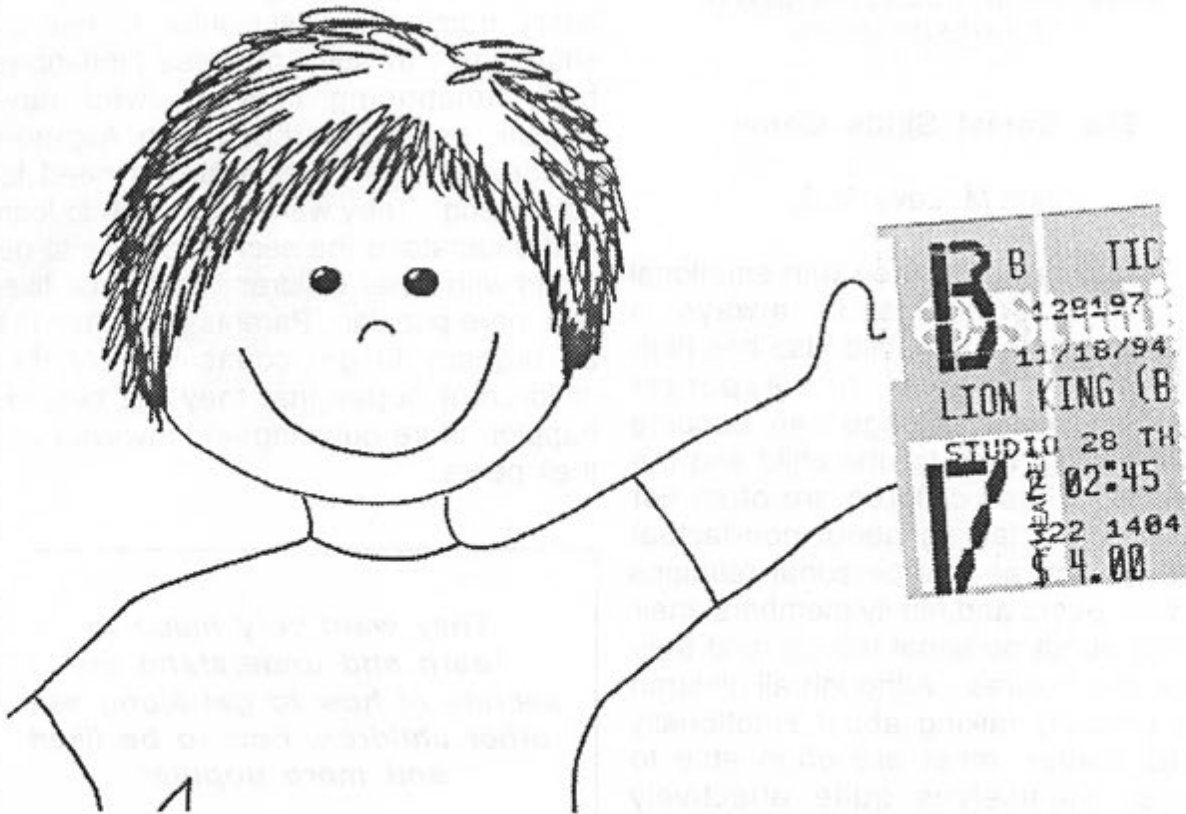




THE Jenison Public Schools MORNING NEWS Winter '94

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities
and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding



A new use for cookie crumbs and ticket stubs! *See page 8.*

THE MORNING NEWS is a publication of Jenison Public Schools, Jenison, Michigan

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Note: Due to limited space, the article, "Can We Teach Theory of Mind?" by Carol Gray, originally planned for this issue, will appear in the Spring '95 issue.

Ordering

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Address**
Jenison High Sch
Carol Gray, Editor



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ay (see article, pg. 8)

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Editor's Note: Stine M. Levy, M.S., is an Educational and Behavioral Consultant in Bloomington, Indiana. We wish to thank her for submitting the following article, and sharing her ideas with subscribers to THE MORNING NEWS.

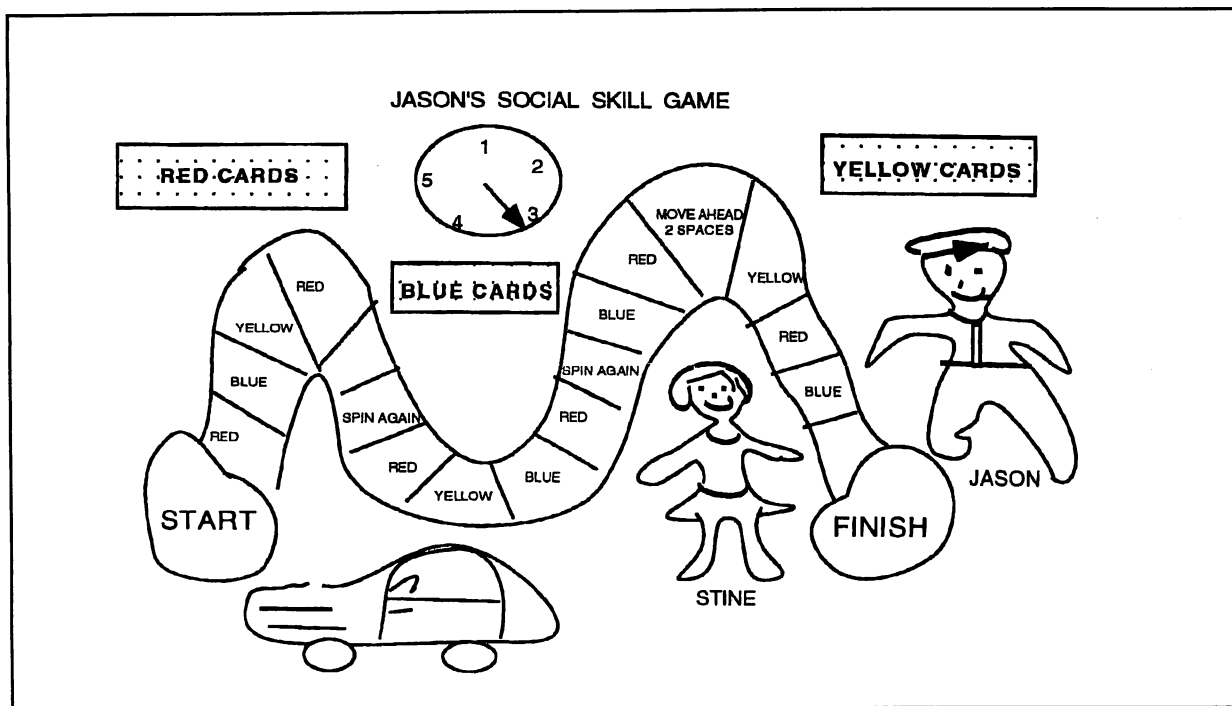
The Social Skills Game

-Stine M. Levy, M.S.

Counseling children with emotional and social problems is always a challenge. When the child also has high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome, the challenge can become overwhelming, both for the child and the therapist. These children are often not very adept at talking about non-factual matters, such as interpersonal relations with their peers and family members, their feelings about personal issues, and their hopes and desires. Although all children have difficulty talking about emotionally loaded matter, most are often able to express themselves quite effectively through play or drawings. Children on the autistic spectrum are seldom able to do so

because they usually have such restricted play and drawing interests that they are not good at using these two media to represent their feelings and thoughts. In addition, they don't generalize learning easily from a therapist's office to real life situations. In spite of these limitations, high functioning children who have autism, especially those with Asperger Syndrome, often feel a strong need for counseling. They want very much to learn and understand the secrets of how to get along with other children, how to be liked and more popular. Parents also often feel an urgency to get counseling for their children in hopes that they will become happier, more outgoing and involved with their peers.

They want very much to learn and understand the secrets of how to get along with other children, how to be liked and more popular.



Up until about five or six years ago, I was reluctant to provide counseling services for children who have high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome. I tried to persuade parents that I could work more effectively and efficiently through them, teaching them to become, in a sense, their child's therapist or social skills trainer. But parents persisted and continued to pressure for counseling for their children, to supplement the work they were doing with me. So I decided to experiment with a format that I felt had some chance of succeeding. I felt that successful counseling would need to incorporate the following elements: 1) a way to help children communicate more easily, 2) a structured and predictable format, 3) a heavy emphasis on visual input, 4) some way of getting input and feedback from parents, 5) a built in system for transferring learning to real-life settings, and 6) an approach that at least on the surface is logical in order to satisfy the children's strong need for logic and order.

In addition, I wanted a format that children would enjoy and look forward to. What I came up with is a Social Skills Game, which I have been using very successfully now for five or six years. Although I have not done any systematic research with this technique, parents' as well as children's comments have persuaded me that the technique has merit. Since I make a new game for each child, the social and emotional situations that we focus on are highly individualized. For this reason, the game format works for a wide age range of children. I have used it with children as young as 4 years and as old as 15 years.

During the initial counseling session, I usually ask if the child would like to make a game that would help us talk. Most children welcome the suggestion. During the following session, using magic markers on vinyl cloth, the child and I draw a game board (see above). The game layout can be as elaborate and artistic as the child's

interests and abilities permit. Based on information provided by the child and parents during the previous and subsequent sessions, I prepare cards that drive the game. I usually prepare three different types of cards to create some level of suspense and build in a measure of fun, as the child and I work on problems that have caused nothing but frustrations and feelings of failure in the past. Red cards, which will be described in more detail later, are the heart of the game and describe a variety of social situations that present difficulty for the child. Blue cards are fun things to do, such as "Pat your head while you rub your tummy", "Stand up and jump" or "Count backwards from 15 to 1". Yellow cards are surprises, such as "Take another turn", "Move back to the nearest red space", "Move your opponent back three spaces". Sometimes I add an informational category for older children, eliciting responses in their particular area of interest, such as "What is a paleontologist?" "Name five planets", "Describe a tyrannosaurus."

Red cards are highly individualized and describe specific situations in which the child has had difficulties in the past. Sometimes parents prepare cards for me describing situations at home or at school. Examples of red cards are:

Jason sees Brad at the shopping mall. Brad says, "Hi Jason." What should Jason do?

Your mother tells you it's time for lunch. You want to finish your Atari game. What should you do?

Jason accidentally broke his mother's vase while chasing the dog in the living room. His mother is angry. What should Jason do?

Jason doesn't like the bright lights at a friend's house. They make him feel jittery. What can Jason do?

Your brother is being a pest. You want to be left alone but he wants you to play ball with him. What should you do?

I constantly add new red cards as parents or the child describe new social situations causing problems. One child tried to tell me about a conflict with another child that occurred at school the previous week; he had a hard time describing what happened, so he asked if we couldn't get out his social skills game. He had no difficulty dictating a game card describing the problem. The structure and visual input of the card seemed to help him communicate.

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The game can be played with a spinner instead of dice, which is easier and more fun for young children. My favorite type of spinner is a Chanukah dreidle with numbers marked on each of the four sides. Both the children and I enjoy the challenge of putting a good spin

on the dreidle; this is fun in and of itself. If you let the dreidle spin on a small plate or saucer, it is less likely to run away from you. Older children, especially, seem to enjoy the dreidle. Of course if you have a child or a therapist who is a bit stuffy, you can always use dice.

When a player lands on a red space, we try to figure out a good response for the situation described on the top red card. In a sense, the stated problem and solution we develop constitute a social story a la Carol Gray.

Not all solutions are necessarily what parents would hope.

The more we play the game, the more opportunities the child has to repeat the agreed upon strategy. As time goes on, we may decide to elaborate on the solution or develop alternative solutions.

After the child is thoroughly familiar with the strategies and solutions that we have agreed on, we invite parents, siblings, and/or neighborhood friends to play the game with us. Sometimes with very young children I include parents from the very beginning. Involving parents and significant others in the game permits them to become sensitive to and aware of the approaches we are taking to solving problems.

Not all solutions are necessarily what parents would hope. For instance, I often try to teach children to negotiate with parents and peers as an alternative to complying passively or, more likely, refusing at all cost. After parents have

become familiar with our social strategies, I encourage them to gently prompt the child, if necessary to use the strategy in real life situations that are similar to the ones described on cards. For instance, I urge them to ask the child, "What did you and Stine decide to do when this happens?" Later, parents are encouraged to fade their reminders, with prompts such as, "This sounds very much like your game." or "You already know what to do."

Parents report that children do in fact learn to generalize solutions. Many times they report that the child will say verbatim what we have been rehearsing by means of the game. And that is ok. As they have more success in social situations, children will have the confidence to vary their responses. Often times, when counseling is terminated the child asks to take the game home. What a wonderful way to bridge the transition to a new stage! I encourage families to keep adding new cards and to continue playing as long as the child shows an interest in his social skills game.

Editor's Note:

Our next issue will feature an article by guest author Martin Sawzin, Ph.D., Consultant in Interactional Development, Newton, Massachusetts.

We welcome your articles and ideas!

Deadline for submissions for the Spring '95 issue is January 27, 1995.

Editor's Note: Dale Ranson is a teacher of students with autism at Jenison High School, Jenison, Michigan. We wish to thank Dale for the following article.

Students with Autism in the Mainstream

..we have found that it works to integrate students into advanced classes such as calculus or advanced language arts classes.

-Dale Ranson

The first assumption we make with each of our students is that they belong with other students their own age. Anytime we can provide them with this opportunity we must. More and more we realize that what students get out of general classrooms cannot be taught in a "special" classroom and is almost certainly more important. Giving them the chance to achieve in this setting is vital. As Napoleon said, "Ability is of little importance without opportunity." Not to mention the importance and opportunity provided to the other students.

To achieve this type of integration we use several methods. The following is a brief explanation of the programs we have in operation.

Inclusion in General Classrooms

We try to have our students in the regular education program as much as possible. There are several levels to the inclusion program, with each level providing an option for inclusion to best meet the needs of each student. In addition, each student participates in a

series of vocational training placements throughout their high school career.

Level one is for the student who participates in the regular program all day. At the second level, students spend most of the day in a regular program with part of the day in a special study skills class.



Jenison student Travis Terpstra participates in Doreen Wegener's Advanced Calculus class.

Level three is for students involved in a few general classes with specific special classes to provide more community and school opportunities. These special classes include projects such as our TV show, which will be explained later. Also, we have found that at this level it is effective to integrate students into advanced classes such as Calculus or advanced language arts classes. These classes provide more support from a more serious and empathetic student population than you might find in entry level classes.

Students at level four have “graduated” from high school. “Graduate” can mean one of two things. Some students do not complete the high school curriculum, and graduation indicates they have attended high school classes for four years with their peers. These students do not receive a high school diploma. Other students complete the high school curriculum and earn a high school diploma. To ensure continued support and educational services during transition, their diploma is withheld pending completion of level four in the following year, sometimes referred to as “year thirteen”.

Transition efforts intensify at level four. The goal is to establish a student in a post-school job and adult living arrangements prior to final graduation. School staff work closely with the student, parents, employers and adult service agencies during this final year.

Lunch Coaching

The lunch coach program focuses on providing students with autism an

opportunity to socialize with their peers at the high school. The success of the program has allowed it to expand each year.

The program itself consists of groups of students accompanying special needs students to lunch. They are recruited from the Psychology classes. Each Psychology class is given an hour presentation on autism and Circle of Friends. Following the presentation students volunteer and are scheduled on an every other week rotation with students with autism and other disabilities.

Friendship Club

The goal of the Friendship Club is to promote social interaction between all types of students. Students with a wide range of abilities and challenges are involved in the regular education academic program at Jenison. However, we noticed that often this type of involvement does not generalize to social settings. The Friendship Club is designed to bridge the gap.

At the beginning of each year some type of “ice breaker” is planned. An event such as a bowling outing with a pizza party afterwards is planned during the school day. This helps the students become better acquainted. Throughout the year events are planned, for example holiday shopping and gift exchanges, picnics, and Special Olympics. Each student is also encouraged to become involved with a person with different challenges in a social setting outside of school. This may mean going to athletic events, dances, movies or any number of other activities.

Those who become involved in these outside activities participate at the end of the year in a social activity planned during the school day.

The Friendship Club advisors try to keep the club a student centered club. The format and activities used are chosen by the student members. A conscious effort is made to have the students run the meeting and set up the activities.

The club is now beginning it's second year. Everyone was very pleased with the success of the club in it's first year. We are looking forward to expanding the activities and seeing what the students come up with next!

Yogurt Sales

We began selling T.C.B.Y. yogurt during the lunch period through the Friendship Club. The main goals were, and still are, to provide the students with retail sales experience and to promote interaction with the entire student body. The results were amazing. Not only did our students get incredible hands on job experience from setting up the machine to keeping the books, they also made friends along the way (not to mention the profits!)

One goal is to involve regular education students in the T.C.B.Y. yogurt sales. It has been limited due to scheduling problems. Although this area is not going as well as we would like it has had some limited success. The profits are used to fund Friendship Club activities and to support other activities throughout the school.



Jenison student Jodi VanderLaan serves T.C.B.Y. yogurt during a lunch period.

TV Show

Our newest project is a TV show produced, directed and performed by individuals with special needs. It involves working with the TV station personnel and all of the staff and students in the school district. It is called "This Week in Jenison" and covers the entire school system.

I have been informed by Carol Gray that I will be doing a follow up article on this in the Summer '95 MORNING NEWS. Talk to you then!

THE SOCIAL STORY NEWS

New ideas in the art of writing social stories, and the use of
Comic Strip Conversations and related techniques.

... a journal using representative items to assist children with autism in recalling and sharing information between home and school:

The Garbage Book

(also known as My First Journal)

- Carol Gray

Often young children with autism have difficulty sharing home and school experiences with their teachers and parents. Where other children describe in detail the events of home or school, children with autism often do not readily share this information. Similar to the daily home-school journals often used to share information between parents and teachers, *The Garbage Book* is a new communication tool which helps children with autism report on their experiences.

From the perspective of a child with autism, the routines surrounding traditional home-school journals may seem a little confusing and illogical. Consider this example: Andrew, a 5 year old with high functioning autism, arrives at school. He watches as his teacher, Miss Smith, opens his journal and reads a detailed account of the trip his family took to Grandma's last night. After reading the journal, Miss Smith asks Andrew, "Where did you go last night?" Andrew is confused. *Why* would Miss Smith ask him something *she already knows* - something *she just read about*? Miss Smith's question doesn't make sense, it's not functional, because her need for the information is not genuine.

The Garbage Book is a journal using real items to assist children with autism in recalling and sharing information between home and school. Each page contains a picture of a child with a hand raised as if ready to show an item. Each day, representative items are selected by the child

and stapled to the raised hand in the picture. For example, Andrew helps with raking leaves, and staples a leaf to the picture. On another day, Andrew attends a movie, and staples a ticket stub (as illustrated on the front cover of this issue). Polaroid photos and drawings may also be used. Anything goes- snack size baggies make it possible to share an unlimited variety of items like breakfast cereal, grass clippings and Legos. In this way, Andrew arrives at school with an item which may help him remember information to share with the teacher.

It is important for a teacher to be genuinely "clueless" regarding the items a child staples in The Garbage Book. For this reason, events shared via The Garbage Book are never mentioned in the home-school journal between parents and teachers. In addition, a teacher reviews a child's Garbage Book *prior* to reading notes from parents. In this way, any questions a teacher has about the items in The Garbage Book are genuine.

The same procedure is followed as The Garbage Book returns home with items from school. Snack samples like popcorn or cookie crumbs, twigs from a nature walk, or crayon stubs from an art activity are examples of possible school "garbage." A final activity of the day may be for a child to select from 2 or 3 items an item to attach in the book to take home to share.

There is room on each page to write what the child says upon sharing the item. By drawing a "talk" symbol, the child's description of the event may be recorded by the teacher or parent.

A booklet describing the Garbage Book in detail, including how to assist children in sharing information, modifications for non-verbal children, incorporating the use of social stories, and related group and individual activities is being developed. Watch future issues of THE MORNING NEWS for ordering information.

Social Stories UnLimited™ Presentations and Inservices

Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations, and Related Instructional Techniques

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C.

Musk.

Jonkoping, Sweden

Dallas, Texas

Ft. Worth, Texas

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February 24, 1995. *Autism '95.*

February 24, 1995. *Using the Perspective of Individuals in Special Programming.*

February 24, 1995. TEACCH Winter Inservice for TEACCH

February 28, 1995 (Evening). Presentation: *Social Stories and Related Instructional Techniques.*
 Contact: Wilma Wallace (616) 722-1688

March 15-17, 1995. Presentations at *Autism and then...*
 Contact: Maria Eriksson 036-10 44 66 or FAX 36 / 10 45 76

April 3, 1995. Inservice on topic of Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations, and related instructional techniques.
 Contact: Kathy Baldwin (214) 231-6301 ext. 325

April 4, 1995. Inservice on topic of Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations, and related instructional techniques.
 Contact: Barb Williams (817) 740-3619

May 5, 1995. *Autism Society of Iowa 1995 Spring Symposium.*
 Contact: Chris Brosnahan (319) 557-1169

Please note:

Materials listed on page 10 are available from the Autism Society of North Carolina. Orders placed after January 1, 1995 will be returned to the sender. (back page) should be...

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... season, and a terrific New Year!