Peer Mediated Interventions: Promoting Social Interactions for Young Children with Disabilities

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Overview

• Peer Mediated Interventions (PMI)
• Goals/Target Skills
• Supporting Peers to Implement
• Monitoring Implementation Fidelity
Peer Mediated Interventions
Social Interaction Skills are Essential!

- Social communication skills are a core deficit area in ASD
  - Limited reciprocity
  - Limited initiations
  - Odd or missed social conventions
  - Difficulty sustaining interactions
  - Presence of repetitive behaviors
Shifting the Adult Support

PMI increases the frequency and quality of social learning opportunities in the natural environment
Direct and structured intervention is needed!

- Observation alone is not enough
- Explicit teaching is often needed for students with autism to learn and use social skills
- Peers also may need explicit instruction on how to engage effectively with peers with autism
Improved Outcomes & Evidence-Base:

- Social and communication skills of students with autism
- Academic engagement
- Increased perspective taking and tolerance of peers involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Intervention (0-2)</th>
<th>Preschool (3-5)</th>
<th>Elementary (6-11)</th>
<th>Middle (12-14)</th>
<th>High (15-22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No studies</td>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>Social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Joint Attention</td>
<td>Joint Attention</td>
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<td>School-Readiness</td>
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<td>Play</td>
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<td>Academic</td>
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<td>Academic</td>
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Selecting & Training Peers
Selecting Peers

- Exhibits good social skills, language, and play skills
- Well-liked by other peers
- Positive social history with target student
- Are willing to participate
- Readily follows adult directions
- Regular school attendance
- Select several peers to rotate
Selecting Peers

• Other Considerations:
  – Young children: Attends to a task & teacher directions
  – Gender
  – Similar interests
  – “At-risk” peers
Different Selection Processes

1) For peers supporting in general education

2) For peers supporting in the special needs classroom
Potential Selection Process for:
Peers Supporting in Special Education Setting

• Talking to class or specific peers to gauge general interest
  – Need and benefits of being a peer buddy

• Example Process:
  – Share with administrators the purpose and benefits of PMI
  – Obtain at least 2 teacher nominations
  – Receive parent permission to participate
  – Peer application
Peer Training Overview

• Initial training to peers on how to appreciate and support individual differences
  – Include discussion of similarities as well as differences
  – Need to consider confidentiality and disclosure issues
• Share the positive traits and similarities of the student
• Share purpose and goals of peer mediated support for the student
Peer Training Steps

Teach specific behaviors one at a time and practice with adult support

1. Describe the behavior
2. Model the behavior with a peer
3. Have peers practice
4. Provide prompts or feedback
5. Provide reinforcement (praise, high-five)

(Neitzel, et al., 2008)
Training for your youngest peers

• Embed within preferred activities of the target student with special needs:
  1. Stay
  2. Play
  3. Talk
  4. Cheer!
Identifying intervention
Goals/ Target Skills
Overarching Goals:

• Increasing frequency and quality of:
  – Initiations with peers
  – Responses to peers
  – Play schemes (e.g., functional play, turn taking)
  – Engagement with peers

• Decreasing:
  – Frequency of inappropriate behavior (e.g., repetitive movements or verbal self-stimulation)
  – Avoidance or disengaging with peers
  – Teacher support
Learning Targets

Basic Social Interactions

- Responds to the greetings of others
- Initiates greetings with others
- Invites peers to join him/her in activities
- Joins in activities with peers
- Takes turns during games and activities
- Interacts with peers during structured activities (comments, shares)
- Engages in one-on-one social interactions with peers
- Requests assistance from others

- Maintains an appropriate distance when interacting with peers
- Offers assistance to others
- Politely asks others to move out of his/her way
- Allows peers to join in activities
- Responds to the invitations of peers to join them in activities
- Allows others to assist with tasks
- Responds to basic questions directed at him/her by others
- Experiences shared enjoyment in activities with peers
Peers are Trained to:

- Organize play (making suggestions, role, other play)
- Support sharing (offering, giving, accepting)
- Provide assistance (completing a task, getting on play equipment, responding to requests)
- Provide affection, praise and encouragement (e.g., high-five)
Supporting Peers to Implement
When to prompt peers

- When there is no interaction for 30 seconds
- When the peer asks for support
- Prompts could be explicit instructions, subtle verbal cues, picture cues, or gestures
- If no response within 10 seconds, prompt again and provide physical guidance
# Plan for Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of day/Activity</th>
<th>Target Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning centers</td>
<td>Responding to peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specials (art/music)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recess</td>
<td>Say “yes” or “no” when asked to play</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Mike, Shane)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon centers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallway</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Specials (PE/intervention)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing group</td>
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Working Through Common Barriers
When attention to peers is a barrier:

Some students may not be orienting to peers at all therefore initial interactions may be pairing peers with reinforcers or fun activities
When communication is a barrier:
Facilitate through Alternative Assistive Communication

• AAC can be a powerful tool within PMI
• Train peers on how they can support use of AAC
  – How to effectively prompt and respond to target students
Reinforcement!!!
Peers need reinforcement, too!

• Establish a reinforcement system for peers

• Based on age, adjust schedule and type of reinforcement
  – Young children: sticker charts, token systems

• Use specific verbal praise
Monitoring Implementation Fidelity
Monitoring PMI

- Target student social interactions:
  - Frequency of social interactions or use of specific skills (rate)
  - Quality of skills used (rubric/rating scale)
  - Overall engagement in the social interaction (percent)
OCALI Autism Internet Modules
http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/

National Professional Development Center on ASD- Evidence Based Briefs
http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/briefs

Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative (MAGI)
http://autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov/
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Thank you! Questions?