

Designing reasonable adjustments to support school inclusion

for children with a disability

Evidence Review Summary

Social Skills Groups

A great deal of research has demonstrated the capacity of children with autism to learn social skills in group settings. The advantage of a social skills group is the opportunity to practice skills in a supportive environment, with feedback and shaping of appropriate skills. The disadvantage is that often researchers find that only the targeted skills show improvements, that skills for which explicit rules or scripts can be taught (e.g. greetings) are learned better than skills for which the rules are vague (e.g. conversation), and that skills are hard to generalize from the clinic to school or community settings. Researchers also identify that children with autism have more difficulty interacting with peers than adults, which may be due the increased flexibility and empathy of the adults who know the child has autism or are more experienced interacting with individuals with a range of social skills. Because schools may lack a sufficient number of children with autism to host a social skills group, researchers have also examined the effects of peer-mediated interventions, engaging school peers without autism to act as peer buddies or facilitators. Various programs that teach typically developing peers how to better reach out to, include, and socially instruct peers with autism in school or community settings have shown that this approach enhances social skills for children with autism above and beyond adult-led direct social skill instruction.

Further reading:

- Barry, T.D., Klinger, L.G., Lee, J.M. et al. *J Autism Dev Disord* (2003) 33: 685. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JADD.0000006004.86556.e0>
- Duncan, A. W., & Klinger, L. G. (2010). Autism spectrum disorders: Building social skills in group, school, and community settings. *Social Work with Groups*, 33(2-3), 175-193.
- Hotton, M., & Coles, S. (2016). The effectiveness of social skills training groups for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 3(1), 68-81.
- Kasari, C., Rotheram-Fuller, E., Locke, J., & Gulsrud, A. (2012). Making the connection: Randomized controlled trial of social skills at school for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(4), 431-439.