A Review of Practical Social Skills for Autism Spectrum Disorders: Designing Child-Specific Interventions

By Kathleen Koenig

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), also known as pervasive developmental disorders, are a group of conditions characterized by developmental impairments in socialization and communication and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviors. These disorders are an alarmingly prevalent topic of conversation in the news, in pediatrician and therapists' offices, in classrooms, among concerned parents, and at home, within families. The rate of diagnoses seems only to rise.   Professionals who work with children on the autism spectrum are eager for effective resources on how to help children and their parents or caregivers manage it. Readers of this book now have a new tool to add to their arsenal.

In this book, Koenig not only explains what signs to look for in recognizing symptoms of ASD, which show qualitative impairment in social interaction, but also how with the right plan of action in place across the board from all caregivers (i.e. parents, teachers, childcare providers, family members, etc.) children cannot only learn new social skills that fit their individual needs, but they can learn to integrate them into some of the most common situations that they face on a daily basis. This book is based on the principles that the best social interventions are evidence-based, specific to each child, and properly integrated. The author has referenced over 200 different sources in this book and with her work at the Yale Child Study Center, Koenig has added her own unique approach to not only how to come up with an effective plan, but also how to integrate that plan into all aspects of the child's life in order to properly treat children suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorders.

This book expresses how early detection and the implementation of the proper collective strategies really makes a difference due to the idea that as children with ASD become older, the gap between intellectual potential and day to day functioning widens. This is the result of the social world becoming more abstract and complex due to being somewhat outcast in society because when other children and people do not understand what the problem is then they are not sure how to handle someone with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Additionally, children who are socially disconnected, lonely, and isolated are at greater risk for mental health problems.

Koenig explains techniques such as visual strategies and supports, scripts and role play, developmental play approaches, video modeling, peer mediated approaches, technology based instruction, group instruction, self- monitoring strategies, parent-delivered interventions, and much more. She also discusses how a team effort by all involved parties in the child's life is extremely important in order to achieve success in all aspects of the child's life. Working with the child in only one atmosphere is not nearly as effective as everyone in their life being involved with the same plan and goal in mind. Koenig also explains how behavioral and developmental approaches are both necessary due to the fact that neither approach can address all of the children's needs by itself.

ASD is primarily a social disability, so cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors all play a role.   The dynamic nature of the process of competent social interaction creates complexity for teaching social

skills. The author explains how a socially competent person assembles needed skills in prearranged or novel ways in order to interact effectively with the environment. In kids with ASD, it is not just the lack of a particular behavior or friendship skill, or the absence of a rich narrative history of social experiences and successful social interactions on which to draw when confronting a social situation. The challenge this presents to a person with ASD cannot be overemphasized.

Overall, this resource guide is easy to read, practical, and contains a wealth of information for practitioners, educators and the general public. Anyone who is interested in developing social skills programming for individuals with ASD should invest in this book.

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