Helping Adolescents with ASD Access the Curriculum Using Social Thinking Strategies
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Amy- All right, once again, welcome to our webinar today, Helping Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders Access the Curriculum Using Social Thinking Strategies. Our presenter today is Sharon Baum, CCC-SLP. She is an SLP in the New York City Department of Education and provides services in the ASD NEST Program, as well as privately in the clinic setting and in homes. In addition, she's a freelance writer and has published for the ASHA Leader and she supervises interns and teaches a diagnostic evaluation course at Pace University's graduate program. So we're very pleased to have her here with us today. Welcome, Sharon, I'm gonna turn over the mic to you.

Sharon- Hi, everybody. I'm looking forward to presenting today on Helping Adolescents with ASD Access the Curriculum Using Social Thinking Strategies. I just wanna give you a little bit of an overview on what you will hear today. First of all, I'm gonna explain a little bit more about what gaining access to the curriculum actually means. I will also be discussing what social thinking challenges impact the academic success of our students. And I break those down into two major categories, theory of mind as well as executive functioning.

Also I will give an overview of common social thinking strategies used by SLPs in the therapy room, that I use consistently in my own therapy room. I will also give evidence of social thinking challenges in the classroom, how to carry over these strategies into the classroom, anxiety and problem solving and how it impacts social thinking since that's something that also seeps into the academic success. And then finally, working towards being able to self advocate since we want our students to ultimately advocate for themselves to gain access to the curriculum.

And finally, I will conclude with a summary and be open to questions. In terms of learning outcomes today, there are three learning outcomes. After this course, participants will be able to identify five barriers that make it difficult for individuals with ASD to access the school curriculum. Describe three strategies that SLPs can use to

help students experience academic success. And number three, identify three ways that SLPs can collaborate with teachers to help students with ASD overcome learning obstacle. So what are the core challenges of adolescents with ASD? So, I've been part of the program in NEST for about seven years, which is a collaborative program that helps individuals with Asperger's gain access to the curriculum. And through this program, I've harnessed some skills that I've learned through social development intervention, which is an approach that helps our students develop the theory of minds so that they can better use the skills in the classroom and in their natural environment since social thinking isn't something that is automatic for them.

So much of the work and much of what I'm gonna be explaining today has been inspired by my work for the NEST Program. So gaining access to the curriculum is such a large term. We hear it all the time, and we know that our role as related service providers is to help our students gain access to the curriculum. Now according to IDEA, which is the Individual With Disabilities Education Act, we are required in every state to give students an ability to access the curriculum and support them in whatever way that they need. So if a student is struggling in any area that is hindering their academic success, we are required to support that need. It's important to mention here though that we also want to provide for the least restrictive environment. We don't wanna overservice a student and we also don't want to not provide the student with enough support, but we wanna make sure that they're able to achieve academic success as supported by the team.

Of course funding varies from state to state and every state has a different idea of what is needed to help a student gain access to the curriculum. So, like I said, least restrictive environment is what we're getting at. We want to support inclusion and we want our students to be as successful as they can be, but we don't want to provide them with an environment that overservices them or makes them less independent. And so in order to figure out that happy balance, we have to collaborate with all the educators on that team, and by doing that, we can not only develop a plan for the

student, but we can modify instruction as new things come up. Since adolescence is an ongoing stage of development, I see students in NEST from six to eighth grade. It's important to work with the team on an ongoing basis to modify that instruction. And I'm going to, as I explained earlier, delineate two of the major core social thinking challenges. I'm gonna break them down into the theory of mind and executive functioning.

And as Michelle Garcia Winner, who is so influential in the social thinking curriculum states, the two go hand in hand. And theory of mind and executive functioning issues are basically, when merged together create the perfect storm for difficulty navigating the academic curriculum. And theory of mind also is a big umbrella term and there are a lot of facets that go under it. Overall, it's the ability to understand the desires, intentions and beliefs of others. And this is such a huge thing that doesn't come automatically to our students who have ASD and it not only impacts them in the therapy room, but it also carries over into the classroom and into any natural setting that they are in.

And then we've got the facets or the components of core social thinking. And so we've got perspective taking, self-awareness, experience sharing, episodic memory, for those who don't know what episodic memory is, it's the ability to think back to prior experiences that delivered an outcome that was unwanted, and then thinking of that situation again when a similar situation comes up so that a different outcome is achieved and so that the desired outcome can be ultimately mastered. Then there's cognitive flexibility, which is the ability to change ideas and opinions based on the others around you. So instead of being just in tuned with your own ideas, and your own desires, you're able to be flexible with shifting ideas and opinions. Appraisal also, in NEST we like to call it reading the room. You walk into a room and you have to evaluate what's going on. We have to evaluate, hey, who are the people in the room? What are they doing right now? What is my role right now in this room? By evaluating the situation, students are able to then understand what they should and should not be

doing in that moment. And then nonverbal communication, we're all aware of is, anything related to body language and our students have difficulty with, not only adjusting their body language to communicate their intent or their desires, but interpreting the body language of others and what that communicates. And finally, context is just the situation that one finds themselves in. The difficulty with this for our students is that context is always changing. So even though a situation seems similar, there are always going to be nuances. There are always gonna be different components to the situation, which is why rules are changing according to context.

And that's also difficult for our students. Then we have the executive functioning piece, which is also a large, big umbrella term, but it has anything to do with organizing information, initiating tasks, making decisions, coping with new situations, and problem solving. And executive functioning taps into social thinking because it requires our students to organize all of the ideas in the social environment to then make inferences and then ultimately achieve the outcomes that they want and need for their academics.

So one of the strategies that we commonly use as SLPs, especially with this population, is capitalizing on strengths and interests. And I love to use interest inventories in the beginning of the year because that maps out for me and for those collaborating such as teachers and other related service providers, basically what the key interest of our students are. Now, there are basic interests that our students come in with, such as video games, comedies, Legos, art, and then there are more of those intangible interests that I've learned over the years that have really helped my students because peer mentoring, for example, is something that my students, some of them have really, really loved to do, and it's that ability to help someone who isn't as advanced as you in an area and teach them skills by modeling for them or doing role playing with them, but helping them learn a difficult concept that you've already mastered. So it's important to not only focus on those outward interests that they display but also those intangible interests. One of the ways that I rank interests I find to be really useful, that actually helps my students when they come and broaden their

horizons, is by giving them a simple map like this. And as we see here, we have topics that they could put on one side and then they have the least liked to most liked on the other side.

And essentially what we're doing is we're allowing our students to put on five different topics or five different areas that they're interested in beyond video games, because we, again, want to broaden their horizons. And then on this side, on the side where it says least liked to most liked, they can place a dot in the region that affiliates with how much they like that versus how much they don't like it. And what's interesting is that interests do evolve and so just because one of our students comes in with an interest or a focus that often the parents will say, this is what they love. Sometimes there are other interests that they are not aware of yet or interests that change as they continue to engage with their peers.

Now, again, strengths and interests are good because they help us model new social concepts and also, we can always bring in stories related to the characters, that relate to their interests. So it's always useful to bring in a superhero or a dancer or a singer that they admire. And for example, if the student is struggling with understanding that sometimes receiving help from someone is okay and that person isn't trying to correct them, we can then bring in, let's say, someone like Rihanna who they love and say, hey, well, when Rihanna is making a mistake and her peers try to correct her so that she can perform better, what does she respond and why? And I'm gonna give some strategies directly related to this as we move forward. This is an example of incorporating interests, but it's something that more SLP room based because it's not something that can be carried over as much into the classroom. This is just an example of something that I came up with a group of my students and it really tested their cognitive flexibility because it wasn't only their interests that were being incorporated on a day to day basis in the therapy room, it was also incorporating other students' interests. And if you look through this quickly, you'll see that there's a debate section where they can talk about current events. There's a section where they can make some

different types of foods, a section on Legos. And this is a great way of incorporating interests but not only one person's interests, group interests, and then forcing them to work together on each others interests.

So like I said, taking interest inventories has been super useful. There's a website here that I have used at times with some of my students because some of my students often come into the therapy room asking about the ramifications for speech and how that will affect them in their future career. And this is a great tool. It's www.mynextmove.org where students can explore their personality further and even link it to potential careers in the future. And then they start getting a better understanding of other related strengths or related interests that they can hone in on that could help a future career. Video modeling, I absolutely love, I adore video modeling. I can't say enough about it, and my students over the years have really, really responded well to video modeling.

The important thing with video modeling is, when you select a clip and you want to model a social concept that characters are experiencing in a specific clip, it's important to stop and allow the students to make inferences on what they're seeing as opposed to just shooting the video clip the whole time because then they may forget what they were thinking about. Also, I think it's important to use, again, interest related video clips as well as video clips that you think really hone in on or target that specific area. I've used Super Bowl Commercials, I've used clips from their favorite video or TV shows, Pokemon clips, clips from cartoons, and what I really actually have really learned to like a lot is using the Pixar short films. If you go on the Pixar Short Film website, you can see a lot more short films that demonstrate different social thinking concepts. Comics strip conversations created by Carol Gray is another tool commonly used. It's a very simple, you just pick the communication breakdown. So you pick the troubling social concept that the student is struggling with, and then you basically require a speaking bubble and a thinking bubble.

The students can review the comic strips and then also think about, okay, here's a scenario with this peer or with this teacher or with my family member, and now that I'm looking at what they're thinking, what can I do so that next time our communication will be a little bit more improved. Also, another way to incorporate comic ships is if the situation keeps coming up over and over again. You may wanna even try doing the comic strip multiple times, and showing them and comparing, hey, look, this situation happened with your family member, it's happening again, it's happening again. Look at what's going on, what could we change? I've learned that students sometimes respond better when the repeated situation is coming up to repeated comic strip conversations.

But it's also important to wait for a calm state because in the heat of the moment, the last thing a student is gonna wanna do is engage with you especially in a structured task. But don't wait too long because then the social concept may not be kind of in the moment on their mind. And then I linked to a website here, autism.org, that has different colors that you can implement and different colors can also represent different emotions of the individual in the comic strip based on what they're feeling in the situation. And then moving along is an example.

Now, I included this basic comic strip because just as we teach our students flexibility, we have to be flexible. And so this comic strip doesn't follow the exact rules that is mentioned by Carol Gray. However, it is a way that a student expressed that they, their friend was upset at them because they weren't accepting help with them. Their friend was offering them help and trying to help them, and instead the student responded, ugh, I can't deal with this, I don't wanna be your friend, and the other student just kept getting angry at them. And so this was a good way for them to work on accepting help and if not wanting help, how to communicate with your partner or with your peer about that in a way that won't make the person feel frustrated. This is a more advanced comic strip, and it's with a student that couldn't deal with the boring moment as we

call it, or an uninteresting moment that didn't directly correlate with what they were interested in.

And in this comic strip, you see that there's a thought bubble and a thinking bubble. It may be a little bit hard to see, but if you zoom in, you do notice that, basically the student is calling out their peer for being really boring, not wanting to listen to them, and the other student is just getting upset because they feel like their peer doesn't want to listen to them and is getting frustrated. And ultimately you see in the end, the peer who is being told that they're boring, he says, I don't like you. That's what they ultimately say. And this is an opportunity, a teachable moment for the student to learn that sometimes stories aren't gonna be interesting, just like sometimes stories that they tell aren't gonna be interesting to their peer.

Story Grammar Marker is another tool and this is something that I've used in different forums. This picture is based on an activity that I did with my students where they created their own story grammar marker. And I have a link here where you could look more, you can research more information about it. But basically, the Story Grammar Marker could be really useful for problem solving because the students are able to look at the character and then they're able to, they're able to think about the situation starting with the character, the trigger event, the feelings, after the trigger event happen how the person felt, and then try different solutions until they get to the outcome. And what's great about this is there's a critical thinking triangle, which is the middle part of the Story Grammar Marker, which has the trigger event, the emotion, and the plan. And the reason why I find that particularly useful is because most of my students have difficulty tying in the trigger event and the feeling, what led to them or their peer or their teacher to feel that way. And again, here we have, I'm just giving you some additional information that Maryellen Moreau is the one that, Maryellen Moreau is the one that came up with this, and again, you could use it in real time or you could use it based on a social story.

And it is a multisensory cue so you don't have to use the actual breed, the actually Story Grammar Marker breed that I just displayed. You could also use graphic organizers or planning sheets or outlines of it for students who don't like it. Because again, adolescents sometimes can look at a breed like that and think it's juvenile and they say, hey, what is this? I'm too old for this. So outlines of it are good too. Then we get to our power card as SLPs and power card is really a useful tool and also a very simple tool. What's good about it is that it's very, very portable. That you could use an index card, a large index card or a paper. And on one side, the individual chooses a hero or someone that they admire, whether it'll be a superhero or a singer or celebrity that they adore, and then next to it you highlight how this specific superhero would react in a certain situation and what may happen if they react that way in a situation.

And eventually on the back or on the other side, the flip side of the page, you have sequential steps of how the hero can do this or achieve the outcome in a different way. So I'm gonna actually give you a video example of how to construct this power card. What's good about this video is that it also supports any type of interaction that you may do with your student in the therapy room that can help them with their social thinking. In this specific video, we're demonstrating how to craft a power card based on a specific social situation that this person struggled with. This is a neuro of a typical individual and she's role playing. Okay, Amy, I'm ready.

- They're just so annoying.

- What's wrong, Michelle?

- Well, during lunch I went to them and I started going their faces and trying to talk about a lot of things and they were so like destructive and it felt so weird.

- You know what, Michelle? It's interesting 'cause when you come into my room, I've noticed that this situation keeps coming up. And so what I wanna work on with you

today is a power card, and this is something that you'll be able to carry with you when you're in the cafeteria, when you're in the classroom, when you're in the speech room, wherever you are and it will help you kind of better understand about what you do in these situations, because I want you to make friends and I want you to know how to interact without people ignoring you, right?

- Okay.

- So let's think of your favorite person or not your favorite person or somebody you admire.

- Ariana Grande.

- You like Ariana Grande, don't you? Isn't she fabulous, right? So Ariana Grande. Oh, yes, she is pretty fabulous. And we're gonna think about her in this situation. So she's in front of her crowd of people and fans and she's going around onto them, and so we're gonna create, we have a picture of Ariana Grande here, right? We have, right next to it, we have a little story about what happens to Ariana Grande when she's in the crowd and you'll be saying random things to her fans getting a little too close to the fans, and what happens next after she walks around her fans and mutters random things too close to them?

- Well, people think she's weird. People think she, like they wanna leave and people might want a refund like go into her events. Is that right?

- Yeah. They may want a refund, they may want a, they may get angry and they may not look up to her as much. And so you want people to respect you and look up to you, which is why Ariana Grande is going to be our figure here that represents that, right? But the next thing that we're gonna do, we're gonna try to go over this card and we're gonna think about, okay, what are the steps that we can take to avoid these

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consequences, right? So, you are in a cafeteria, and I'm talking to a friend of mine, so I'm going to be assuming your class named Juliette, and this is Roberto, and Juliet and Roberto are right here we're talking about The Avengers. Hey, so The Avengers was great. Yeah, was it great, Roberto? The Avengers was really awesome, wasn't it, right? And I know it was such a good movie, right? Oh, fabulous, they really outdid themselves this time. So here's your opportunity to say something without getting too close to us, right? So let's think of this. So Roberto, The Avengers, everything is, yeah, it was a great movie.

- Maybe I'll, since I don't like The Avengers, maybe I'll come up with a solution.

- Excuse me. Michelle, you don't like The Avengers? Is that what you did say?

- No, but I like Mary Poppins.

- Oh, you do like the Avengers. Okay, like us, right? But you like Mary Poppins better?

- Yeah.

- Oh, why? We, right, Roberto, you ever heard? I don't know why, why?

- I like the musicals, I like the people, the acting unit.

- Oh, that's a different kind of movie. So there we go, that's one step we could take, right? We can kind of join in the conversation by expressing our own idea, right, without getting too close and random and we can change the topic just like you did, right? Another thing that can be done is if I'm just sitting there, right? I'm eating my lunch, Juliet over here, I'm eating, right? Let's think about it as I'm eating my lunch, we're sitting in the cafeteria and you want to talk to me.

- Oh, like did you fail your math test? Like what happened in there?

- Oh, there we go. Oh my gosh, did I fail the Maths test? No, I actually did pretty well, what about you?

- I think I did okay.

- Really, you're not sure? I think I did okay but I'm a little nervous about it, but, yeah, I think I did well. So that's another example of what we can do. Michelle, we can initiate a conversation, right? You didn't get too close, you didn't say something random, you just initiated an idea about a common thing that we have in school together. That was great, right? So we have three things that Ariana Grande could do, but so can we, right? Which is we can initiate something about our common days, right? We can add into a conversation, right? And we can even express our ideas by joining in. But it's important to remember that we don't interrupt a conversation that's going on already, right?

- Okay. Okay?

- Yeah.

- All right, Michelle, I can't wait to see how this works out for us, okay?

- Okay.

- I'm hoping that cafeteria days, are going to just keep getting better and better. So as we see here, this was an example of how we can use the power card and it was demonstrated in terms of helping this individual who is neurotypical but was acting it out. And, just an example of how the power card would look, you'd have a picture of Ariana Grande over here and one on the front side, next to that would be kind of a little

blurb about Ariana Grande and how she loves to perform for her fans, but when she gets close to them like this individual is doing to her friends during lunch, it can make them feel uncomfortable and then they may want a refund.

So just a little blurb about what would happen if that person that they admire violates a social rule, what would happen to them. And then on the other side, you brainstorm like we did three different strategies or three different steps that we can do to avoid that communication breakdown. So all of these strategies are great and there are additional strategies that I didn't delve into as much. Social stories are great because they take a social concept and then create a story about that specific concept in terms of what is expected in different situations, and how we can modify our behavior so that we can get the feedback that we want from the people around us.

Problems solving maps are always great and you can find them anywhere, just maps that link a problem to a solution. Therapy dogs are great if you have one in the school that you're at or at the place that you're at because I have actually found them to promote interaction between individuals that weren't likely to communicate with each other. 5 point scales that I'm gonna delve into later are also good because they help students monitor and adjust their communication, even when they're frustrated and prevent communication breakdowns from escalating beyond the boiling point. And then there's also role playing, which is a common thing that we do a lot. The reason why I included this picture is because this picture is a picture from the school that I used to work at, and it really encapsulates a lot of the strategies that we just discussed, but also really presents what it looks like when social engagement is really delivered to peers in a way that others can really understand and relate to.

So this is an example of two individuals in my old school that were principals for the day and they had to present to the a bunch of other students in their classes, and they had to ask them about different topics or different ideas that they'd like changed in the school. So for example, some of the students didn't like the idea that they didn't have

a uniform. Ironically, some of them wanted a uniform. Some of the students were unhappy with the start of the school day. And so they had to mediate this whole situation with their peers. But what was great about it was that it allowed for a cognitive flexibility, it allowed for them to shift roles, it allowed for them to be more self aware by thinking about their own ideas while also using prior situations to inform them of what to do in this situation.

So, for example, some students started getting really upset because their, their idea was basically being vetoed and not really incorporated into the rules that they would potentially change. And the students were able to use episodic memory to inform them of how to reduce frustration amongst everyone. Then we have a 5 point scale like I said, and A 5 Is Against the Law is a great book highly recommend. What I like about that one is that you get into big trouble if you don't follow basic social norms. For example, if you are in a car one day, if these students, adolescents, eventually they're driving age and they get a speeding ticket and they say to the police officer that pulls them over, oh, wait, I didn't really mean it. That's not really enough to get out of a speeding ticket and that could really cause the situation to escalate and the police officer can become irate and there could be ramifications. So therefore, that's another reason why a 5 point scale showing the different levels is important, and A 5 Is Against the Law is great. And this is an example of a 5 point scale, you can modify it as you would like. There are ways that you can incorporate pictures too next to each number. I've in the past incorporated pictures of a student's interests. For example, I had a student that loved Inside Out and because they loved that I was able to create visuals from that according to each emotion. So this is one that you could use for the students' emotions and it can be used in the therapy room and in the classroom, and also gives them tools.

For example, take three deep breaths when you're starting to feel irritated, squeeze a stress ball when you're between irritated and getting angry. And then at the point where you're getting angry and you're gonna really explode, maybe better to take a

walk than disrupt the entire class and disrupt your own learning. Then like I said, a dog could be useful if there is a therapy dog because that could help students engage with each other. Now, so the first half of this really spoke about our strategies and how we could use them.

But now I want to kind of bridge this with how the social thinking challenges appear in the classroom. Reading comprehension challenges are a major, major one because our students who struggle with social thinking and executive functioning are gonna have trouble making inferences based on prior knowledge. So if they're reading a story about characters, they're gonna have trouble making inferences about how the character is feeling and also have difficulty understanding why a character acted a certain way. That's where the trigger event or antecedent event comes in. And then also speak of organizing information. They have to really organize a lot of information in middle school when they're reading and to get to that gestalt, or that main idea. And then again, figurative language is always gonna be a difficult one to tap into. And so the ways that we can use these skills in the classroom as we collaborate with the teachers is that, even the teachers in the classroom, if we inform them, can really cue the students' prior knowledge, and they can recall similar episodes that happened to them. So, if they're reading a book about an individual who struggled with peers because they kept correcting them, for example, if there's an event like that or an episode like that that happened in this story, they can recall their own situations where peers got annoyed because they kept correcting them in ways that were frustrating. Also attention to detail is something that our students really are good at and sometimes it's viewed as a negative, but we can use our attention to detail to gather all the information.

But because of the executive functioning piece, we got to work on ways to prioritize. And that's why graphic organizers and visuals will come into play. I've also had students create their own gradient of emotions because I think that it's not good enough for our students to know if someone is feeling happy, sad, mad, they have to

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know the different levels of emotions and that way they can better link the antecedent event to occur in state. So they can't link the antecedent event to a current state unless they really know what the current emotion is. So by creating their own emotion wheels and things like that they can really build up their emotion vocabulary.

And a memory wall, also I've found useful where the students were able to think of an episode in a story and then also look back at similar situations that they were in, pictures of themselves actually in extra curricular activities, for example, and how they reacted in a similar situation. A great resource for graphic organizers, I linked over here, www.risd.k12. What I love about this is that it incorporates a lot of thought bubbles, which is great because it really helps students understand what the character might be thinking and why they acted that way. So these graphic organizers specifically link the thoughts of the characters in terms of what they're thinking, their characteristics, and how they acted and maybe why they acted that way. So this is an example of a really, I find a really nice wheel, emotion wheel that a student made based on a character that she really liked from Anatomy. And what she did was she color coded it based on emotions too. And as you see, she did a little bit of gradients because she incorporated mad, bitter or cross, that was her understanding that you may be mad and then you may get bitter and then you may get cross. And she also had something with sad, depressed, disappointed. And, again, we're just building up that gradient. It's not just happy, sad, mad, a person who's mad may become infuriated and then eventually enraged, and those different levels are certainly important.

But having them take ownership and create their own visual is really useful. Now writing. Writing is something that all my adolescent students, not all, not all, but most really don't like to do. And I find that over the years it's become a bigger and bigger struggle to get my students invested in the writing process. And individuals with ASD often experience academic problems as well as organizational difficulties in flexibility and literal thinking style, which could impact their written language ability. So on top of being adolescents who may not love writing or writing not be their favorite activity, on

top of that, they're also have that piece. Now, many students don't want to even initiating the writing process. A lot of students, the teachers have complained very often that they don't even want to get started. Many have even come to me in the therapy room, many of the students and said, hey, I don't understand, why do I need to write this? This is ridiculous.

And that's a hidden rule that we'll talk about later on, which is understanding that sometimes we have to do things because in the social world, we're obligated or mandated to do certain tasks. And then there's also organizing the writing and revising. Revising is a big one because revising will require our students to say, hey, you know what? The person reading this actually may not like the way I wrote this and therefore I'm gonna have to be flexible and adapt and change some of the things that are in here. So some of the strategies that you can use to help writing, I think, first and foremost is to create a positive writing climate because very often our students come in with a very negative approach towards writing. And if we can just foster this idea of, hey, you know what? Writing is something that can be really useful for us, it can help us express our feelings in certain situations when we're feeling a certain way, that could be useful. And you have to also continuously reinforce the idea that we're not writing for ourselves. Unfortunately we're writing, or fortunately we're writing for someone else who's going to be judging our writing based on a list of rules and checklist as per academic expectations. And that ties into the hidden rules, which is, there are going to be academic expectations in the middle school and high school world. And some students do receive adaptive technology.

What I've learned from that is that it is a double edge sword because in some ways it could be helpful in terms of the students that have fine motor issues, but it could also be distracting because of the keys. So just be careful of that. Now, one of the writing templates, there are so many of them. There are so many graphic organizers out there for writing. The reason why I like this specific one, it's called the POW TREE Writing, a self regulated strategy. I actually came across it recently and started implementing it.

The reason why I love it so much is because it's self regulated, which means that the students are required to self evaluate and reflect. And that is very hard, but also necessary for our students to do. Very often they start something, they go off on a tangent and there's little reflection being done in terms of, hey, what did I just write? Was this good? Should I fix something? So first, this is an example of how they can use it with a persuasive piece, but they can also implement it with a non persuasive piece.

So first they pick the idea, the organize their ideas, and then they have to write and say more. But then after they pick the idea and organized, they can then think of a topic sentence about what they believe. The R stands for the reasons, which is why not only do they believe, but why their readers should believe in something in their statement. Then there's the ending, which is wrapping it all up and that would be their chronic conclusion. But then, there's the examined piece, which is reflection, which is, did I include everything, right? And this is where the teacher has to work with the student and say, hey, look back, reflect. Did you include everything that is needed? And there should always be checklists involved depending on the school and the class that they're in, in terms of what is needed. Then teacher-student moments. Wow, that's a tough one. That's one that's really important.

And I labeled this the good, bad, and the ugly because this is actually a visual I used with my students. Very often students would come into my room and they would complain and they would say, oh my God, the teacher, I can't believe what they did. The teacher reprimanded the student in front of me and yelled at him, I can't believe it. I don't understand why the teacher is giving us all lunch detention, I didn't do anything wrong So fostering these teacher-student relationships is crucial for access to the curriculum because, again, teacher students have to have a positive relationship in order for the students to effectively be in the classroom and carry out the tasks that are necessary. I found the most common ones to be that a student will just correct the teacher in the middle of a class, and sometimes shout it out in a way that could be

insulting to the teacher. They may even confront the teacher about a rule that they don't lik or their role. And then also delineating or differentiating between you and them.

So, very often students will respond to a teacher saying, you have done this or you are acting like this to the class, and they will take it personally as it is related to them specifically or individually. And then they may even, some students have actually even told me how to interact with another student and they've told their teachers, hey, why are you talking to that student like that? Or why are you reprimanding them? But again, this all goes back to the student having to learn their role in situations with authority figures. And so, again, we can use some of our prior tools that we had mentioned, comic strips and power cards, reviewing the hidden rules, which I'm gonna give you an example of some hidden rules that I collaboratively came up with my students on in terms of what are some hidden rules between teachers and students based on their specific struggles. You can also always review perspective taking and emotions. How's the teacher feeling based on this action? Or what can I do differently? And also you should also break down reasons for specific choices made by the teacher because then maybe the student won't have as much of a negative view of the teacher if they know a little bit about the why. So this is kind of a small writing, but I'm gonna give you a couple of examples.

And this is adapted from a book called The Hidden Curriculum and these actual rules that I came up with were very individualized. They're not taken from any book, but I was inspired by The Hidden Curriculum. And so this group specifically had trouble with being punished as a whole class. So I included a rule that sometimes students will be punished even though they didn't, they themselves didn't actually cause that problem. Also another one, a teacher may not believe that your excuse for not coming to class or completing an assigned task, this is not because they think you're a liar, which many students say, hey, I'm not a liar. Why did they think I'm a liar if I stated my excuse? But

they just don't have enough knowledge about what happened in your life leading up to that assignment.

So there are a bunch here that you can go through. Rule of thumb, hidden rules. Well, guess what? With everything that we do, with everything that we teach, there's always gonna have to be room for flexibility and such are the same for hidden rules. Hidden rules obviously will change across contexts. But, this is a visual that I came up with for my students and I said to them, when we're solving problems, right? There are a lot of, it depends. It depends is my goto word and it's a word that students really hold on to. That, yes, probably, if someone's giving you the cold shoulder, they probably feel insulted, right? Probably if you break a law, you will go to jail, right? So your actions do have consequences, but you can't expect that it's gonna always be the same across the board because there are always gonna be exceptions to these hidden rules. And this is a visual of a hidden rule that I've actually given to teachers taking an inspired from The Hidden Curriculum by Brenda Smith Myles. I think it's important for teachers to have a copy of this so that they better understand the students and understand that their students aren't necessarily engaging with them in a negative way because they don't like them, but it may be because they're misunderstanding the expectations and they're just not wired to get it.

So basically it says here that the hidden curriculum includes unspoken or implicit academic, social and cultural messages that are communicated to students across the school day, right? And the key here is that, how do we know that a student is not getting a hidden rule versus maybe their personality is such that they just wanna be confrontational, right? Sometimes it's hard to separate the two. But some key ideas that come into our head, such as I shouldn't have to tell you or everybody knows this, when your brain is a teacher is kind of perplexed as to how the student didn't get this basic concept or why you did this, that's a cue to you that, hey, this might be a hidden rule, a misunderstanding.

Then peer interactions. Super important because again, peer interactions are at the core of all of this, of our social work that we do with our students with ASD. Group work obviously is gonna be difficult, right? We're gonna have the over initiators who love to take a leadership position, and we're gonna have the under initiators who other students may call the slacker. But it's important for them to develop different roles and modify roles as they develop flexibility. Conflict resolution could be really hard. There could be miscommunication, obviously, breakdowns are common. And again, this can interrupt accessing the curriculum because if these are repeated events, it can consistently disrupt their work in the group work, disrupt the whole class, and then leave them not accomplishing as much. Now this difficulty with social engagement can lead again also to a lack of motivation, because, again, in middle school, throughout a lesson, people are yearning for some sort of companionship or some peer support. And not having that peer support for a homework buddy or a study partner can be really isolating. So as we bridge this into the therapy room, we could use strategies that I mentioned earlier, right? One thing that I find to be highly effective is to just say, we're doing group thinking now versus individual thinking.

So if we're all thinking by ourselves and we're doing our own work, whether it be in the therapy room or the classroom, now we're transferring over to group thinking and that's kinda cue, a cue and a basic simple phrase that cues them into, hey, now I've got to get into group mode. And that kind of prepares their mind for the shift to group work. Role cards I'm gonna show you in a moment about how to use role cards, which some of you may use to assign specific roles so that they know how to shift roles. Friendship visuals are also great because it can help them understand that they don't need to be friends with everyone, but they do have roles with other people besides friends and they will have to interact with people that are "non-friends". Also hidden rules, again, can be used collaboratively with the students.

Again students in group specific could come up with hidden rules based on what their peers expect of them. And also peer mentoring. I've learned to love, and I actually

published an article about it. I included in the reference page about peer mentoring, and how this model can also help students not only gain more confidence in their abilities, but help others who are struggling with a specific social concept. So this is an example of this friendship visual. So my student actually started with the basic number four is the lowest form. Someone you don't really see where you just say kind of hello to, and then it moves up to the BFF or family where you're shouting sleepover. And that kind of helps them differentiate between different people that they're gonna be dealing with whether it be in school or outside. But the big thing here is that there are gonna be acquaintances and not friends that they have to work with in a group. And then this is another visual that kind of like a game where I have my students think about who they would call when faced with a particular situation, for example, if they have to describe in detail how sick they're feeling, right? Would it be their best friend? Would it be an acquaintance? Or what about someone calling in the middle of the night when you can't sleep? Are you gonna call a family member, an acquaintance, a friend? And this gets them into the mode of thinking about different types of peer relationships and helps, has helped my students to actually overcome that obstacle of, hey, I don't wanna work with that person. Why do I have to? Understanding that yes, there are different relationships.

And then this one I really like because this student actually created a little map of different friendships, and number four says dark horse or people who are of service to you. And so I like how it starts with family and then kind of maps out all the way to people who do services and then people that, that I don't really like, which could be completely outside of the circle. Role playing cards, I'm gonna give you an example. You should be really simplistic about the roles, and this is a role card visual that I came up with my students. I think it's important to, the term role and role playing and role cards are thrown around a lot. But the thing is with these role playing cards, is that one size does not fit all because it's very hard for our students to shift roles and understand specific roles. So for this specific group, they were very scientific based and they loved investigating things.

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So I actually selected primary investigators, secondary investigator, recorder, and editor. And the editor typically has a really hard time because you have to not only review the work, but they have to make changes based on any mistakes. And some students are not going to be receptive to the mistakes that they make. And then there's a mediation process. But just make sure when you come up with these role playing cards that they're groups specific. If they're interest specific, even better, because then they can relate to that role more and understand it. So just saying you're the leader that means that you're gonna lead the group is just simply not enough. I've seen that backfire many times even in the classroom. And then is there a collaboration hidden rules or rules that I've come up with with my students based on peer interactions? So this specific group struggled with, I had a couple of students in the group that just didn't wanna contribute to the group. And I said, if you don't contribute to your group work, your partner will likely feel angry or upset that he or she is carrying the burden of all the work.

Make sure to use words like likely or probably because again, our students are very rigid when it comes to terms. And so if you say likely or probably, that will save you the hassle of later on explaining that there are exceptions, 'cause not all students will be upset if you don't do the work. Also another one that was really good that helped them is that it's important to switch roles and actively listen to your peer, so you know when you can contribute to your group as your group member knows that you are willing to help out.

And again, there are a few others mentioned here that you can look through. And also if you keep saying no in response to your partners suggestions, your partner will likely think that you are not flexible with them and get frustrated when working with you, and may not want to work with you in the future and that's something that can have implications beyond school. So collaborating together is really the goal of this peer interaction work that we do, because as we strengthen them, as you see in this picture,

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the students are able to know their roles and switch roles. Then the last thing I'm gonna talk about is just anxiety and problem solving because I do feel that this is a big component that's sometimes overlooked.

Students sometimes get aggressive towards peers and teachers because they don't know how to cope with the anxiety. And because problem solving is hindered because of the social thinking challenges, sometimes the anxiety goes up really high and in the classroom it can look as aggressive behavior or a disruptive behavior and then they're not learning as much. One of the things that I did in the past, thankfully, I mean I was lucky enough with a teacher in one of the classrooms to get a fit bit, a grant, and we were able to have the students monitor their anxiety. And what was great about that is that, when they were feeling a little bit anxious, they looked at their heart rate monitor and if they saw that their heart rate was up, they were able to jot down, hey, that's a trigger event for me. When I'm being interrupted, for example, oh, my heart rate goes up to that high, wow.

Also we wanna strengthen episodic memory in this situation because the anxiety before can really help inform us of, oh wow, that situation causes anxiety. It's gonna cause anxiety again. And this is where we have to collaborate with social workers and mental health professionals. And, the beginning of your survey is great where you can just kind of have them jot down a few areas that are difficult for them or that make them anxious. Meditation is great, I love headspace. Even in the moment, live and in the moment I'm kind of a headspace, kind of situation could be even where the students come in and they're all riled up and they need kind of a break. Break area is important in adapted seating and adapted seating and also recognizing the positive. Our students are struggling, right? But it's important that we also recognize that they have strengths and make them aware of it. And so creating this positive supportive environment is really useful.

And this is an example of how I use positivity throughout the year, especially at the end of the year, I have my students give each other awards based on a positive attribute or characteristic that has really allowed them to contribute to the group or that they really recognize in that person. And, what's great is I've watched students who really don't get along with each other in the group or in their small groups in the classroom and I've watched them actually be aware or develop an awareness of a strength, and a skill and a characteristic. And it just creates a really, a much more positive climate and also helps students really feel better about their strengths. Ultimately the goal is to get our students to self advocate because unfortunately we won't be with them beyond middle school or even high school and they're gonna have to speak up for what they need for the curriculum. So whenever they're having a problem, we're gonna have to work towards helping them identifying the problem, evaluating the problem, choosing an effective solution. I have a little case study here that talks about a 14 year old in eighth grade who had trouble with telling students they're wrong whenever they made a mistake.

And basically it was interrupting his access to the curriculum because he was so focused on correcting other people. And so if you think about this case study, this is an example where this student will need to learn, okay, how can they advocate for themselves, right? Because the group work now is late because he's so focused on making sure that everybody is correct. So it's important for the student to know that they're allowed to advocate on behalf of their opinions, right? But it's also important for the student to understand the different roles that they have in the group. So, again, this is a student would be advocating eventually for themselves and telling the group, I understand what you're saying, but I'm thinking something completely different. Instead of, go into their immediate instinct, which is, you all are wrong and I can't work with you.

Again, measuring success is important. And the IEP goals are really great for ensuring continued measuring of success. But we have to remember the progress isn't linear,

these are adolescents, these are adolescents with ASD, changes are constantly coming up in their lives, there are always new developments, new peers, that they're friends with new exposures, and that can alter their success. I included in the PowerPoint also a list of questions that you can ask the teacher. And again, it should be student specific because not all students are struggling with the same things but this is kind of a generic way or a generic set of questions that you could ask the teacher and you could give like every few months just to see how the student is doing. But the ultimate goal on the bottom, last but not least is how is this student doing on academic tasks and tests? Because again, this is all about using all our strategies and all our skills to eventually have the student improve in their academic areas. So now I'm going to just summarize briefly and allow for some questions to come in. So again, as we reviewed, it's our job as SLPs to help students with ASD access the curriculum. Many of our students' academic challenges are directly related to difficulty with social thinking as well as executive functioning. We have many different ways to support our students and we have many different activities and many of these strategies can be carried over into the classroom, but we need to collaborate. This may affect academic subjects and interaction.

And we mentioned a whole set. While we help our students access the curriculum, our goal is to help them learn how to advocate because ultimately they're going to need to advocate for what they need, what supports they need in order to access the curriculum. We have to also monitor success so we know the progress of our students. But again, progress isn't linear, so we have to constantly be in contact with anybody on the team as well as anybody seeing the student outside so that we know if there are any new changes that are impacting their progress. These are my references and now I can take questions.

- Thank you so much, Sharon. I'm just gonna take a look at the questions in our Q&A pod. I wanted to let our participants know that you are free to leave now and you will receive credit for full attendance. If you can stick around, we'll probably do another

three or four minutes of questions So here's a question from Deann asking if you could give a little bit more explanation of what a memory wall is?

- Oh, sure. So a memory wall is basically a set of pictures that you use of your students in action. And what that means is, doing any sort of activities. So if they go on trips, you could take pictures from those trips and put them on a wall kind of on the side. Let's say you have a desk, you can put them on the sidewall, or if they have pictures that their parents wanna give to you to bring in, of different activities that they've done. But the goal is to use it as a reference point for social thinking, so that when they're in a situation where they're feeling a certain way, you can then go look at the picture, a specific picture and say, hey, oh look, it looks like you were feeling a similar way. That similar way in that picture. What happened there and what did you do there and what could we do now?

- Great, thank you. And you were talking about rules of thumb and we have an audience member asking, is there a set number of rules of thumbs that tends to work better? Like three rules versus 10 rules or?

- Right, so I think it's group dependent. For that specific group that I presented the picture for, I only used a few rules because I wanted each rule to represent a specific category. So for example, one rule was about breaking a law, so that was more of like the legal realm and something outside of school. Another rule was class dependent, and then another rule was therapy room dependent. So, I tried to break it up according to that but that was more geared towards that group, but in terms of the hidden rules, typically I like to collaborate on that in a different way. On the hidden rules, I like to kind of collaborate on at least five to 10, because that list can guide them in the classroom.

- Got it, thank you. Someone else is asking if there is a place to purchase or get access to some of the resources that you made like the role playing cards and so on? or would you let people just create them or?

- Oh, yeah. So the ones that I created, she's asking about or he, he or she?

- Yes, yes.

- Oh, so I could actually link, if there are specific things in the presentation that anybody is interested in I could upload it as a PDF.

- Okay, that would be good. Or if you don't mind people contacting you yes I mean.

- Oh, they can do that via email. They can definitely contact me via email.

- Okay, I'm gonna put a little pod up here. Would you mind to type your email address in there?

- Sure. And that way if people were looking for specific things, they could talk to you about that.

- Okay, so I put that in there. Should I press Enter or? That's good?

- That's perfect. I can see it. We're just gonna do one last one here and then we'll need to wrap up for time sake. And it's almost more of a question than comment, but I think this is a great point. Someone is saying, I'm concerned about teaching students that they must take undeserved punishment that results from hidden rules. Research has shown that people with disabilities are already at a higher risk of abuse than those without, and I agree that students with autism must learn about hidden rules, but I think they should also be taught how to recognize and respond to authority figures and others in appropriate and potentially abusive behaviors.

- Yes, definitely that is a good point to make that you don't want students to learn that they're just gonna be punished for something that someone else did. That's not really the goal of the hidden rule system. But that's why it has to be explained to in depth in terms of saying, hey, you know what? In life, if you are being held accountable for something that someone else said, you have to speak up and advocate for yourself and say that you didn't do that. But in terms of the way the classroom functions, there are gonna be times that the whole group will receive something such as a lunch detention just because we are trying to teach them as they go into the workforce and even college, university that groups will kind of stick together and work together, and unfortunately, when certain group members are not doing their fair share, other groups may also suffer some of the consequences. But I think it's your--

- That's a natural consequence of what happened of life.

- But speaking to the point, I think yes, it is important to remember that we don't want these students to then think, hey, you know what? I should just be punished for someone else's actions. I think it's important for them to know that there is a difference between being accused or punished for something that you didn't do versus being reprimanded or punished as a group.

- Absolutely. Well, Sharon, thank you so much. Some wonderful practical examples of things that we can put to use with our clients. I appreciate your time.

- Thank you, thank you for having me.

- I think I'll go ahead and wrap up the meeting today. Thanks to our participants for being here. We appreciate you being here and your questions. I will end the meeting here. I hope everybody has a great afternoon and that we'll see you at another webinar before long. Bye, everybody.