

# **Social Communication Group To Develop the Social Skills of Young Children**



**SPECIALIST TEACHING SERVICES  
EARLY YEARS SEN INCLUSION SERVICE**

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# **Social Communication Group To Develop The Social Skills Of Young Children**

*Devised and written by the Autism Outreach Team (Early Years) and the Early Years SEN Inclusion Team*

This small group activity was designed to support the development of social skills, attention and listening for children who need extra support and practice in these areas. It is intended as a structured but fun time where children receive a high ratio of adult support within a quiet and highly structured session. The sessions should happen on a regular basis, include a range of children and should develop and change over time to keep the children interested and motivated.

If your setting is receiving additional funding this is an ideal opportunity for using the higher ratio of staff.

You will find an accompanying DVD showing the session described above with four children aged 3/4 years old working with a practitioner from The Early Years SEN Inclusion Team.

## **Why should you do it?**

Most children learn to relate to other people naturally through playing with adults and other children. They learn that communication between two people requires eye contact, turn taking, attention and listening. Young children often have difficulties in these areas and for some older children these and other skills (see Appendix 1) don't come naturally and need to be taught. Learning through play and enjoyment in a structured, safe and fun session is best.

## **Who should be included?**

Ideally there should be up to 4 children with a range of abilities in the group. Children with average social skills should act as models to the target children in the group. Try not to choose children who are very confident as they may 'take over' the group. If the child you are focusing on is reluctant or has difficulty with a larger group start by introducing the session on a 1:1 basis with an adult or with an adult and one other child. Or allow a reluctant child the freedom to sit on the edge of the group (possibly with adult support) until they are comfortable with joining in. Most children will gradually move into the circle in their own time.

Be aware that some children will need consistency of group members. In other instances it would be good to choose particular children the target child is showing an interest in to support developing friendships.

## **Where should you do it?**

A separate or quiet space away from the main group is ideal but if this is not possible a clearly defined area will do. Use a rug or small carpet, clearly named

individual mats or a circle of chairs to indicate who is playing where. At first you may need a colleague to re-direct interested children to other areas with the comment 'Your turn later'. Use the same format each time for consistency.

## How often?

Ideally you should hold a group session two or three times a week depending on the target child's attendance.

## What do you need?

**BE WELL PREPARED!** You need to be well prepared in advance and have everything to hand. You need the specific props and toys for each session in a box or bag kept next to the adult. You will also need visual support in the form of a picture strip, cards for that day's activities and a finished tub or pouch.



You will need:

- rug/carpet
- picture strip
- board to put them on
- finished pouch/box
- soft/foam ball
- balloons
- game
- stickers (optional)
- comment sheets for recording

## Why do you need the visual support?

It is very important that you use (and continue to use) the pictures of the activities for the group. They should be easily seen by all the children in the group.

The pictures will help the children feel comfortable with what is happening. They help to make a familiar routine, show the beginning and end and what will happen next. Children like to be involved in the whole process, taking pictures off and placing them in the 'finished' pouch/box and seeing what will happen next.

## How will you track progress?

To find out where the focus child has strengths and weaknesses in each of the skills required for social interaction

- familiarise yourself with the key skills and their symbols (Appendix 1)
- observe the child communicating in as many situations as you can with as many different adults and children as you can
- decide on a time-frame for when you are going to start and then check progress at regular intervals (Appendix 5)

A comment sheet (Appendix 2) is provided for recording responses in each session. It has symbols for key skills at the top to help you decide on the focus for the target child. Highlight, circle or tick the focus and add comments where relevant on the activity. You might record utterances, responses, likes, dislikes, interaction or joining in. A specimen sheet with the sort of recording that might be helpful is provided (Appendix 4).

## How do you start?

Get the children seated in a circle. Have another adult to support initially so that things are as smooth as possible in the first session. Once you are established you may not need another person. Always start with the same 'Hello' song which should have the appropriate picture on your visual strip.

### 1. 'Hello' Song

Start with a fun 'Hello' song. The adult should choose a child by name and lead the singing.

*"Hello Jacob, Hello Jacob, Hello Jacob. Jacob say "Hello".*  
(to the tune 'Nice one Cyril'- ask an older member of staff!)

That child can then be asked to choose the next child and so on.

*This activity will give each child an opportunity to attend and listen for their own name and to learn the names of other members of the group. It also provides opportunities to develop turn-taking skills through anticipation, waiting and responding appropriately to 'Hello'.*

REMEMBER: child to take picture off strip.

### 2. 'Will you be my friend?' Song

Ask the children to hold hands. If any child does not want to do so do not worry. After watching the others after a couple sessions they may join in at a later date. The adult should encourage children to swing arms gently whilst holding hands and singing:

*'Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Thank you very much.'*

Sing it a second time through, this time faster and swinging arms more quickly.

*This type of activity will encourage children to tolerate other children being close to them, to feel part of a social group and develop friendships.*

REMEMBER: child to take picture from strip

### 3. Roll the Ball

Use a soft or partially inflated ball at first so that children don't get too excited. Later on use balls with a 'fun' element like 'giggle' balls, 'koush' balls etc. Ask the children to say who they are rolling the ball to before they roll it.

*This type of activity will develop shared attention and provide opportunities for listening, turn-taking, choosing and using personal names.*

REMEMBER: child to take picture from strip



### 4. Balloon Game

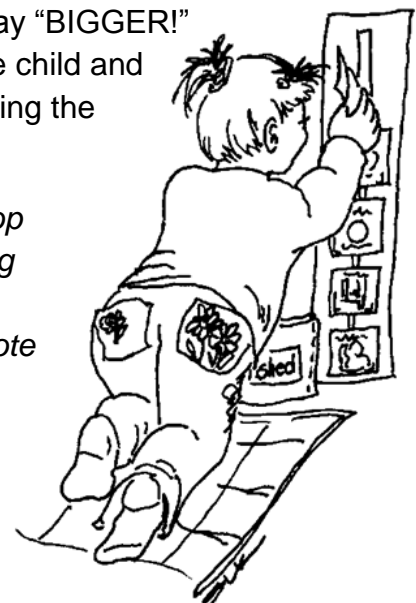
Adult shows the children a packet of balloons. Build up anticipation and make the activity exciting by miming the balloon getting bigger and bigger and whizzzzzzing round the room.

Offer a choice of two different coloured balloons, adult saying "Do you want a red balloon or a yellow balloon?" at the same time as offering the two balloons. Accept an eye-point, gesture or "red" as an initial response building up to the child saying "red balloon" eventually. The adult should blow up the chosen balloon for child and pause after each breath encouraging the children to say "BIGGER!" until the balloon is fully inflated. Give the balloon to the child and encourage them to say "Ready, steady, go" before letting the balloon go.

*This type of activity will provide opportunities to develop individual listening, anticipation, waiting and turn-taking skills. In addition it will encourage shared attention, support children to use each others' names and promote co-operative play.*

*This is a good game to encourage shared enjoyment.*

REMEMBER: child to take picture from strip



## 5. Game

Use a game like 'Pop up pirates', 'Buckaroo' etc. that has a nice clear end. Encourage good sharing and turn taking. Allow children some choice but keep control.

*These games support the development of turn-taking skills, waiting and choosing, co-operative play, coping with both winning and losing and requesting help.*

REMEMBER: child to take picture from strip

## 6. Goodbye Song

The session needs to end on a positive note. It's important that the children feel good about the session so this is an appropriate time to hand out stickers and/or lots of praise.

Sing the same song as for the 'Hello' song replacing hello with goodbye or sing a different song such as:

*This is the way we wave goodbye,  
Wave goodbye, wave goodbye,  
This is the way we wave goodbye,  
Wave goodbye to .....*  
(To the tune of 'Here we go round the Mulberry Bush')

Using the picture symbol timetable will help children to understand and anticipate that the session is coming to an end. Removing the final symbol is a clear representation of 'finish' which will help them to understand that all activities have a start and there will be an end point.

Once the session is established introduce one new element to keep the children's interest going. Remember an adult will usually tire of things much more quickly than a child. Don't change too much too quickly either- one thing at a time e.g. game, group, adult. You may refer to the 'Hands on for Social Communication' Book from your Area SENCO for further ideas. Some games are listed in Appendix 6. Don't forget to use the games to teach a range of social communication skills.

Finally, assessment and comment sheets will provide good evidence for additional funding, targets for Individual Education Plans and information for parents. When other professionals are involved with a target child don't forget to tell them that you are following a structured group activity.

Above all else, HAVE FUN!

# Appendix 1: Key Skills



## **I can share attention**

I can engage in the same activity as the rest of the group by looking together, listening, sharing looks, enjoyment and meaning.



## **I can listen**

I can demonstrate listening skills by becoming silent, looking at who is speaking and showing interest.



## **I can respond**

I can respond by smiling, pointing, following instructions or responding with speech.



## **I can make choices**

I can choose from a range by pointing to or taking the object or repeating the name of the preferred option.



## **I can take turns**

I can follow a sequence of actions knowing when it is my turn to respond by action or speech.



## **I can wait**

I can wait for my turn to speak, move or take a turn.



## **I can use children's names**

I can recognise familiar children, show an awareness of their names or say their names correctly.



## **I can anticipate**

I can show that I anticipate what will happen next by showing pleasure, fear or excitement.



## **I can win and lose**

I can equally accept myself or others being the winner or loser.



## **I can be near others.**

I can tolerate other people close to or touching me and sit in a given space.


















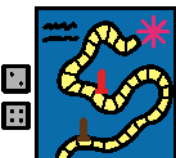

## **I can ask for and accept help.**

I can ask for help with a look, sign or gesture and accept help when it is offered.
















## Appendix 2: Social Communication Comment Sheet (initial)

Child's Name

Focus  Skills										
Hello song 	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Friend song 										
Ball game 										
Balloons 										
Game 										
Goodbye song 										
















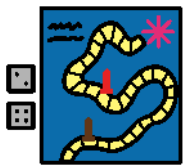

# Appendix 3: Social Communication Comment Sheet

Child's Name

Focus  Skills										
Hello song 										
Goodbye song 										
Additional comments										

## Appendix 4: Social Communication Comment Sheet (example)












Child's Name

Focus  Skills										
<b>Hello song</b> 	Date: 16.10.07 Watched adult with interest. Smiled in response to adult's 'Hello'.		Date: 18.10.07 Briefly signed hello in response to adult		Date: 22.10.07 Showed anticipation of his turn by his body language		Date: 24.10.07 Happily signed hello in response to adult's hello.		Date: 28.10.07 Whispered hello and waved in response to adult hello.	
<b>Friend song</b> 	Happy to hold hands, moved arms when prompted by adult		Laughed along with group at end of fast version		Anticipated faster version shown through facial expression, body language.		Reached out independently to hold hands when shown visuals.		Anticipated song reaching out to hold hands. Smiled throughout.	
<b>Ball game</b> 	Needed prompts (point) before releasing ball to other children. Responded by looking		Less prompts today. Looked at child of choice before releasing the ball.		N. looked at child of choice. Adult named child before he released the ball.		N. looked at child of choice and vocalised before releasing the ball.		Looked at child of choice x3 before releasing the ball	
<b>Balloons</b> 	Pointed to balloon. Needed prompt of 'Nathan look' before 'Ready steady go. Responded		Less prompts today. Watched adults waiting to hear 'Go' before releasing balloon.		Said 'Go' along with adult and others before releasing balloon.		Said 'Go' for own and others' turn.		Vocalised along with adult and others saying 'Ready...Steady ...Go'	
<b>Game</b> 	Pointed to colour he wanted from two. Responded to 'Wait .....turn'.		As before		Fewer prompts today. More relaxed, waiting for turn		As before		Waited for turn. Pointed to and vocalised and named colour of choice.	
<b>Goodbye song</b> 	Watched adult with interest. Moved away from group when adult said 'Bye bye'.		Briefly waved bye bye during song.		Waved, said bye in response to the adult.		As before		Waved and said 'Bye' in response to the adult and other children.	

# Appendix 5: Assessment Sheet

**Child's Name**

Key: 1. Never    2.Sometimes    3.Consistently    4. Excessively

Assessment Sheet				
List of skills	1	2	3	4
I can share attention 				
I can listen 				
I can respond 				
I can make choices 				
I can take turns 				
I can wait 				
I can use children's names 				
I can anticipate 				
I can win and lose 				
I can sit in a circle next to others 				
I can ask for and accept help 				








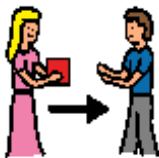



Assessment Date:

Next assessment:

## Appendix 6: Further games

Suggested further games from 'Hands on for Social Communication' (Ask your SENCO for a copy of this EYSENIS publication):

	<u>Page No</u>
'Pass the Bear or Beater' .....	14
Nursery Rhymes.....	18
Sounds Lotto .....	19
Silent Tambourine .....	20
Kim's Game.....	23
Alien Game.....	24
Parachute Game .....	28
Ping .....	31
Spider's Web .....	33
Pass the Animal .....	39
Telephone Game.....	42
Shopping Game .....	43

<p>Hello song</p> 	<p>Goodbye song</p> 	<p>Friend song</p> 	<p>Ball</p> 
<p>Koosh ball</p> 	<p>Balloon game</p> 	<p>Game</p> 	<p>Passing game</p> 
<p>Old MacDonald</p> 	<p>Tambourine</p> 	<p>Swap places</p> 	<p>Finished</p> 