

## EDUU 676 Week 7 AFIRM Assignment

By Link Schrader

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- a. **Name of the EBP module completed:** Social Skills Training (SST)
- b. **Brief Description of the Evidence Based Practice:** The University of North Carolina's National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders has developed resources to explain and support the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) to support instruction for learners with ASD. These resources are known as the Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules, or AFIRM (Griffin, et al, 2015).

**What it is** - SST “refers to any adult-directed instruction in which social skills are targeted for improvement. SST meets the evidence-based practice criteria and is included in the 2014 EBP report (Wong, et al., 2014).

**What it entails** – The first steps needed in using SST are 1) identifying the behavior, 2) collecting baseline data, and 3) establishing a goal or desired outcome. SST Planning includes 1) deciding if 1:1 or a group format will be used, 2) selecting participants, 3) initial assessment, 4) selecting lessons, determining the structure of the training sessions and instructional strategies to use, 5) preparing materials, 6) preparing instructors, and 7) scheduling the training. Using SST includes 1) implementing the training as planned, 2) reinforcing target skills, 3) generalizing target skills, and 4) providing support to peer models, if any. To monitor SST effectiveness, it is important to collect data and determine subsequent steps based on the learners progress.

Many tools to assist in implementation are provided in the AFIRM module (Griffin, et al, 2015).

**Evidence and Research that supports it** – Several references are provided in the AFIRM modules to case studies that support the use of SST. A few of these are provided as references to this paper. There is evidence to support the use of SST to address social and play outcomes for ages 3-22, communication for ages 3-14, behavior for ages 3-11 and cognition for ages 6-14.

- c. Why I Chose This EBP:** I chose this EBP because the listed goals of SST included “changing bad reputations; handling teasing, bullying, and arguments; interest expansion; and perspective-taking and theory of mind skills.” Unfortunately, the SST module did not include a further discussion of these goals, nor did a cursory review of the module references lead to additional information or resources for addressing these goals. I did my own research using such terms as ‘ASD and “changing reputation”’ and ‘ASD and arguments’, but nothing on point arose. I found somewhat more when I searched for “adults with ASD”. While most results referred to “young adults” I found a commentary on Autism and Employment (Solomon, 2020) that includes a more comprehensive discussion of how deficits in social skills affects adults with ASD in their employment. Additionally, I’ve included a reference to an important article from Mentra, the “Neurodiversity Employment Network” (Pittaway, n.d) which apparently has only been seen by 612 persons. Helping learners with ASD to maintain good reputations and to handle bullying and arguments at school will help them with these issues in the future.
- d. How I would go about implementing this EBP into my practice:** For my learners with ASD I am most interested in SST as a tool 1) to improve participation in the classroom leading to greater academic knowledge and the ability to share unique insights held by learners with ASD; and 2) to improve peer relationships and the sense of belonging and inclusion for learners with ASD.

**Example #1 – Sharing Unique Academic Insights:** I currently teach at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level where I have witnessed on numerous occasions learners with ASD sharing unique insights regarding academic learning while at the same time observing neurotypical (NT) peers to ignore or take little interest in such magical wanderings. I would like to use SST to train learners with ASD on how to appropriately make references to comments of peers and to modulate their comments to present them in a way that might encourage group discussion and improve the attention given by NT learners.

**Example #2 – Building a Sense of Belonging and Inclusion:** I occasionally get called to lunch recess or a PE class when a learner with ASD is experiencing a mini-crisis relating to peer relations. Before these events occur, I have witnessed learners with ASD walking alone along the periphery of a play area, or experiencing difficulty in joining into a conversation or play activity. Brief questioning of NT peers within the vicinity have indicated that there are peers who would welcome the learner with ASD into their groups, but often the learner with ASD has his (and all my learners with ASD or boys) eyes set on joining a conversation or activity with a single individual who needs a break from the learner with ASD, or where the learner with ASD has such difficulty in joining that they ask to sharpen pencils during lunch recess. I'd like to use SST to help in this situations.

**e. Description of Collaborative Processes To Make Implementation of this EBP Easier:**

The collaborative process is essential in both the examples described above. First, in the classroom collaboration with the general education teacher to call on the learner with ASD and to encourage the attention and participation of NT learners will lead to improved outcomes. Seeking peer collaboration both in the classroom example and during play activities will also increase the likelihood of success with SST interventions.

## References

- Griffin, W., Sam, A., & AFIRM Team. (2015). *Social skills training*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, FPG Child Development Center, University of North Carolina. Retrieved from <http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/Social-skills-training>
- Pittaway, M. (n.d.). *Reasonable adjustments are beneficial for neurodivergent employees, but true inclusion requires a culture shift*. Mentra. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://www.mentra.me/reasonable-accomodations-for-neurodivergents-culture-shift>
- Solomon, C. (2020). Autism and employment: Implications for employers and adults with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(11), 4209–4217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04537-w>
- Wong, C., Odom, S. L., Hume, K. Cox, A. W., Fettig, A., Kucharczyk, S., Brock, M. E., Plavnick, J. B., Fleury, V. P., and Schultz, T. R. (2014). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Autism Evidence-Based Practice Review Group. Retrieved from <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/sites/autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/files/2014-EBP-Report.pdf>