

Helping Awkward Children Fit In



Kelly Evans M.Ed., NCC
School Counselor

A little bit about me...

Professional background

United Methodist Home for Children
Casework Treatment Specialist

Professional School Counselor
Capital Area Intermediate Unit

I grew up with the camping program

Camper
CIT
Junior Counselor
Senior Counselor



Agenda



1. Training Video:
Helping Awkward Children Fit In: Accelerating Social Awareness & Development
2. Working with social deficits at camp
3. Additional social thinking strategies
4. Case study practice
5. Questions/comments

Some reasons for social deficits...

Clinical

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Communication Disorders
- Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder
- ADD/ADHD and Executive Dysfunction
- Learning Disability
- Anxiety and Depression



Non-Clinical

- Non-traditional schooling
 - Homeschool and cyber school
- Family dynamics
 - Modeling and few social opportunities
- Neighborhood programs, foster care, and residential treatment programs
 - Inconsistent caregivers
 - Trauma
 - Reinforcement of negative social patterns

Common traits of a social skill deficit

- Awkwardness during everyday interactions
- Physical or verbal intrusiveness
- Impulsive or inappropriate comments and behaviors
- Argumentativeness
- Repetitive questioning



Helpful Interventions...

Impulsive or inappropriate behaviors

1. Supportive talking

- talk with the camper about what happened
- informal (non-threatening)
- Avoid questions like:

"Why did you do/say that?" or "What went wrong?"

3. Honest telling

- give feedback and allow for practice
- Be concrete and direct
- *honest and clear*
- Role play



2. Instructive Showing

- increase awareness
- Point out thoughts and reactions of others
- Good thoughts versus weird thoughts
- Create discrete signal

Helpful Interventions...

Argumentative, repetitious, and/or aggressive behaviors

1. Give choices - avoid a power struggle

First..., then...

Example: Your choices are to swim or play volleyball. Which one would you like to do?

Example: First clean up your snack, and then you can horseback ride

Example: During quiet time you can read a book or write a postcard.

2. Writing - the camper may lack the verbal skills to communicate effectively

Camper writes down question

Counselor writes down question and camper responds

Camper writes down thoughts, feelings, and solution

"Chill" Place

Be proactive...

Establish cabin rules

- Collaborate with campers
- Display rules in a visible place
- Discuss expectations
- *Be consistent*



Make a "chill" place for each cabin

Helps to teach campers to monitor and self-regulate

Introduce when establishing rules

Create buy-in

- Allow campers to help designate a spot and make it their own
- Encourage *all* campers to use when needed
- Encourage counselors to use it too!
- Positively reinforce appropriate use of the spot
- Use the same language during other camp events

Follow-up

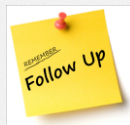
Provide many opportunities for campers to get to know each other

Monitor progress

Check-in with the camper

Positive reinforcement

Positive praise



(Follow-up should be done discreetly)

Additional Social Thinking Strategies...

Help put the situation in perspective

Expected versus unexpected behaviors
Situation specific

Good thoughts versus weird thoughts
What you do makes me think...

Size of the problem: small, medium, and large
The size of your reaction has to match the size of the problem
How big do others see the problem?
How big should your reaction be?



Additional Social Thinking Strategies...

Body awareness

Personal space
Personal space bubble-don't pop it!
"Where do I end and you begin?"

Being "part of the group"
Body in the group

Whole body listening
Eyes, ears, voice, body, and thoughts



Additional Social Thinking Strategies...

Teach strategies

Stop and think
Deep breathing
 Figure 8 breathing
 Six sides of breathing
Counting
"Chill" place
Go for a walk with a counselor
Develop a signal



Disrespect should never be tolerated!

Case Study...

Dan came to camp with some very rigid ideas of how things should go. He often refuses to participate in games, claiming that everyone is cheating. Even when the rules are logically explained, Dan becomes more upset and eventually tunes out the counselors who are trying to help him.

What is the next thing you would say to Dan?
What options can the counselors try to assist Dan with this problem?

Questions?



Comments?
