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Focusing on Friendship: Online Supported Activities for Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum

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Focusing on Friendship:
Online Supported Activities for
Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum

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ABSTRACT

A core feature of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is social skills differences. Social skills groups have received support as an intervention that fosters social skills of those with ASD. However, there is limited information about the use of telehealth-based social skills groups. The proposed ASD adolescent social group design is formatted for telehealth services, and has been conducted virtually since 2020. This ASD social group program features unique virtual teaching and recreational activity curriculum as well as some program evaluation data methods and responses from participants.

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Autism Spectrum Disorder and Social Skills Interventions

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental disorder characterized by restricted repetitive behaviors and social communication deficits (APA, 2022). Restrictive repetitive behaviors can include self-stimulatory behavior such as flapping, rocking, spinning, etc (Kuenssberg et al., 2011). Ritualistic behaviors also fall into this category, in which individuals favor routines and activities that can be repeated, such as watching a video over and over, asking the same question repeatedly, or eating the same food every day (Kuenssberg et al., 2011). Social communication includes aspects such as pragmatic language (Mandy et al., 2017), nonverbal communication, eye-contact, and tone of voice. These social communication deficits can have a major impact on an individual's quality of life (de Boer & Pijl, 2016; Franke et al., 2019). Individuals with ASD, particularly individuals with higher cognitive and language skills, can develop anxiety surrounding their social differences as they are more aware of these differences (Uljarevic et al., 2020). Many individuals with ASD desire to have meaningful social interactions with others, but they lack the skills necessary for successful social interactions.

A common broad intervention that has been employed to aid in the accumulation and use of appropriate social interactions has been social skills training (Dekker et al., 2019; Epp, 2008; Kasari et al., 2016). Social skills training is rooted in behavioral therapy, where skills are taught, modeled, and rehearsed. However, social skills training is not exclusive to ASD. It has been implemented in treating a wide variety of disorders and concerns such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (de Boer & Pijl, 2016), anger issues, severe mental illness (Hersen et al., 1975; Mueser & Bellack, 2007),

and substance use disorders (Miller et al., 1974). Social skills trainings typically address multiple aspects of social interaction such as nonverbal communication (eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, body language, etc.), assertiveness, conversation (initiating and ending), awareness of emotions (self and others), and rejection (Kaduson & Schaefer, 2006). These skills can be taught using various methods: group instructions (Kaduson & Schaefer, 2006), social stories, social scripts (Keeling et al., 2003), video modeling, and peer interactions (Kasari et al., 2016).

History of Social Skills Training

What is and is not socially appropriate changes across time and culture, but individuals are expected to know and comply with the social norms. For instance, the manners and etiquette of the 1960s are strikingly different from those of today. The *Los Angeles Times* published an article about a course on social graces for preteen children (Mott, 1986). This course titled “White Gloves and Party Manners” was based on social etiquette of the 1960s. It was intended to teach the social skills necessary for being poised and polite via education surrounding table manners, introductions, and other practical skills (Mott, 1986). This demonstrates that teaching social skills is not a foreign concept; it has just become more formally known as social skills training.

Lovemore Nyatanga (1989) researched social skills training and provided some insight into its origins. Nyatanga asserted that modern day social skills training may have arisen from three potential precursors. The first being reciprocal inhibition, which was a technique developed by psychologist, Joseph Wolpe (1958). Reciprocal inhibition, also referred to as counter conditioning, encouraged individuals to behave the opposite of the symptoms involved in the disorder, such as relaxing when a feared stimulus is presented,

which would deteriorate the bond between the stimulus and the anxiety response (Wolpe & Plaud, 1997). The anxiety or fear responses were typically directly conditioned or reinforced by maladaptive cognitions (Wolpe, 1981). Therefore, counter conditioning was the beginning of modern-day systematic desensitization, where individuals work to combat their conditioned fears by engaging in behaviors opposite of their anxiety responses based on their hierarchy of fears (Wolpe & Plaud 1997). While this is more based upon learning relaxation skills, it does have a social component. Being relaxed in the presence of feared stimuli enables an individual to conform to the social norm of not exhibiting specific fears, especially in a public setting (Nyatanga, 1989).

Nyatanga (1989) also identified Zigler and Phillips' (1961) work in linking social competence to mental health outcomes as a contributor to the development of social skills training. In their study, Zigler and Phillips (1961) found that individuals with lower levels of social competence were hospitalized longer and were more likely to be re-hospitalized. Individuals with high levels of social competence generally had better prognoses (Zigler & Phillips, 1961). These findings suggest the significance of adequate social competence and social skills on mental health.

The final precursor relevant to the emergence of social skills training relates to some of the work of William Schofield (Nyatanga, 1989). In his book *Psychotherapy: The Purchase of Friendship*, Schofield (1986) discussed some potential biases within psychotherapy interventions. He introduced the concept of YAVIS, which was an acronym for "Youthful, Attractive, Verbal, Intelligent, and Successful" (Schofield, 1986, p. 133). Schofield argued that therapy relies primarily on conversation, thus therapy interventions are biased towards middle- and upper-class clients who have more

education and better social skills. This sets the stage for social skills training as an alternative to other interventions. Schofield (1986) implied that social skills training would be a better fit for non YAVIS clients as opposed to other more abstract and theoretical treatments. This relates to the previous finding that increasing social competence (Zigler and Phillips, 1961), whether it be for YAVIS populations or non-YAVIS populations, can play a role in an individual's prognosis.

Early Social Skills Trainings

Social skills training has taken various forms over the years, but it was first implemented as assertiveness training (Mueser & Bellack, 2007). In the 1960s and 70s, social deficits were described as "social ineffectiveness" (Miller, 2012, p. 445). However, social ineffectiveness lacked a concrete definition, thus the social skills training interventions also lacked a common objective. One of the main pioneers of targeted social skills interventions was Michel Hersen (Miller, 2012). Hersen was a clinical psychologist who studied assessment and treatment of interpersonal skills. Hersen was one of the first to try to identify specific social skills components to target for treatment (Miller, 2012). In these studies, assertiveness skills of alcohol dependent individuals were examined (Miller et al., 1974). Results indicated that social encounters that required participants to be assertive were stressful for individuals with alcohol dependence. In order to bolster both nonverbal and verbal assertiveness skills, various methods of instruction were provided such as, verbal feedback, video feedback, behavioral rehearsal, modeling (Miller et al., 1974).

In addition to substance use disorders, social skills training in combination with medications were implemented with individuals with schizophrenia (Hersen et al., 1975;

Mueser & Bellack, 2007). In Hersen et al.'s (1975) case study, social skills training focusing on assertiveness was implemented via instructions, rehearsal, feedback, and in-vivo modeling. Findings indicated that the combination of medication and social skills training yielded positive outcomes, where the medication aided in regulating the individual so they could benefit from the social skills instruction (Hersen et al., 1975). Although Hersen's and colleagues' studies focused primarily on assertiveness, his research aided in understanding how interpersonal skills impact psychopathology (Hersen et al., 1975; Miller, 2012).

Mueser and Bellack (2007) also examined the utility of social skills training in the treatment of severe mental illness like schizophrenia. Impaired social competence is a characteristic of schizophrenia, and social skills impact quality of life and community functioning. Other commonly used interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for psychosis, family psychoeducation, and supported employment, do not target or improve social competence (Mueser & Bellack, 2007). Therefore, social skills training is one of the most effective interventions for addressing the social impairments common to schizophrenia (Mueser & Bellack, 2007).

Social skills training has also been frequently utilized with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) populations to improve social communication. Establishing positive peer relationships is challenging for individuals on the autism spectrum (Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010). Individuals with ASD typically have fewer friendships, and this social situation may not be due to a lack of want for friends (Orsmond et al., 2013). Instead, these individuals' social differences make creating and maintaining friendships difficult (Orsmond et al., 2013). A commonly used method of implementing social skills training

is via social skills groups. These social skills group trainings have been researched often, but with mixed results, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Group Social Skills Trainings

A popular format for teaching social skills has been in groups, where participants can interact with similar peers and practice skills. Dekker et al. (2019) conducted a randomized controlled trial for group social skills training for children with ASD. Dekker et al. used a manualized social skills training that followed a structure of conversation, homework review, introduction to new topic, practice, role play, assign new homework, and play time. The participants were randomized into one of three groups: social skills training, social skills training with parent and teacher involvement, and care as usual. The results indicated improvement in social functioning, as reported by parents, immediately after the group social skills training. No significant differences were found between the three conditions. However, there were no further improvements after a 6-month follow-up, even when booster sessions were provided (Dekker et al., 2019). This begs the question as to why immediate results exist but fade over time. Perhaps long-term improvement is not being generalized due to a lack of practice, or perhaps social skills can be taught in a fixed number of sessions, but the social insight needed to adequately use the skills is not something that can be taught in the same amount of time (Dekker et al., 2019).

However, other research has also noted that social groups improve peer relations in the groups, but the improvements rarely generalize outside of the group (Chester et al., 2019; Kasari et al., 2016). Kasari et al. (2016) conducted a comparative randomized controlled trial evaluating social skills groups at schools for elementary aged children

using either an intervention approach or peer approach. The intervention approach, SKILLS, targeted specific skills, such as body language, saying hello and goodbye, conversation, dealing with bullying/teasing, and emotion regulation (Kasari et al., 2016). The peer approach, ENGAGE, included typically developing peers as models and focused on activities for promoting cohesiveness like conversation starters, structured games, free play, etc. Kasari et al.'s (2016) findings indicated more support for traditional social skills training groups without the inclusion of typical peers. Children in the SKILLS group showed more peer engagement and peer acceptance. These findings could be due to the direct instruction provided and the opportunity to practice the skills following instructions. Furthermore, the group was conducted in the school setting which may have aided in the generalization of using the skills in their own respective schools (Kasari et al., 2016). Nevertheless, groups with neurotypical peers may still have some benefit, as they provide individuals with ASD the opportunity to participate in ordinary childhood experiences.

Further social group research has been conducted examining whether adding a play component to the curriculum increases social competence over time (Chester et al., 2019). Children with ASD exhibit difficulties engaging in peer play, as they lack the social skills to effectively initiate, join, or maintain play with peers (MacDonald et al., 2009). Chester et al. (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of a social skills intervention using three randomly assigned groups: social skills training with unstructured play, social skills training with semi-structured play, and a wait-listed control group. Results indicated that compared to a wait-listed control group, children with ASD improve in social competence and social skills following a social skills training intervention with

play. There was limited evidence in support of semi-structured play versus unstructured play. Overall, the findings were supportive of short-term benefits from social skills training with play (Chester et al., 2019).

Other Group Approaches to Social Skills Instruction

Instead of aiming to solely to improve social skills via social skills training, other groups for individuals with ASD have incorporated other modalities and education strategies in order to improve social communication (Epp, 2008; Levy & Dunsmuir, 2020). Epp (2008) incorporated art therapy into her social group program, which challenges individuals with ASD to be less concrete in their self-expression. The group program is called SuperKids and it incorporates some cognitive-behavioral strategies along with art. SuperKids targets the following areas of social skills: compromise, identifying and expressing emotions, friendship, sportsmanship, nonverbal communication, verbal communication, and emotion regulation. Epp (2008) found that while social skills were not significantly improved, other areas such as assertion improved and internalizing behaviors, hyperactivity, and problem behaviors saw a significant decrease.

Levy and Dunsmuir (2020) also implemented a creative approach for modeling and teaching social skills via Legos and peer modeling in a natural school setting. Lego therapy fosters teamwork between children with ASD and neurotypical peers in order to build Lego models. The children must divide the labor requirements amongst themselves, which promotes the engagement of social communication elements like joint attention, turn-taking, and joint problem-solving. Results indicated significant increases in areas of social engagement, social initiation, and positive social behavior. However, there is still

the concern of generalization of skills. It appeared that skills generalized from the school setting to the child's home setting, but social skills did not generalize into other aspects of the school setting (Levy & Dunsmuir).

Telehealth

There have been some creative approaches to ASD therapy interventions targeted at improving social skills; however, there are limited telehealth group opportunities for individuals with ASD (Beaumont et al., 2021). Telehealth and telepsychology have seen an influx since the COVID-19 pandemic, and online forms of interventions are likely here to stay. Telehealth can provide service opportunities to individuals who may not have easily accessible resources in their immediate area. This creates a new area to be explored – online opportunities for social skills interventions.

Chung et al. (2016) examined the efficacy of game-CBT for adolescents with high functioning autism. The game-CBT approach combined some traditional CBT protocol material along with a prosocial video game. Results indicated that sociality was improved to a similar degree as traditional offline CBT. The use of online intervention or online supplemented interventions appear promising for individuals with ASD given that online and offline result were comparable (Chung et al. 2016).

While online interventions may still be an area needing growth, many individuals with ASD turn to social media for support and social engagement. Abel et al. (2019) examined Facebook groups related to ASD to identify the nature and use of these online communities. Six functions emerged for the Facebook groups: support, social networking, advocacy, information and promotion of treatments, sales, and fundraising. Most groups focused on providing support and advice, while groups providing socializing

opportunities were the second most common. These groups provided individuals with ASD a safe place to discuss special interests (Abel et al., 2019).

Implications

Social skills training has historically been utilized to aid in the treatment of a variety of disorders from substance abuse, severe mental illness, to developmental disorders (de Boer & Pijl, 2016; Hersen et al., 1975; Miller et al., 1974; Mueser & Bellack, 2007). Moreover, social skills training has also been effective in improving social communication in nonclinical samples (de Mooij et al., 2020). However, social skills training has been a major contributor in the treatment of social communication deficits in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (Dubreucq et al., 2022; Otero et al., 2015). Social skills training for ASD typically involves teaching, modeling, rehearsing, and providing feedback. Group instruction has been the method of choice for teaching social skills, as it provides a safe place for individuals with ASD to learn and practice social skills with similar peers (Chester et al., 2019; Dekker et al., 2019; Kasari et al., 2016;). Despite the positives, social skills training groups have been criticized for their lack of long-term change (Dekker et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these groups still provide a valuable opportunity for socialization, as individuals with ASD can engage with similar peers or integrate with typically developing peers (Kasari et al., 2016). The proposed group strives to present social skills material in a concrete but engaging manner, but the main goal is to provide adolescents with a social opportunity to engage with similar peers and build friendships. The proposed group is telehealth-based, but the program design can be adapted to in-person services as well.

Proposed Social Group

The Focusing on Friendship group is geared towards verbal adolescents, age 13 to 17 years, on the autism spectrum. The group offers brief social skills instruction combined with activities aimed towards increasing social interaction between group members. The goal is not to significantly improve social skills but to provide social opportunities that can foster friendship and greater quality of life.

The group meets on Zoom Healthcare Fridays from 5:00 – 6:00pm for a total of six sessions. Participants will need access to a phone, tablet, or computer in order to attend Zoom meetings. In the past, the group has been offered at no cost, but the most recent iteration of the group includes a fee of \$35, which is used to purchase and mail skill related and motivational items to participants.

The group composition includes participants, co-leaders, and facilitators. The program can accommodate up to 12 participants, most of the groups have included approximately eight adolescent participants. This group is unique in the sense that it includes co-leaders and facilitators. Every clinician is a facilitator, and a typical group has six to eight facilitators. The facilitators attend every group and serve as models of prosocial behavior and specific social skills. Facilitators engage with group members either verbally or via chat and strive to ensure everyone participates. At times, some participants need prompted or redirected, which makes it helpful to have multiple facilitators that can manage both modes of communication, verbal and chat. Each week two clinicians will serve as co-leaders, who lead activities and teach the instructional material. All facilitators serve as co-leaders at least once.

At the initial group meeting, participants and facilitators work together to identify some group guidelines. The term guidelines has been used in place of rules because some participants associate negative connotations with the word “rules.” Guidelines is a more neutral term that conveys the same message. Guidelines should be reviewed before each session. It is also recommended that a short review slide is included before each session. The slide should include key points about the social skills information presented at the previous group session. Group activities should take up the majority of the group time, and lessons should be kept brief but still convey crucial social skills related information. The instructional material is best received with presented with visual aids such as PowerPoint or google slides presentations. Material should be paired with image or video examples that relate to special interests in order to maintain engagement and interest.

Lessons and Activities

Conversation

One of the hallmarks of ASD is social communication deficits, thus psychoeducation and opportunities to practice conversation are crucial components of the social group. One indicator of life quality is social participation, and adolescents and young adults with ASD tend to have lower conversation abilities and hence lower social participation and life quality (Orsmond et al., 2013). Research suggests that youths with ASD may have difficulties with some of the pragmatic behaviors in conversation, such as management of information, management of topics, and reciprocity (Paul et al., 2009). These difficulties could manifest as making comments that are off topic, providing either too little or too much information to the listener, and/or monopolizing or disengaging from the conversation. However, it may not be an issue of knowing *how* to use

appropriate conversation skills, but an issue of knowing *when* to utilize skills (Paul et al., 2009). Therefore, conversation interventions need to focus not only on teaching communication skills but also provide opportunities for the skills to be put into practice and solicit feedback from peers.

Education of conversation skills has taken many forms, the most common being pragmatic language, social skills, or peer-focused approaches. Pragmatic language approaches emphasize teaching verbal and nonverbal skills necessary for maintaining conversation and repairing conversation breakdowns (Mandy et al., 2017). The social skills approach incorporates education about pragmatic skills, but models and practices the behaviors within social scenarios and settings. The final approach, peer-focused, uses neurotypical peers to model and facilitate conversation skills. Timler (2018) reviewed some of these different intervention approaches for children and adolescents with ASD. Timler (2018) found that interventions that employed aspects from each approach were more likely to yield optimal outcomes. The proposed group utilizes some components from each approach.

The Picturing Friendship Group uses brief instruction and activities to practice conversation skills. Group structure was designed to “sandwich” the lesson in between two activities in order to maintain attention. For the instruction portion, the two co-leaders will introduce and explain some important aspects of a good conversation. It is important to choose topics that will be pertinent to the group members. Below are some potential broad conversation topics and tips suitable for most adolescents with ASD.

Instructional Material

Eye Contact. Discuss with participants the importance of eye contact during a conversation. What does eye contact convey during a conversation? How long should eye contact be maintained? Have participants brainstorm some ways to make eye contact less intimidating. A common suggestion posed by the group is to look at a person's nose as opposed to directly looking into the eyes. Visual aids can also be incorporated into the lesson, such as eye contact practice videos.

Tone of Voice. Discuss with participants the importance of other aspects of nonverbal communication during conversation, such as tone of voice. How does tone of voice affect one's message? Use special interests or other examples to illustrate the tone of voice. For example, characters such as Spongebob and Squidward are good examples of two different tones. SpongeBob's tone typically indicates that he is excited and interested, while Squidward's tone conveys that he is uninterested.

Asking Questions. Emphasize to participants the importance of asking questions to show interest and keep the conversation going. Remind participants to ask questions that pertain to the topic.

Balanced Conversation. As mentioned previously, individuals with ASD are prone to either talking too much or too little during a conversation. Therefore, it is necessary to provide information about keeping a conversation balanced. Ask participants to reflect on times when they have either dominated the conversation or appeared disengaged. Video examples from participant movie or TV interests can be used to exemplify both balanced and unbalanced conversations.

Telehealth Conversation Etiquette. Given that this group is conducted in a virtual format, it is necessary to discuss how conversation etiquette is slightly different online compared to face-to-face interactions. Eye contact is more difficult, as we naturally look at the person's face on the screen as opposed to looking directly into the camera. Online video calls pose difficulties for knowing when to speak without interrupting someone. Differing internet speeds can cause lags which makes it easier to talk over top of each other. When typing in the chat, sometimes judging someone's tone can be difficult. These are just some of the potential differences and challenges of online communication. Ask the participants about the differences or challenges they foresee and some possible solutions or tips.

Activity

Before engaging in conversation psychoeducation, icebreaker activities are excellent for assessing group member skills, fostering group cohesion, and providing an opportunity for reinforcement of existing skills. Icebreakers used in past groups that were well received included "two truths and a lie" and "my favorite." Other activities to incorporate to inspire conversation between group members following instructional material include "this or that" and "would you rather." All activities and icebreakers encourage spontaneous conversation between group members either verbally or via chat. Refer to the appendix for a full list and description of all activities.

Friendship

Given the social communication deficits common to ASD, many individuals on the spectrum have difficulty making and maintaining friendships and relationships. Children with ASD are more likely to feel socially isolated and never see friends or be invited to

activities (Orsmond et al., 2013). This social group provides adolescents with a social opportunity to engage with similar peers and make friendships. However, the group only lasts for six weeks, so participants need to be presented with some foundational skills and tips for making friendships.

Malloy et al. (2019) explored friendship conceptualizations of children with ASD, and found that friendships were typically defined by their expectation and transgressions. Neurotypical children frequently identified kindness as a crucial component of a friend, but kindness was less salient to children with ASD when conceptualizing friendship (Malloy et al. 2019). Children with ASD are often more prone to bullying and may experience more unkind acts in general, even by people who are considered friends, thus kindness may not be thought of as a prerequisite for friendship (Malloy et al. 2019). Despite the different conceptualizations of friendship, neurotypical children and children with ASD can and do have reciprocated friendships (Petrina et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it is still important to explore the different ideals surrounding friendship in order to assist children and adolescent with ASD in choosing, making, and maintaining friendships.

Instructional Material

Qualities of a Good Friend. Discuss with the participants and have them offer potential qualities of a good friend. Qualities that could be discussed include trustworthy, honest, nonjudgmental, loyal, supportive, empathic, etc. Encourage participants to share any specific examples pertaining to a time when they were a good friend.

Tips for Making Friends. Provide some tips for making friends and ask the participants to share some of the ways they try to make friends. Some potential tips include joining a group, starting a group, complimenting someone, smiling, etc. Be sure

to discuss potential caveats of these tips. For example, one scenario to discuss would be when someone tries to join a group but gets rejected. Help participants to identify alternative courses of action and coping skills to employ.

Activity

To facilitate friendship skills, “spread the love” complimenting activity is used. Participants take turns complimenting another group member. Co-leaders and facilitators model compliments that go beyond physical appearance. For example, we strive to make compliments that reflect someone’s character like “I appreciate how kind you are to our fellow group members,” as opposed to surface level compliments like “I like your shirt.” However, we accept any compliment that is offered, and if someone cannot formulate a compliment, we thank them for their effort and move on to the next person. We have noticed that some participants will compliment the group as whole rather than an individual person. We accept these broad compliments and choose another individual to provide the next compliment. Provide labeled praise and reinforcement as needed during this activity.

Social Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution

Skills related to problem-solving, particularly social situations and conflicts, are valuable during adolescent years and even more so during adulthood. When comparing problem solving skills across varying social settings, adults with developmental disabilities exhibited the most difficulty with solving social problems in the workplace, followed by social problems within the community (Gumpel et al., 2000), thus the importance of introducing and practicing social problem-solving skills during adolescence for individuals with ASD. Different instructional methods have been utilized

for enhancing social communication skills in the area of social problem solving such as traditional manualized methods and even computer programs (Bernard-Opitz et al., 2001).

Chou (2020) examined the utility of the *Navigation of Social Engagement* (NOSE) model which implements a three-phase approach that incorporates self-directed strategies for problem-solving. The phases differ in instructional modality, with phase 1 focusing on problem-solving sequences, phase 2 using problem-solving models, and phase 3 using problem-solving workbooks. Results from Chou's study indicated significant increases in awareness of social problems and self-directed problem-solving skills based on teacher rated posttests. The proposed group aims to assist adolescents on the spectrum with learning and applying basic problem-solving steps to social situations.

Instructional Material

Problem-Solving Steps. Introduce the participants to basic problem-solving steps and link the steps to potential social conflicts. Common steps include identify the problem, generate possible plans of action, evaluate the pros and cons of the plans, choose a plan, implement the plan, and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. Present and practice the social problem-solving steps in a manner that will best benefit the group. Participants may have difficulties identifying social problems or conflicts within their own lives. When this occurs try offering an example pertaining to group interests. Consider playing a clip from a movie or TV show. *Star Wars* examples often work well, like Anakin Skywalker and how he sometimes does not handle conflict effectively. Use the problem-solving steps to process the fictional example by generating possible

solutions and evaluating each plan. Once participants can grasp a fictional example, try asking again for personal examples of handling social problems or conflicts.

Activity

Group storytelling is a fun activity that allows for the participants to use their collective imaginations to craft a story. During this exercise, have the students identify the main components of their story, allot some additional for time for discussing the conflict in the story and the best solution. For more information about group storytelling, refer to the appendix activity list. Example stories can also be found in Appendix B.

Awareness of Emotions of Self and Others

Difficulties identify the emotions of others likely contributes to the social communication deficits that are characteristic of ASD. Griffiths et al. (2019) examined emotion recognition impairments in children with ASD when differing intensities of emotions were presented via facial expressions. Findings suggested that children with ASD are less accurate at labelling emotions across intensity levels compared to controls. However, it was noted that ASD participants made similar errors to the control group, such as mistaking disgust for anger (Griffiths et al., 2019). Given the common mistakes among both groups, psychoeducation concerning emotional awareness should focus on varying intensity of emotions and the subtle facial differences between complex emotions.

In addition to difficulties identifying the emotions of others, children with ASD tend to have difficulties identifying their own emotions. Children with ASD may claim not to feel an emotion or have difficulty identifying their own emotions, particularly if the emotion is considered negative (Rieffe et al., 2007), thus limited reporting of coping

strategies employed to deal with negative emotions. The proposed group aims to provide brief psychoeducation concerning basic emotions and how to identify within oneself and others, as well as offering potential coping skills.

Instructional Material

Participants may be at different levels of emotional understanding, so it is best to cover the basics of emotional awareness briefly. Using images of special interests, have participants identify the different emotions. For instance, Grumpy Cat could be used as an example for anger or frustration. Discuss the body/facial cues that gave insight into the emotional state. Ask participants where they feel different emotions in their bodies and inquire about how thoughts affect feelings. Finally, have the participants discuss different coping skills they can utilize to handle difficult emotions.

Activity

For the topic of awareness of emotions, participants usually enjoy the educational material that incorporates images and videos of special interests, such as watching clips from *Star Wars*, *Disney*, or *Pokémon*. Other complementary activities, such as Mad Libs or Twenty Questions, should be included to provide fun social engagement opportunities for the participants.

Assertiveness

A crucial component of social interaction involves being able to communicate effectively and assertively, but there is limited research concerning teaching assertiveness to the ASD population. Individuals with ASD are susceptible to social isolation or rejection due to their communication deficits and peer-mediated interventions have been implemented as a means to assist in developing communication skills (Bambara et al.,

2018). In Bambara's and colleagues' peer-mediated intervention study, adolescent general education peers were paired with adolescents with ASD during lunch to improve assertive conversations skills. Results indicated that there were increases for participants with ASD in their abilities to initiate conversation, ask follow-up questions, and participate more in conversations with trained peers. The proposed group aims to provide some basic instruction concerning the different styles of communication.

Instructional Material

From past groups, we have found that assertiveness is a more difficult topic for participants to grasp. Provide explicit definitions of the different communication styles. Understanding of the different communication styles is better achieved when the definitions are paired with concrete examples of passive, aggressive, and assertive communication. Video examples help clarify these concepts and allow for discussion of certain verbal and nonverbal behaviors that can provide insight into what communication style is being employed. Visual aids that depict communication styles along a continuum are also helpful in demonstrating how assertive communication is the middle ground between passive and aggressive.

Activity

To model assertive communication, consider using a group drawing activity. One person will be the artist drawing the image, ideally one of the co-leaders or facilitators. The group will select the image to be drawn, and the artist will be unaware of the selection. It is up to the group to describe the image in enough detail for the artist to draw. The artist may make some mistakes, and the group must be able to provide corrective feedback. This activity encourages assertive communication in order to get the

most accurate rendition of the original image. Participants must be able to communicate to the artist effectively without coming across as passive or aggressive. For more detailed instructions and examples of group drawings, see the appendix.

Rejection

Adolescents with disabilities, such as ASD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), tend to have higher instances of peer rejection and lower instances of peer acceptance compared to typical peers (de Boer & Pijl, 2016). Even in inclusive classrooms, children with ASD were only involved in social relationships with peers approximately half of the time, and as grade levels increase, they were even less connected with peers (Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010). The proposed group aims to assist adolescents with ASD in processing and reacting to rejection via discussions pertaining to types of rejection and ways to cope with rejection.

Instructional Material

Define rejection and discuss different ways rejection may be communicated. Sometimes rejection is overt and clearly identifiable, and other times, rejection is more subtle. When rejection is clear, it usually involves “no.” However, the “no” can be conveyed nicely or hurtfully. Rejection can also be unspoken, where someone simply ignores or avoids another person. Whether the rejection was conveyed overtly, covertly, nicely, or cruelly, it is important for participants to have plans for coping with rejection. Help participants create a list of coping skills such as talking with a trusted adult or engaging in positive self-talk. Rejection is a topic that can bring up painful memories for some participants. Be prepared to take some time to process, validate, and normalize participant experiences and feelings.

Activity

Given that rejection is a heavy topic that can bring up negative emotions, the group activity that follows the lesson usually does not directly correspond to rejection. Instead, we take some time to engage in a fun activity that fosters group participation and connectedness. Virtual scavenger hunt is an excellent activity to allow some movement and engagement with group members. Participants find items in their house based on prompts the co-leaders reveal. This activity provides participants with the opportunity to share items with the group and comment on other participants' items. Detailed instructions and example prompts are included in the appendix.

Sportsmanship and Frustration Tolerance

Sportsmanship is a crucial social skill area for children to develop, as well as the ability to handle and tolerate moments of frustration. Individuals on the autism spectrum may experience difficulties coping with losses and frustrations associated with games and sports, given other social skills deficits (Ferguson et al., 2013; Keeling et al., 2003); however, there is currently a limited body of research focusing on sportsmanship skills within the ASD population. The research available suggests that frustration tolerance and sportsmanship skills can be modeled and taught effectively for individuals with ASD (Ferguson et al., 2013; Keeling et al., 2003).

Behavioral skills training has been utilized in teaching a variety of skills to individuals with ASD, individually or in group format. The key components of behavioral skills training include instruction, modeling, rehearsal, and feedback. Ferguson and colleagues (2013) employed behavioral skills training to teach three sportsmanship skills – complimenting, turn taking, and being a good sport. Nine children

with ASD completed a 10-week social skills intervention and played Wii Sports games. Following the intervention, participants displayed improvements in giving compliments, taking turns, and making positive postgame comments. However, it is important to note that the generalization of these skills beyond the treatment setting was not investigated (Ferguson et al., 2013). Therefore, it is uncertain if the improvements maintained or receded outside of treatment.

Keeling and colleagues (2003), presented a case study where power cards were employed in the teaching of sportsmanship skills to a 10-year-old girl with ASD. Power cards utilize special interests in the teaching of skills by linking the desired behavior to an individual's interests. Keeling et al. found that the power card strategy was effective in increasing prosocial behaviors pertaining to sportsmanship, and the skills were generalized across settings. While the proposed group does not employ individualized power cards, special interests are frequently incorporated into instructional material as models of good sportsmanship and frustration tolerance.

Instructional Material

Discuss with participants about the qualities of being a good sport versus a bad sport. Ask participants for examples from their own life and provide some examples based on special interests. Engage participants in conversations surrounding emotional reactions to winning or losing games. Provide psychoeducation concerning strategies for building frustration tolerance. Potential coping skills to discuss include deep breathing, talking to a trusted adult, grounding techniques like the five senses exercise, and expressive techniques such as writing or drawing.

Activity

The best way to practice sportsmanship and frustration tolerance is to play a game. Werewolf is an interactive game that can be adapted to play over zoom. The premise of the game is that werewolves are hunting townspeople, and the townspeople must work together to identify the werewolves. Sometimes people fall prey to the wolves or are falsely accused of being a wolf. The group members must be able to be good sports and manage their frustrations in order to complete and enjoy the game. Werewolf can be a complicated game to learn, so it is important to have explicit instructions. Sometimes some participants are not able to comprehend the game, so it is recommended to have alternative activities or allow for individuals to opt-out of playing. Full instructions on how to play werewolf virtually are included in the appendix.

Life Planning, Accepting Change, and Saying Goodbye

Change is constant, and life is filled with transitions, but change can be difficult to accept or even frightening. The main component of adulthood is independence, living independently and having financial independence, both of which require finding stable employment. Some of the areas that contribute to difficulties adolescents with ASD face as they enter adulthood include executive functioning, social cognition, and comorbid diagnoses (Wisner-Carlson et al., 2020). Individuals with ASD may need assistance in overcoming these barriers that interfere with their transition to adulthood. Some potential services to assist with the transition to adulthood include social skills training, employment interventions, college transition programs, and driving lessons (Wisner-Carlson et al., 2020). These interventions will help foster autonomy and prepare individuals for the future.

Another hallmark characteristic of ASD is rigidity and the desire for routines. Therefore, the transition from adolescence to adulthood can be difficult for both children with ASD and their parents (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Cheak-Zamora and colleagues investigated the perspectives of adolescents with ASD and their caregivers concerning the transition to adulthood. Through focus groups, they examined social, education, and vocation needs, as well as any other transitional concerns. Results indicated that both caregivers and adolescents had concerns about education and vocation, specifically the lack of opportunities available for individuals with ASD (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Another common theme surrounded stress and anxiety for both adolescents and caregivers (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Caregivers reported feeling overwhelmed and in need of a break, but they also feared for the future, wondering who will help their child to live and function effectively in the future. Given these fears, caregivers tended to take on more responsibility and take on many of the daily activities for their child. Adolescents, on the other hand, are concerned about the future, and tend to shut down. They tend to avoid the subject of transitions and let their caregivers take control of the situation (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015).

Another study by Thompson et al. (2018), examined perspectives of parents of children with ASD concerning their child's transition to adulthood. Three themes were identified – to be understood, to understand the world, and to succeed. Parents wished for understanding from the world, where strengths-based approaches that recognize skills of individuals with ASD are utilized as opposed to singling out deficits. Furthermore, parents wanted their children with ASD to be able to understand and to succeed in the adult world (Thompson et al., 2018). Given these concerns, the proposed group aims to

encourage adolescents to begin thinking about the future and the changes that come with it.

Instructional Material

This material can be broken down into separate lessons or combined, depending on the needs of the participants. Adolescents on the spectrum face many life changes, with one of the biggest changes being the transition into adulthood, and with these changes come the need for mastering some basic life skills. Participants can benefit from having discussions surrounding goals for the future and expectations about upcoming life changes. This lesson also corresponds well to the final group session. The ending of group is disappointing for some group members. Often, this social group hour is a major social highlight of their week. Normalize feelings related to the ending of group whether it is positive or negative. Since this group is mainly a social opportunity group, we allow participants to rejoin the group as many times as they wish.

Normalize that change is inevitable and a natural occurrence in our lives. Discuss with the group some of the various changes they may encounter during their lives, such as changing schools, moving homes, changing jobs, etc. Have participants identify some goals for the future and brainstorm different ways they can strive to achieve their goals. Also consider having participants identify some of the life skills they will need during their future endeavors such as money management, time management, basic chores, and hygiene.

Assist participants in identifying and coping with different types of goodbyes and changes. Some goodbyes are temporary, while others are more permanent. Explore different reactions that participants may be feeling. When necessary, reframe negative

thoughts surrounding the end of group and saying goodbye. After all, “good” is part of the word goodbye which means that goodbyes are not inherently supposed to be negative experiences.

Activity

The “spread the love” complimenting exercise also works well for concluding group. Giving compliments can provide group members with an opportunity to express their gratitude and provide feedback on their experiences from group. It ends group on a positive note. However, it is beneficial to pair the compliment exercise with another fun activity that the participants can enjoy together during the last session. Some potential activities are twenty questions, my favorite, would you rather, and this or that. The would you rather and this or that questions can pertain to life skills, such as “would you rather wash the dishes or wash your laundry?” This makes the discussion surrounding life skills more interactive and fun.

Group Improvements and Adaptations

Online Platform

ASD social groups similar to the proposed group were conducted in person previously, but the global COVID-19 pandemic resulted in services shifting to a telehealth format in Spring of 2020. The shift to telehealth proved to be challenging, and for this group to be successful, a strong video-conference platform, such as Zoom Healthcare, was necessary. Originally, the group started on another telehealth platform, but it could not accommodate varying internet speeds thus the quality of the video-call was diminished for all users. The switch to Zoom improved both audio and video connection and also provided other feature that have become crucial to the success of the online social group. Zoom allowed user to set a virtual backgrounds and filters, which

promoted self-expression and social engagement with other group members. However, the chat option was most important feature for the group.

Chat Feature

Participants had varying verbal abilities. Some participants were comfortable verbally speaking in front of the group while other preferred to comment in the chat. Chatting greatly increased participation in group activities and allowed for complimentary social interaction that paralleled the group activities. The chat feature also assisted individuals with slower processing speeds, as they were able to contribute to the discussion without perceived social pressure to respond quickly.

Time Spent on Lessons and Activities

In the pilot group, social skills lessons lasted for about 45 minutes and 10-15 minutes were allotted for an activity. Participation and engagement with the material was limited. The current iterations of the group focus on activity-based learning. Sessions typically begin with a small activity, then a brief lesson on a social skills topic, and end with a lesson-related fun activity. Co-leaders and facilitators also provide participants with the opportunity to choose social activities and create their own versions of activities. For example, participants are encouraged to create their own “would you rather” questions.

Special Interests

During the pilot group, special interests were rarely included during instruction of social skills. Most of the lesson focused on obtaining real-life examples from participants, and it was often difficult for participants to think of examples from their life. Currently, special interests are asked about during intakes and then incorporated into the

instructional material to reinforce and teach social skills concepts in a fun and meaningful way.

Program Evaluation

Throughout the group, feedback is elicited via directly asking both participants and facilitators about group activities and instruction. Participants' suggestions for activities are welcomed. It is a constant process of adapting existing activities and finding new activities in order to keep the group interesting since many participants return to the group for all three series – spring, summer, and fall. Despite covering some of the same social skills topic during the different series, the presentation of the material, examples, and activities are reworked to maintain engagement. For instance, the topic of conversation is addressed during each group series, but different special interest examples and activities are incorporated to make the social experience more novel.

In addition to generic group feedback, this program involves research participation where data on friendship and life satisfaction is collected. Qualitative friendship data is collected via participant photo submissions. Participants are asked to submit a photo each week that displays what friendship means to them. The photos are then coded based on common themes such as traditional friendship, special interests, group activities, family, and stock images. Life satisfaction surveys were emailed for participants and their parent or guardian to complete prior to group and after group completion. However, the life satisfaction data was unable to be statistically analyzed due to the limited number of completed and returned surveys. In the future, an incentive for completed surveys may be introduced so more surveys will be returned. Examples of

friendship photo submissions and the life satisfaction surveys can be found in the appendix.

To assess generic feedback about group activities and social skill use, a short questionnaire with open-ended and Likert scale questions was introduced. To ensure that the data is recorded and submitted, time is set aside during the final group meeting for participants to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire can also be found in the appendix.

From the questionnaire, it was revealed that the participants' favorite activities were Werewolf and Group Drawings, which are both primarily social activities. When asked what was most memorable from group, participants indicated that spending time with everyone and playing games is what they will remember most. Participants were also asked to give suggestions about what could make the group better, and they often stated that they enjoyed the group as it is currently. Since this group places more emphasis on social opportunities than skills acquisition, participants were asked if they felt like they had formed friendships within the group. Participants generally indicated that they had made friends and even considered the other group members as family.

Feedback from Participants

At the end of the group, it is common for participants to express their gratitude for being a part of the social group. Below are some comments that participants have shared via the chat feature about this social group. The comments have been copied directly from the chat, with the original spelling, punctuation, and grammar the participants used.

“Okay want to thank y’all for doing this and this is basically family for most of us. and yeah that’s it.. So in the words of Kobe Bryant (and in the words of me) Mamba out and You guys are a Grammy award winning group. MVP.”

“The weeks are hard for me and it helps me get through them when I know I will be together with all of you on Friday.”

“I loved this group so much and also I hope that this continues for many years to come.”

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APPENDIX A

Training Manual: Lesson Outlines

The following social skills lessons are presented in a tentative outline. Each lesson can be revised to fit the need of the group. While the group timeframe spans six weeks, there are 8 potential lessons that could be selected for use during the six session. Some of the material can be broken down into two separate lessons as well, such as splitting conversation into verbal and nonverbal. It ultimately depends on how in-depth of instruction the group needs. A general format for group begins with a lesson focusing on conversation and ends with a lesson focusing on transitions and changes. There is not a set order for the material. The order of the instructional material can be sequenced based on the most pressing group needs. However, it is important to inform students of the connection between the previous lesson and the present lesson, regardless of the order that the material is presented. Furthermore, the examples and scenarios portrayed in these outlines may be changed and tailored to fit different special interests within the group. It is important that the examples be engaging and rewarding for the participants.

Lesson 1: Conversation

With this being the first meeting, have participants introduce themselves. It is best to provide a simple script that participants can use such as “Hi, my name is _____, and my favorite animal is _____.” Once everyone has introduced themselves, proceed to create some group guidelines in collaboration as a whole group. The guidelines should ensure that participants feel comfortable to share during group and still be able to have fun. These guidelines should be reviewed at the beginning of each group session.

Learning Objectives

- Bolster basic conversational skills within the nonverbal and verbal domains.
- Nonverbal skills include eye-contact, proximity, active listening posture, tone, and facial expressions.
- Verbal skills include taking turns talking and asking questions.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying visuals, and should pertain to special interests if possible.

Eye-Contact

Eye contact demonstrates that we are listening to what is being said. Sometimes it can be intimidating to make eye-contact during a conversation. Sometimes people will look at a person’s nose instead of directly in their eyes. Generally, we should make eye-contact about 50% of the time when we are speaking and about 70% of the time when we are listening. When making eye-contact, maintain it for a few seconds intermittently. We

do not want to maintain eye-contact 100% of the time, as this can be uncomfortable for both the speaker and the listener. On telehealth platforms such as Zoom, eye-contact is trickier. If we were to attempt to truly make eye-contact, we would have to look directly into the camera. However, most people make eye-contact by looking at the speaker's video on the screen.

Tone of Voice

Tone of voice can help us to identify the meanings and feelings behind a person's words. It's not about what is said, but how it is said. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who had very little variations in tone? Was it hard to tell what they were feeling or if they were interested in your conversation? Some examples of characters that have monotone voices are Professor Snape from *Harry Potter* and Squidward from *Spongebob*. Tone is not only conveyed through spoken voice but through written words too. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine someone's tone from their messages in the chat. We may need to ask for clarification.

Asking Questions

Asking questions displays to the speaker that you are listening and interested in the conversation. Questions also keep the conversation going. It's important to keep your questions on topic with what is being said. Asking a random, off-topic question may seem rude. Do not rely too heavily on questions, because we do not want the conversation to feel like an interview. Remember to add some comments to the conversation too.

Balanced Conversation

Try not to dominate the conversation, but allow the other person equal time to speak. Also avoid speaking too little. A conversation does not last if you only respond with one-word answer. We must learn to keep the conversation balanced. On a telehealth group call, balancing the conversation can be difficult. We have different devices and internet speeds which can affect the rate at which we hear the dialogue. This makes it difficult to avoid interrupting someone. If we accidentally interrupt or talk over someone, we should apologize and allow the person to repeat what they said.

Activities

For all activities, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Two Truths and a Lie

Before starting the instructional material, have the participants engage in an ice breaker game like “Two Truths and a Lie.” Each participant presents three statements about themselves, where two statements are true and one is a lie. The group discusses together to determine which statement they think is the lie. This activity facilitates conversation and allows participants to become familiar with each other.

This or That

After the group instruction, it is recommended to end the session with a relevant and fun activity. “This or That” allows participants to compare interests and start conversation surrounding the different preferences. “This or That” questions should be fun and interest oriented, such as “beach or lake” or “Darth Maul or Darth Vader.

Lesson 2: Friendship

The first lesson introduced basic conversational skills, and those skills reflect basic competencies for making friends, thus it is generally ideal to cover friendship following the conversation lesson. Begin this lesson by reviewing group guidelines and linking the topic of conversation to friendship. This can be achieved by provided a brief, one-slide overview of the previous week's material and then providing a rationale for why conversation skills are important when trying to make friends.

Learning Objectives

- Identify some of the qualities associated with friends.
- Provide advice and ideas for seeking out and building friendships

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying visuals, and should pertain to special interests if possible.

Qualities of a Good Friend

There are several qualities that we look for in a friend. We want a friend that we can trust and will be honest with us. Friends should also be supportive of us and try to empathize with our struggles. Sometimes, we look for friends that share some of our values and interests, but it is also good to have friends that are different from us too. Can you think of a time you were a good friend? What about an example of a book, movie, or TV character that was a good friend?

Tips for Making Friends

There are many ways we can meet new people and potentially build friendships. One way is to join a group or club. Sometimes we are not granted access to joining, and in these cases, we may need to find another group or create our own group. Another friendship strategy is to compliment someone. Compliments can open the door for conversation and possibly create new friendships. Just like groups, sometimes individuals will reject our offers of friendship. Not all of our efforts at creating new friends will be successful. If someone rejects you, respect their decision and try making friends with someone else. It can be helpful to talk about your feelings with someone you trust following a rejection.

Activity

For all activities, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Spread the Love

“Spread the Love” is a complimenting activity where everyone takes turns complimenting someone until everyone has received a compliment. One of the co-leaders starts by complimenting one of the group members, then the person who received the compliment will compliment someone else. This process continues until everyone has received a compliment. Encourage participants to make compliments that go beyond physical appearance. However, accept any compliment that is given because this exercise can be difficult or anxiety provoking for some participants. If a participant does not feel comfortable selecting someone specific to compliment, they may compliment the group as a whole or simply choose not to participate by saying “pass.”

Lesson 3: Social Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution

Social problem-solving skills and the ability to resolve conflicts is ideal content to cover following the friendship lesson, as friends have conflicts sometimes. However, other lessons such as rejection, awareness of feelings, or even assertiveness could follow the friendship lesson. Regardless of which session social problem solving and conflict resolution is presented, be sure to link the current skill set to the past skills in order to emphasize how different social skills relate and build upon each other. The simplest way to make this connection is via review slides. Include one slide of review per the previous lessons covered. In addition to the lesson review slides, review the group guidelines prior to starting the new material.

Learning Objectives

- Present and explain the steps involved in solving social problems: identify the problem, generate possible solutions, evaluate the positives and negatives of each solution, choose the best solution and implement it, assess the effectiveness of the solution.
- Discuss potential conflict management strategies.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying visuals, and should use social problem examples that pertain to special interests if possible. Practice the problem-solving skills using various scenarios in order to assist participants in becoming familiar with the steps. Co-leaders and facilitators should offer ideas and feedback during the instruction.

Problem-Solving Steps

Sometimes, we encounter problems when we are interacting socially with other people. We need to be able to analyze what the source of the problem is and brainstorm ways to resolve the conflict. There are five problem-solving steps that we can apply to social situations: identify the problem, generate possible solutions, evaluate the positives and negatives, choose and implement the best solution, assess the effectiveness. Consider this problem scenario: you are playing *Dungeons & Dragons* with your friends, and you notice that one of them made some character change rules without telling anyone in the group. What could you do?

Identify the Problem

In order to work towards solving social problems, we must be able to identify what is the source of the problem. In our *Dungeons & Dragons* scenario, what is the problem? The problem has to do with communication, because the character change rules were not communicated to you.

Generate Possible Solutions

After we have identified the problem, we need to come up with some different plans or solutions. What are some of the possible solutions we could try (Co-leaders record the different plans the participants propose and add suggestions as needed)? We need at least three possible solutions. We could get angry and accuse our friend of cheating. We could ask our friend to explain the character change rules to the group. We could stop playing the game. There are several courses of action, but we need to decide what solution will be the most helpful.

Evaluate the Positives and Negatives

We have identified the problem and generated possible solution, so now we need to carefully evaluate our plans. Our first plan was to accuse our friend of cheating. What are the pros and cons of this solution? It will address the problem, but will it solve the problem or make the problem worse? Our second plan was to ask our friend to explain the rules to the group. What are the pros and cons of this solution? Will it solve our problem without blaming others or causing more problems? Our final plan was to stop playing the game with our friend. What are the pros and cons of this solution? Will it solve the problem or avoid the problem?

Choose and Implement the Best Solution

We have successfully identified the problem, generated solutions, and evaluated the positives and negatives of each solution. Now we need to decide what solution to implement. Based on our discussion of pros and cons, what solution do we think will be best (co-leaders should accept the participants' suggested solution even if it is not the best one, as this will facilitate discussion during the final step)? Let's try asking our friend to explain the new character change rules to the group.

Assess the Effectiveness

Many people think that the final step of problem-solving is taking action and implementing the plan, but the final step actually involves determining how successful was our solution. We need to evaluate the effectiveness of our solution. If our solution was not helpful, we will need to go back through our problem-solving steps. We may need to choose one of our other solutions we generated and try it. If our solution was

helpful and solved the problem, then we have successfully completed the problem-solving steps. How effective do you think our *Dungeons & Dragons* solution was?

Conflict Resolution

In addition to utilizing social problem-solving steps, we should also be familiar with some conflict resolution strategies. Conflict resolution strategies should be considered during step two and three of our social problem-solving steps. The conflict resolution strategies are often the possible solutions we are generating, and we need to evaluate the positives and negatives of using a particular strategy. Some common conflict resolution strategies include compromising, avoiding, and collaborating. Depending on the issue we are experiencing will have need to decide what strategy will work best.

Activity

For all activities, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Group Storytelling

Group storytelling lets participants use their collective imaginations to craft a story. The story should include a conflict and a resolution. Co-leaders will ask the participants to identify the main components of the story. One of the co-leaders should share their screen and type out the story as the participants decide what to include. The other Co-leader will facilitate the sharing of idea and make sure everyone has a turn to add to the story. Allow for special interests to be included in the story. Samples of group stories can be found in Appendix B.

Lesson 4: Awareness of Emotions of Self and Others

A crucial social skill is the ability to identify the emotions of oneself and of others. This material can be introduced at any point as the lesson for sessions two, three, four, or five. Awareness of emotions compliments the conversation lesson, given that facial expressions commonly provide the necessary nonverbal cues for understanding another person's emotions during a conversation. Additionally, awareness of emotions relates to friendship and social problem-solving. Friends need to be aware of each other's emotions in order to respond empathically, and awareness of emotions of self and others allows for more effective solutions when problem-solving. Co-leaders should review any previously covered material and the group guidelines before introducing the topic of awareness of feelings.

Learning Objectives

- Identify bodily cues and thoughts that are reflected of emotional states within oneself.
- Identify verbal and nonverbal cues of emotional states of others.
- Introduce possible coping skills for handling emotions.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying picture or video examples, specifically special interest examples of different emotions. Ask the participants to explain how they were able to identify the emotions, specifically if it was a verbal or nonverbal cue that aided in the identification.

Awareness of Our Own Emotions

It can be difficult to identify our own emotions at times, but there are several bodily cues that can help us gain insight into our feelings. Ask participants to share some of the cues they notice in their bodies when they feel certain emotions. For instance, discussions could focus on where anger is felt, such as clenched teeth or fists, tension in the eyebrows, and rigid posture. Emphasize that these bodily cues can overlap with different emotions, so we have to pay attention to our thoughts as well. Potential overlaps could be crying when angry or sad. Discuss the contextual clues in the situation or the different thoughts that an individual may be experiencing when feeling such emotions.

Awareness of the Emotions of Others

Once participants have grasped some ways of identifying emotions within themselves, discuss different ways that we can attempt to recognize emotions of others. The most obvious way to recognize the emotions of another person is paying attention to what they are saying. Sometimes, people are direct and state their feelings (“I’m so angry!”), while other individuals make subtle statements about their feelings (“I’ve had a rough day.”). When the statements are more subtle, we need to rely on other cues – nonverbal cues. Facial expressions can provide valuable information about how someone is feeling. If someone is happy or excited, they will likely be smiling. If someone is scared, their eyes and mouth will be open wide. Sometimes there is some overlap between expressions, such as fear and surprise. Ask participants to discuss alternative ways of identifying the emotions of others when facial expressions appear ambiguous.

Coping Skills

Ask participants to share coping skills that they currently use. Then collaboratively form a list of different coping skills that the participants could employ when handling a difficult emotion. Practice a coping skill as a group, such as deep breathing or the 5-4-3-2-1 technique.

Activities

For all activities, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Guess the Emotion

“Guess the Emotion” can be played two different ways. The first is a game of emotional charades. Co-leaders will have a list of emotions and assign an emotion to be acted out. Participation in this activity is voluntary, and it is best practice to ask if anyone would like to volunteer. Some participants may not feel comfortable acting in front of the group. Encourage those who are not acting to actively participate by guessing the emotion being portrayed.

The second version of “Guess the Emotion” is played using images of special interests. For example, an image of grumpy cat would be presented, and the co-leaders would ask, ideally the individual who is interested in grumpy cat, to identify the emotion. This version of the game is reinforcing and generally ensures participation from all group members.

Group Drawing

The “Group Drawing” exercise can be framed as a potential coping skill for expressing emotions. Many individuals enjoy drawing to alleviate negative emotions or as a hobby. However, there is the possibility for individuals to be overly critical of their

artwork. The “Group Drawing” activity utilizes the whiteboard and annotation feature of Zoom, which allows all participants to draw on the screen. Participants will take turns adding something to the drawing without making any negative comments about their own work or the work of others. Participants can discuss amongst each other about what the drawing looks like or what should be added. It can be difficult for participant to wait to draw until there turn, so flexibility and explicit instructions are necessary.

Lesson 5: Communication Styles – Being Assertive

Using assertive communication is critical for vulnerable populations, such as teens on the autism spectrum. However, teaching about communication styles has proved to be difficult for this population. Simply defining each communication style has not been sufficient. The use of graphics that display each style on a continuum and the use of video examples has been the most effective. The instructional material concerning assertiveness can be utilized at any session during group, but it is best to introduce it earlier and have frequent reviews given the complexity and nuances of the topic. Similar to others lessons, co-leaders should review any previously covered material and the group guidelines before introducing the topic of communication styles.

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between communication styles.
- Define and provide concrete examples of passive, assertive, and aggressive communication styles.
- Emphasize the importance of assertive communication.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying video examples pertaining to each communication style. The video examples are more effective if it pertains to a special interest. A good video example that includes all three styles is a clip from a *SpongeBob* episode (<https://youtu.be/SYuboi4GWO4>). This particular clip displays SpongeBob communicating passively and Plankton being aggressive after failing to teach SpongeBob

how to be assertive. In addition to providing examples, co-leaders should acknowledge and praise participants' assertive communication as it occurs throughout the session and any subsequent sessions.

Passive Communication

When people communicate passively, they are not expressing their feelings, opinion, wants, or needs. Passive communicators allow other people to “walk all over them.” Their tone is often apologetic, and they speak softly.

Assertive Communication

When people communicate assertively, they are expressing their feelings, opinion, wants, and needs in a clear, appropriate, and respectful manner. Assertive communicators speak calmly and use “I” statements to express their wants and needs. Being assertive protects people from being manipulated or mistreated.

Aggressive Communication

When people communicate aggressively, they are expressing their feelings, opinion, wants, and needs in a manner that violates the rights of the people around them. Aggressive communicators may yell, interrupt, or attack others. They often speak in a loud voice and use “you” statements that blame others. People tend to be fearful or alienate themselves from aggressive communicator.

Activities

Group Drawing

The group drawing activity can also be adapted as an assertiveness exercise. Instead of everyone drawing together, one person will be the artist drawing the image, ideally one of the co-leaders or facilitators. The group will decide on an image to be

drawn, without the artist knowing of their selection. The group's job is to describe the image in enough detail for the artist to draw. The artist may make some mistakes, and the group must be able to provide corrective feedback. The participants must be able to communicate to the artist effectively without coming across as passive or aggressive.

Virtual Scavenger Hunt

Another activity to consider pairing with the assertiveness lesson is a virtual scavenger hunt. Co-leaders read prompts to the group, such as “find something you are proud of,” and the participants search for an object to share. This scavenger hunt can give insight into the different types of communication styles in the group, based on how the participants display what they found. Some individuals will briefly show their item and not offer any explanation, while others will talk over top of each other in an attempt to share their item. Some participants are more assertive and will raise their hand in order to get permission to share.

Session 6: Rejection

Rejection is another topic that can be taught at any point during the group, as it relates well to most of the other lessons. Rejection can occur in conversations, thus sparking the use of social problem-solving skills. How we handle and respond to rejection is indicative of our communication style. Regardless of when the rejection lesson is presented, co-leaders should emphasize how it relates to previously learned social skills. As with all lessons, review previous content and group guidelines prior to beginning the rejection lesson.

Learning Objectives

- Define rejection and the different ways that rejection can be communicated.
- Suggest potential ways of coping with rejection.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying video examples pertaining to rejection. The video examples are more effective if it pertains to a special interest. A good video example that displays rejection is a clip from a *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (<https://youtu.be/jBCoyeSItVs>). This particular clip portrays Anakin being denied the rank of Master. Anakin does not respond to this rejection the most effectively, but this allows the participants to generate alternate responses that Anakin could have implemented and to analyze his communication style.

Recognizing Rejection

Sometimes rejection is easy to recognize and other times rejection is subtle. When rejection is clearly implied, it typically involves someone saying “no.” However, the “no”

could be stated politely or it could be rude. Rejection can also be unspoken or communicated nonverbally, where someone ignores or avoids another person. Regardless of the manner of rejection, rejection can be hurtful.

Coping Skills

Whether the rejection was conveyed overtly, covertly, nicely, or cruelly, it is important for participants to have plans for coping with rejection. Co-leaders should guide participants in identifying coping skills for handling rejection. Some potential skills include talking with a trusted adult or engaging in positive self-talk. Since rejection is a sensitive topic that can bring up painful memories, allot some time to process, validate, and normalize participant experiences and feelings.

Activity

Rejection can be a difficult topic and may bring up negative emotions, so the group activity that follows the lesson usually does not directly correspond to rejection. Instead, the activity should be fun and promote group participation and connectedness. For the activities, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Riddles and Jokes

Co-leaders come prepared with a list of riddles and jokes to share with the group. Participants are encouraged to share their own riddles or jokes as well. Co-leaders will need to remind participants to share only clean jokes.

Virtual Scavenger Hunt

If the virtual scavenger hunt has not previously been used, it makes an excellent activity to allow some movement and engagement with group members. Participants find items in their home based on prompts revealed by the co-leaders.

Session 7: Sportsmanship and Frustration Tolerance

Learning to work as a team and gracefully accept defeat is a fundamental skillset adolescents will need for the future. Making friends and maintaining friendships requires the ability to be a good sport and effectively handle frustrations. This lesson builds upon other skills and allows for more socialization compared to other lessons. Co-leader's will need to review past lessons and the group guideline briefly, and then cover the current material within a 20-minute time frame. The remainder of the hour should be devoted to a game that will test participants' sportsmanship.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the qualities associated with being a good sport.
- Suggest potential skills for tolerating frustrations.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. The following information should be presented with accompanying visuals, and should use sportsmanship examples that pertain to special interests if possible. However, the instructional material should be relatively brief in order to allot sufficient time for a group game. Ask participants to define what sportsmanship means to them. Discuss how sportsmanship is not solely for sports but can be applied to a variety of settings.

Being a Good Sport

Good sport's try to maintain a positive attitude regardless of the outcome. Good sport's also play fair and avoid arguing. It can be tempting to give in to feelings of anger, but it is better to stay focused on the task at hand. Being respectful to other players is

another important aspect sportsmanship. We want everyone to feel included and valued, and we can do this by working as a team and encouraging one another.

Frustration Tolerance

As mentioned previously, it can be tempting to give into our feelings of frustration, especially if things are not going the way we want them to. However, we need to be able to tolerate frustration in order to be a good sport. Everyone wants to win or succeed, but everyone will experience a loss at some point. Coping skills like belly breathing, talking to a trusted adult, and grounding or expressive techniques can help us to manage our frustrations.

Activity

For the sportsmanship game, participants still have the option to participate verbally or in the chat.

Werewolf

“Werewolf” is an exciting game that requires teamwork and good sportsmanship. “Werewolf” can be a complicated game to learn, so providing detailed instructions before the session, as well as reviewing the instructions during the session is recommended. The premise of the game involves werewolves hunting townspeople, and the townspeople must work collaboratively to identify the werewolves. Sometimes people fall prey to the wolves or are falsely accused of being a wolf. The participants need to exhibit good sportsmanship skills and manage their frustrations in order to participate and enjoy the game. Sometimes some participants are not able to comprehend the game, or they are not interested in playing, so it is recommended to have alternative activities or allow for individuals to opt-out of playing.

Session 8: Life Planning, Accepting Change, and Saying Goodbye

This lesson can be broken down into separate lessons or combined, depending on the needs of the participants. This material is typically presented at the final session both the second to last and final session, as the topics corresponding to group coming to a close and preparing for future endeavors. The ending of group is disappointing for some participants. Often, this weekly one-hour session is a major social highlight of their week. This group allows participants to join again for upcoming group series, so co-leaders may reassure participants that this goodbye is only temporary. As with all lessons, briefly review previous content and group guidelines prior to beginning the current topic lesson.

Learning Objectives

- Identify common life skills needed for the transition to adulthood.
- Discuss future goals.
- Normalize life changes and having to say goodbye to people, places, and things.

Instruction

Given the telehealth platform, instructional material is best presented using PowerPoint or Google Slides. Most lessons incorporate special interests, but this lesson relies more heavily on current feelings and self-reflection.

Life Skills and Future Planning

There are many valuable skills needed for the transition to adulthood, and it is ideal to start working on life skills during adolescence. Co-leaders should engage the participants in a discussion surrounding the different life skills. Some potential skills to discuss include scheduling, chores, hygiene, money, hobbies, safety, communication, and goal setting. In addition to having some basic life skills, it is imperative to start thinking

about plans for the future. Co-leaders should encourage participants to identify one goal that either pertains to their future (long-term goal) or a goal that they would like to complete this year (short-term goal).

Accepting Change and Saying Goodbye

Change is inevitable and happens more often than not during our lives. Being a teenager precedes many changes, such as changing schools, getting a job, and even moving out of your parent's home. It's important to remember that not all changes are bad, even if the change seems difficult. Sometimes, when a change occurs, it requires us to say goodbye to some of the people, places, and things we enjoy. Some goodbyes may be permanent, like when a loved one passes away. Other goodbyes may be temporary, such as the ending of this group. When changes and goodbyes are difficult, it can be helpful to acknowledge your feelings, talk with someone you trust, and focus on the positives.

Activity

For this activity, participants may choose to participate verbally or in the chat.

Would You Rather

"Would You Rather" is conversational activity where co-leaders present two options to the group such as "would you rather be very fast or very strong." Participants are also encouraged to create their own would you rather questions to pose to the group. In addition to the fun questions, co-leaders should include some questions relevant to the content covered in the lesson, such as "would you rather spend money now or save money for later?" This makes the discussion surrounding life skills and accepting change more interactive and fun.

APPENDIX B

Activity List

Two Truths and a Lie: This icebreaker activity involves each participant introducing themselves and stating three things about themselves. Two of the statements must be true and one is false. The rest of the group tries to guess the lie. Allow participants to either speak their statement or type them into the chat. “Two Truths and a Lie” is an ideal icebreaker activity for conversation instruction as it engages the participants in conversation as they try to guess the lie. This activity also allows for secondary conversations that arise naturally from the truths/lies the participants state.

My Favorite: This icebreaker activity provides prompts that encourage participants to share something they favor. Co-leaders read the prompts and group members finish the prompt either verbally or in the chat. Example prompts include “my favorite ice cream,” “my favorite movie,” or “my favorite game.”

Virtual Scavenger Hunt: A typical scavenger hunt, but each participant searches for items within their own home. Group co-leaders make a list of ambiguous prompts that allude to items that can be found in one’s home such as “find something that keeps you warm on a cold day,” “find something green,” or “find something you are proud of.” This is a fun activity that allows for movement and show-n-tell. Group participants often engage in conversation surrounding the items other participants share. It is important that the co-leaders and other facilitators acknowledge what each participant is sharing either verbally or via chat.

Group Storytelling: During this activity the whole group works together to create a story. Ask the group what the key elements of the story should be – setting, characters,

and plot. Use the screenshare feature of your telehealth platform to type the story for the participants to see. Make sure to include all participants in this activity. Prompt or directly ask members who have not participated for a contribution to the story. Some participants respond better to visual aids, so pictures of interests may help to stimulate story ideas. The group storytelling activity can be complimentary for social problem-solving instruction. The participants can practice solving social conflicts via fictional stories.

Group Drawing: Similar to the group story telling activity, this drawing is done as a group, which allows for the practice of assertive communication. One of the co-leaders will be the artist and draw one of three preselected images. The images ideally should pertain to participant special interests. The group participants will vote to choose one of the images in the chat. The artist will be unaware of what image was chose, and the participants will offer suggestions and instructions as to how the drawing should look. The artist will purposefully make errors in the drawing and the participants will have to address the errors assertively as opposed to passively or aggressively.

The group drawing activity can also be implemented as a team work exercise, where all group members work together to create a drawing. This can be done via Zoom whiteboard screenshare, and participants select the annotate option in order to all draw at once. This version of group drawing is best paired with group storytelling, as the participants can work together to illustrate their story.

Werewolf: For this virtual group, a modified version of the game werewolf is played. To make the game simpler and easier to play online, there are only three roles – werewolves, townspeople, and narrator. Typically, there is one narrator, two werewolves, and the

remainder of the group are townspeople, but this can be changed depending on the number of group members. The premise of this game involves the townspeople going to sleep (turning off their video) and the werewolves attack (choose a participant to be the victim of the werewolves). The narrator wakes up the townspeople and informs them of what happened during the night. The townspeople consult and vote on who they think is a werewolf. If the individual they voted against was not a werewolf, they are banished from the town. This process of sleeping, werewolves attacking, and voting continues until both werewolves have been identified or all the townspeople are gone. Deceased and banished townspeople keep their videos off for the remainder of the game.

The werewolf game appears to be popular among adolescents, but it should be noted that for some individuals this game is too scary or too complex. Other activities should be available for those either uninterested, too frightened, or ill-equipped to play. Breakout rooms can be used for alternative activities, and then the group can come together to reconvene once the game of werewolf is finished.

For more detailed instructions on how to play werewolf virtually, you can visit the following website: <https://anjuansimmons.com/blog/how-to-play-werewolf-over-zoom/>

This or That: This or that is a conversational activity where participants are presented with two options to choose from such as “hamburgers or hotdogs,” “winter or summer,” or “movies or books.” Participants can respond verbally or via chat. Participants are also encouraged to create their own this or that questions to pose to the group.

Would You Rather: “Would you rather” is another conversational activity where participants are presented with two options to choose from such as “would you rather fly or be invisible” or “would you rather be able to talk to cats or talk to dogs.” Participants

can respond verbally or via chat. Participants are also encouraged to create their own would you rather questions to pose to the group.

Spread the Love - Compliment Exercise: This activity aids in the practice of complimenting others. This activity can be difficult for some individuals but a valuable skill nonetheless. A co-leader or facilitator starts by complimenting one of the group members, then the person who received the compliment will compliment someone. This process continues until everyone has received a compliment.

Twenty Questions: Twenty questions is a fun and simple game to play online. A participant thinks of a person, place, or thing. Then group will ask up to twenty questions and guess the person, place, thing.

Riddles and Jokes: During this activity, co-leaders come prepared with a list of riddles and jokes to share with the group. Participants are encouraged to submit their own riddles and jokes for the group to guess.

Mad Libs: Mad Libs is a fun activity that can be used at the beginning of sessions as an icebreaker activity. Participants fill in the blanks in order to create a silly story. Free online Mad Libs can be found at <https://www.glowwordbooks.com/blog/category/kids-online-mad-libs/>

Guess the Emotion: This activity can be played two different ways. The first is a game of emotional charades, where participants act out an emotion, and the group tries to guess the emotion. The other way to play “Guess the Emotion” involves using images of special interests that display different emotions, and having the participants guess the emotion based on the image.

Activity Samples

Group Storytelling

Kanye's Summer Adventure to Sesame Street

Once upon a time . . .

Kanye West and Drake decided to go on a summer journey. On the way they decided to stop at the Florida Beach to visit some ice cream parlors and play some arcade games. They decided to swim at the beach later.

Back in New York, Elmo is getting trained by Chance the Rapper. He is getting trained in karate, and he is getting ready to go to his first big competition. However, Snoop Dog and Big Bird tried to take over the karate competition.

Kanye and Drake run into the Count in an alley, and the Count said “hey man we gotta get to the Street. There’s some stuff going on.”

Kanye and Drake say “what’s going on?” and the Count says “Snoop Dog and Big Bird have taken over the karate competition. We have to go help Elmo!”

The three of them load up in their helicopter and head to Sesame Street. Julia greets them when they get off the helicopter, and she takes them to the karate competition. Kanye West and Drake end up beating Snoop Dog and Big Bird. Kanye and Drake win the competition! Kanye and Drake snuck some ice cream on the helicopter and decide to share it with their friends and family since they won the competition.

Meanwhile, Julia helps Big Bird become good Big Bird again, so he is able to rejoin the Sesame Street family.

After celebrating, Kanye and Drake escape on a rocket and meet Dr. B on the moon.

The Grandchildren's Adventure

All of the grandchildren are at Grandpa's house and they want to go somewhere. But they get caught in the snowstorm!

Suddenly the granddaughter realizes that they need milk for their dinner preparation.

The grandchildren go out in the snow to visit their neighbor, Kanye West, to see if he might have milk that they can borrow.

Kanye gets milk from his secret cave.

The grandchildren return to Grandpa's house. They realize that the milk Kanye gave them wasn't actually milk.

The bottle that they got actually had shampoo in it and not milk. When they were cooking dinner and pouring it, the liquid had a surprising texture! When the grandkids looked, they realized it was shampoo.

Unfortunately, the grandchildren didn't realize this quickly enough...grandpa had already started drinking the shampoo.

Evidently, this was a super-Kanye shampoo because when Grandpa hiccupped, he started floating away from the house! The grandkids join him in the bubble, float to the top of the hill and continue their search for milk.

Kanye looks out his window and sees the family floating in bubbles. He realizes he had gone to the wrong secret cave! He went to the shampoo cave instead of the milk cave. Kanye took a sip of his shampoo so that he could float too and help the family, but instead he drank the shampoo that made him burp musical notes.

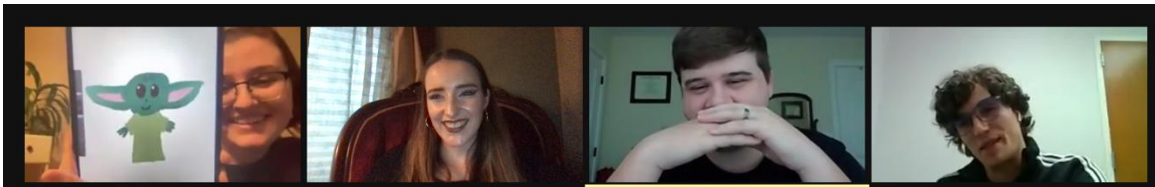
Kanye ended up giving the family milk from Kroger. It's a right turn from Drake's house.

Kanye does what only Kanye does and pushes the red button! When the family runs out of milk, the red button automatically makes milk. Kanye has made sure that the grandchildren never go hungry again!

The whole group goes to Superbowl 56 and has fun!

Group Drawing

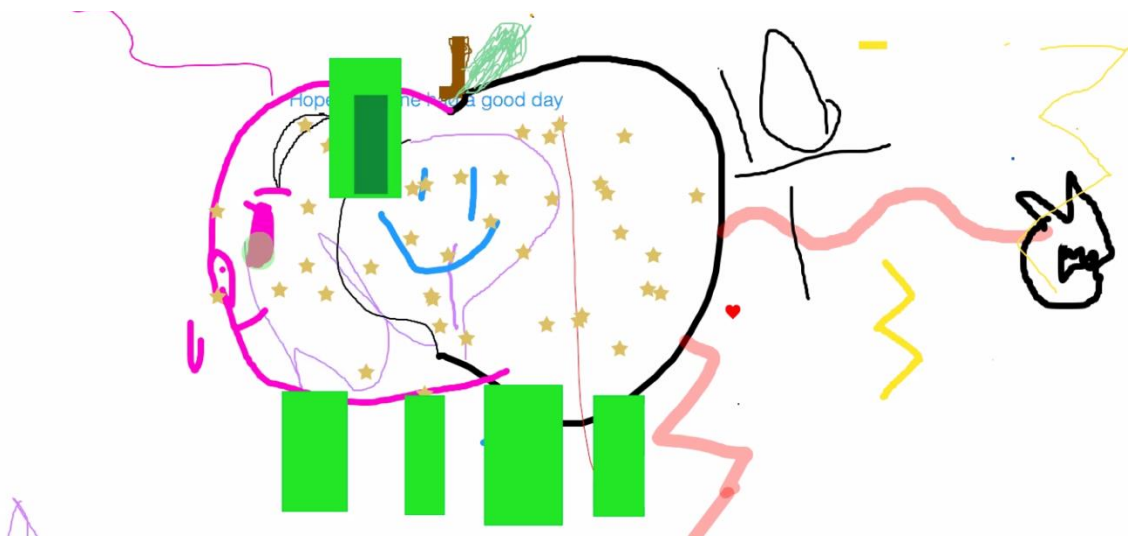
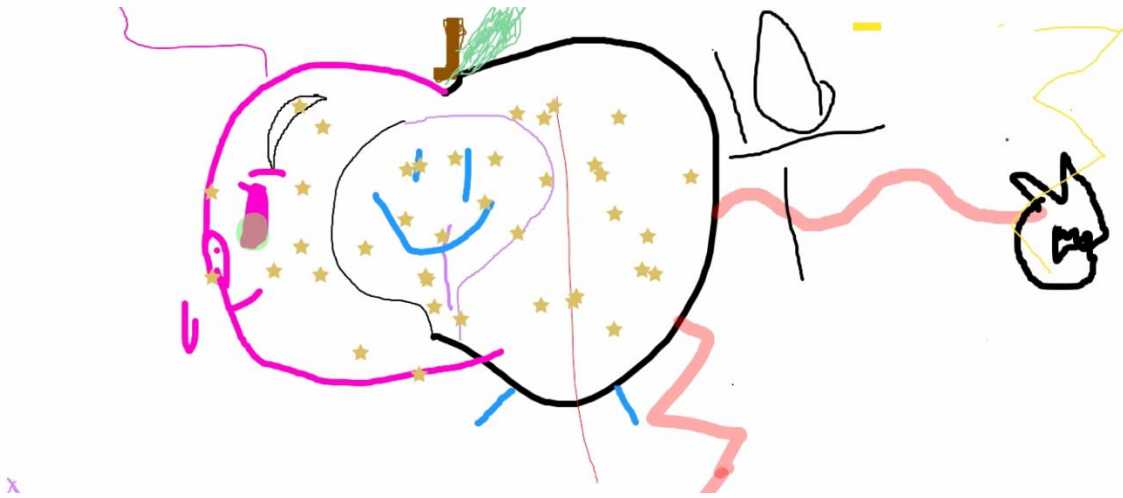
Below is a group drawing that was completed by a group facilitator while the participants provided instructions.



The following group drawing was completed with all participants contributing via the Zoom whiteboard and annotation feature.



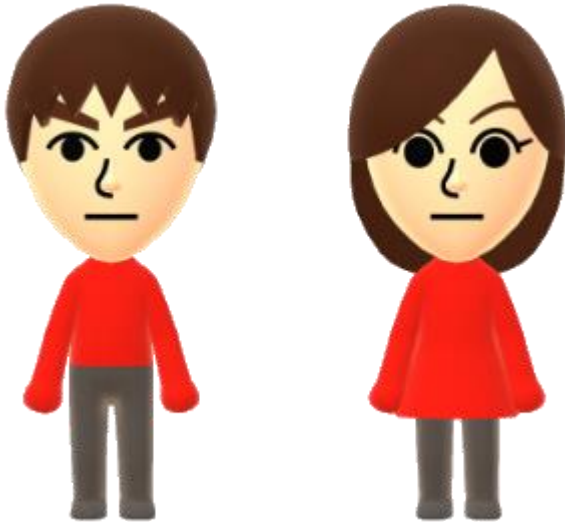
The following group drawings show the progression of a collaborative drawing exercise. Participants took turns adding something to the drawing.





Examples of Research Methods and Program Evaluation

Friendship Photo Submissions





Life Satisfaction Survey – Parent

Students' Life Satisfaction Scale Adapted from Huebner, 1991

Directions: We would like to know what thoughts about your child's life you have had during the past several weeks. Think about how your child spends each day and night and then think about how your child's life has been during most of this time. Here are some questions that ask you to indicate your perception of your child's satisfaction with his/her overall life. Circle the words next to each statement that indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. For example, if you Strongly Agree with the statement "My child's life is great," you would circle those words on the following sample item;

A) My child's life is great.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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It is important to know what you REALLY think, so please answer the questions the way you really think, not how you should think. This is NOT a test. There are NO right or wrong answers.

1. My child's life is going well.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. My child's life is just right.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. My child would like to change many things his/her/their life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. My child wishes he/she/they had a different kind of life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. My child has a good life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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6. My child has what he/she/they want in life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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7. My child's life is better than most kids.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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Adapted from Huebner, E. S. (1991). Initial development of the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale. School Psychology International, 12, 231-243.

Study: Picturing Friendship: Examining the Efficacy of a Teen Autism Group Using Images

Life Satisfaction Survey – Child

Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991)

Directions: We would like to know what thoughts about life you have had during the past several weeks. Think about how you spend each day and night and then think about how your life has been during most of this time. Here are some questions that ask you to indicate your satisfaction with your overall life. Circle the words next to each statement that indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. For example, if you Strongly Agree with the statement “Life is great,” you would circle those words on the following sample item;

B) Life is great.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
----------------------	------------------------	--------------------	-----------------	---------------------	-------------------

It is important to know what you REALLY think, so please answer the questions the way you really think, not how you should think. This is NOT a test. There are NO right or wrong answers.

8. My life is going well.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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9. My life is just right.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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10. I would like to change many things in my life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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11. I wish I had a different kind of life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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12. I have a good life.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
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13. I have what I want in life.

Strongly Disagree Moderately Disagree Mildly Disagree Mildly Agree Moderately Agree Strongly Agree

14. My life is better than most kids.

Strongly Disagree Moderately Disagree Mildly Disagree Mildly Agree Moderately Agree Strongly Agree

Huebner, E. S. (1991). Initial development of the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale.

School Psychology International, 12, 231-243.

Study: Picturing Friendship: Examining the Efficacy of a Teen Autism Group Using Images

End of Group Questionnaire

1. What was your favorite activity from our teen social group?
2. What will you remember most from our teen social group?
3. What could make the teen social group better?
4. Do you feel like you have made friends in this group?

Yes []

No []

5. How confident do you feel about using the skills we have learned in group?

1

2

3

4

5

Not Confident
"I can't use the skills"

A little confident
"I could benefit from
some more practice"

Very Confident
"I have no
worries about
using the skills"

