p>	
<p>Interests</p> <p><i>What are the topics or activities that my child enjoys?</i></p> <p><i>What does my child like to do in his/her spare time?</i></p>	
<p>Joy</p> <p><i>What are the moments and activities that bring my child joy and happiness?</i></p> <p><i>What are the skills or activities that give my child a sense of pride?</i></p>	
<p>Connection</p> <p><i>Who are the people that my child enjoys to be around? Why does he/she enjoy that person? How can I tell when my child feels comfortable and/or connected with someone?</i></p>	
<p>Create Opportunities</p> <p><i>When does my child spend time with children with similar interests?</i></p> <p><i>What opportunities are available in my community?</i></p> <p><i>What could I do to help create friendship opportunities for my child?</i></p>	



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Executive Functioning Skills:

Executive Functions (EF) are a group of interrelated, complex mental abilities that are involved in planning and initiating goals and carrying them through despite interruptions (Salimpoor & Desrocher, 2006).

Our brains air traffic control system.

Some of the executive functioning skills that contribute to making and keeping friends are:

- *Response inhibition* - The ability to think before you act. Thinking about how your behavior can impact a situation.
- *Emotional control* - The ability to manage emotions, control and direct behavior to accomplish a task.
- *Sustained attention* - The capacity to keep paying attention to a situation or task in spite of distractions, boredom, or fatigue.
- *Flexibility* - The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes.
- *Metacognition* - The ability to stand back and take a bird's eye view of yourself in a situation. Self monitoring and self evaluation.

What executive functioning skills does my child need to work on to help him/her develop friendships?

What are some things we can do at home to help develop these skills?

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Practice Plan Example – Paul: Paul is very verbal, he loves science and often talks about science and often talks about it with other people, he has difficulty reading other people’s emotions and when upset can yell and may call people names.

<p style="text-align: center;">Skill to Teach</p> <p><i>How will this skill help my child make friends? Can I build on this skill as my child grows? Does this skill match my child's interests? Is this a skill that could open opportunities for my child to make friends? How do I teach my child his/her "why" this is important to learn?</i></p>	<p>Paul could benefit from practicing having conversations about topics other than science, working on asking people questions about them, and learning better ways of dealing with frustration. These are skills we can build on as he gets older. Improving these skills will help Paul interact better with his peers and may help him make more friends. He is very interested in having friends and talking to him about how these skills will help may motivate him to practice.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Routine/Activity</p> <p><i>When could we practice this skill? Is this a skill we can practice every day so that my child can get enough practice opportunities?</i></p>	<p>We can practice conversations about various topics in the evening during dinner or before bedtime, in the car on the way home from school, and on the weekends. We can work on teaching some new ways of managing frustrations and then remind Paul to use these skills when he gets frustrated with a situation at home.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Breaking the Skill Down Into Steps</p> <p><i>What are the individual steps for this skill? Are there step(s) my child can already do? Are there steps that match my child's interests or preferences?</i></p>	<p>Practicing conversations – We can give Paul some example questions he can ask people to check in about their day or ask about something they like. He is great at asking questions but needs help asking questions that aren’t just about his interests. He has good verbal skills and can help us identify ways to help him deal with his frustrations more appropriately.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Supports for Learning</p> <p><i>What kind of visuals could help my child learn this skill? Am I going to model the entire skill or each step by itself? Would my child be more likely to start learning the skill if we started as partners?</i></p>	<p>We can use role play to practice having conversations about different topics. Paul may like to have a piece of paper with some sample questions to ask while we are practicing. We can also work together to create a picture or written cues to remind him to use more appropriate ways of dealing with frustration.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Positive Reinforcement</p> <p><i>How will I show/tell my child I see how hard my child is working to learn this new skill? Is there a natural reinforcer that is gained by doing the skill?</i></p>	<p>Paul loves positive feedback. We can praise him when he uses his new skills, such as asking people questions about topics other than his interests. We can also praise him when he uses more appropriate ways of dealing with frustration. We can consider ways of reinforcing his efforts with work towards a new science game or a trip to the zoo.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Reflect and Adjust</p> <p><i>What went well? Is there something I can change to help my child be more successful?</i></p>	<p>Paul has done great working on these skills with the family. We invited a neighbor to go with us to the Zoo on our next trip. Before we go we will work on practicing questions and conversation skills before we go.</p>



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Practice Plan Example – Meg: Meg is six years old. She communicates through single words and use of a communication device. She likes to draw and play simple games. She also enjoys playing outside.

<p>Skill to Teach</p> <p><i>How will this skill help my child make friends? Can I build on this skill as my child grows? Does this skill match my child's interests? Is this a skill that could open opportunities for my child to make friends? How do I teach my child his/her "why" this is important to learn?</i></p>	<p>Meg likes to draw or play outside. She seeks out interactions with peers but for short periods of time. She could benefit from working on staying engaged with other people for longer periods of time, and taking turns without becoming frustrated. These are skills we can build on as she gets older. Improving these skills will help Meg engage with peers for longer periods of time and will create opportunities for her to join peers in simple games.</p>
<p>Routine/Activity</p> <p><i>When could we practice this skill? Is this a skill we can practice every day so that my child can get enough practice opportunities?</i></p>	<p>We can work on increasing the amount of time Meg stays engaged by joining her during some of her preferred activities, being positive, and praising her. We can work on taking turns during time playing outside at home and when we play games or with toys in the evenings.</p>
<p>Breaking the Skill Down Into Steps</p> <p><i>What are the individual steps for this skill? Are there step(s) my child can already do? Are there steps that match my child's interests or preferences?</i></p>	<p>Practicing – We can practice taking turns during play at home. We can use predictable language like 'My turn, Meg's turn.' We can teach her siblings and the next door neighbor who plays with the kids to use this language as well.</p>
<p>Supports for Learning</p> <p><i>What kind of visuals could help my child learn this skill? Am I going to model the entire skill or each step by itself? Would my child be more likely to start learning the skill if we started as partners?</i></p>	<p>We model turn taking with Meg's siblings and prompt Meg to take turns. We may use a timer to help Meg practice playing for longer periods of time.</p>
<p>Positive Reinforcement</p> <p><i>How will I show/tell my child I see how hard my child is working to learn this new skill? Is there a natural reinforcer that is gained by doing the skill?</i></p>	<p>Meg loves smiles, positive words, and hugs. We can use praise when she is taking turns. Being more animated and involved in games and outdoor activities with her will be naturally reinforcing and may increase the time she stays engaged with us.</p>
<p>Reflect and Adjust</p> <p><i>What went well? Is there something I can change to help my child be more successful?</i></p>	<p>Meg is taking turns without any prompts with both her siblings and the neighbor. She is staying engaged in activities with peers for longer periods of time. We are working to expand the variety of activities when she will engage and play with peers and siblings.</p>



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Practice Plan -

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RESOURCES

The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autism

By Ellen Sabin

The Autism Acceptance Book is an activity book, a conversation-starter, and an educational tool that engages children in learning to embrace people's differences and treat others with respect, compassion, and kindness. It teaches children about autism; helps them imagine how things might feel for those with autism, and lets them think of ways to be understanding and accepting to people with autism. Ideal for children 6-13 and classrooms and other group settings. Available on Amazon and Watering Can Press.

Engaging with Classmates Who Have Autism, Marcus Autism Center

<https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/engaging-with-classmates-who-have-autism>

As autism awareness grows and more children are being diagnosed, it is more likely that a child will have a classmate with ASD. This article guides parents in how to explain autism in an age-appropriate way and provides tips for being a better friend to someone with autism.

Kit for Kids, Organization for Autism Research

<https://researchautism.org/resources/kit-for-kids/>

This online program is designed to teach elementary and middle school students about their peers with autism. The kit includes an online video, poster, booklet, friendship tip sheets, and workbooks with grade-specific activities designed to be worked on independently or as a group. Many of the materials are free to download and print materials can be ordered on their website.

Helping Kids with Autism Make Friends, Marcus Autism Center

<https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/helping-kids-with-autism-make-friends>

The Marcus Autism Center has published an online article that discusses six ways for parents to help their child with ASD learn the skills related to forming friendships.

The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults

By Elizabeth A. Laugeson, Psy.D.

This book and accompanying DVD is based on the PEERS program at UCLA. While the focus of the book is on teens and young adults, it can help parents and providers working with children 6-12 years of age better understand the skills that are involved in creating and maintaining social relationships. Rules and steps for social skills, ideas for improving conversational skills, tips for expanding social opportunities, strategies for handling peer rejection and bullying, and other topics are addressed. Available on Amazon and Jossey-Bass.

The Oklahoma Autism Network strongly encourages families and providers to review these materials for goodness of fit before sharing them with the individuals they support.



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Socially Savvy: An Assessment and Curriculum Guide for Young Children

By James T. Ellis, Ph.D., BCBA and Christine Almeida, M.S.Ed., BCBA

This book helps parents and educators break down broad areas of social functioning into concrete skills. It covers seven areas of social development, skill-specific IEP objectives, step-by-step teaching plans, 50 games and activities for teaching specific social skills, visual supports, and social stories for discussions of targeted social skills. Available on Amazon and Different Roads.

Crafting Connections: Contemporary Applied Behavior Analysis for Enriching the Social Lives of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By the Autism Partnership – Mitchell Taubman, Ph.D., Ron Leaf, Ph.D., and John McEachin, Ph.D. with additional contributing authors

Presented as a social skills curriculum for individuals with ASD, this book includes information on the importance of intentionally teaching social skills as well how to teach social skills in areas such as social awareness, social communication, social interaction, social learning, and social relatedness. Available on Amazon and Different Roads.

Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary Executive Skills Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential

By Peg Dawson, EdD, and Richard Guare, PhD

Executive skills are the fundamental brain-based skills required to execute tasks: getting organized, planning, initiating work, staying on task, controlling impulses, regulating emotion, and being adaptable. This book includes easy-to-follow steps to identify your child's strengths and weaknesses, activities and techniques proven to boost specific skills, and guides the reader through how to problem-solve daily routines. Helpful worksheets and forms can be downloaded for purchasers of this book. Focus age group is 4-13 years old. Available on Amazon and Guilford Press.

Flexible and Focused: Teaching Executive Function Skills to Individuals with Autism and Attention Disorders

By Adel C. Najdowski

This book was written for professionals and parents to use when teaching executive function skills. It provides practical strategies for teaching learners to be focused, organized, flexible, and able to effectively manage themselves. Ready-to-use lessons, data sheets, worksheets, and other tools can be found in this book. Available on Amazon and Elsevier Inc.

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