I. TOOL ONE: “WHAT’S A STUDENT TO LEARN?”

Introduction

The first tool, “What’s a Student to Learn?” is a tutorial to help teachers and other team members better understand and identify the “social thinking skills” that their students may be lacking. More specifically, it will guide teachers in recognizing particular social thinking skills that their students may need to further develop. It is also a guide to help adults decide which social skills to teach and, once they have done so, generate instructional or Individual Educational Program (IEP) social thinking skills objectives for their students.

Within Tool One: “What’s a Student to Learn?” information is presented in various ways to allow the reader to select the mode that best suits their own particular learning style. When you reach the end of this first Tool, if we have done our job well enough, you will understand the theory of social cognition, be able to use an effective observation tool for recognizing social skills, and be able to generate objectives aligned with your own state’s learning standards.

In Tool One: “What’s a Student to Learn?” the following questions are addressed:

- What are “social thinking skills” anyway?
- How do they fit into the Social-Cognitive Model?
- How can one observe these skills?
- What do social thinking skills objectives look like?
- Can one align the objectives with her own state’s learning standards?
- How do I generate objectives aligned with state learning standards when the student’s performance level is substantially below grade level?
What did you notice about the assessment summary of Nadia?

The recommendations focus upon expanding underlying social thinking skills, similar to the types of decoding and comprehension strategies one adds to the repertoire of a beginning reader:

- Learn to recognize social cues that suggest *anger*, just as a beginning reader would learn to blends and diphthongs once individual sound-symbol relationships have been mastered.
- Learn to calm herself down without using props such as music or markers for drawing.
- Learn to focus upon the intent of the situation, as one would notice the author’s purpose in a story to better understand the meaning.

Nadia appears to know several useful strategies she might appropriately use, based upon the nature of the social situation. Her challenge seems to be in being able to determine the nature of the situation itself. If she cannot determine whether a peer is angry, or caused a problem by accident, she will not know which of her known strategies would be called for in response.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR OBSERVATIONS OF STUDENTS WHEN CONDUCTING SOCIAL-COGNITIVE ASSESSMENTS

Many teachers might be thinking, “But I don’t receive assessment information about a student’s social-cognitive abilities? You are right and you are also not alone! With this obstacle in mind, Drs. Jim Leffert and Gary Siperstein*, noted researchers in the field of social-cognitive development, generated a series of questions to guide your observations of students. Using this list of questions can guide you in your observations of students’ behavior and provide clues regarding particular social-cognitive processes that the child may be having difficulty with. Remember, when you conduct observations it is important to:

- Observe students in both structured and unstructured situations
- Check out students during different times of day
- Note the context for your observations so that you can watch for a pattern of less skillful behavior during particular settings, times of day, and levels of structure.

* For more information, see Crick & Dodge, 1994; Leffert & Siperstein, 2002.
SOCIAL PERCEPTION: Noticing Social Cues

Kid Talk: “Paying attention to what’s going on.”

One component of social perception is noticing social cues, or more simply, paying attention to what’s going on. It is gathering information about social situations from words that are said, from body language, from facial expressions, and from tone of voice. It is also being aware of environmental cues such as the setting of the social interaction. Is the situation formal or informal? Do the people who are involved know each other well?

Noticing Social Cues involves being aware of cues in oneself as well as in others. A student might ask him or herself: How does my stomach feel? Is my pulse racing? Am I perspiring?

Some Challenges

NOTICING QUICKLY:
It is not possible to put social situations on “pause.” Students with learning problems may have trouble processing social cues quickly. Students for whom English is a second language may need extra processing time.

NOTICING MULTIPLE CUES:
Many students fail to notice subtle social cues. Students with learning problems may have particular difficulty focusing simultaneously on multiple social cues.

NOTICING SALIENT CUES:
Students who think concretely may give undue attention to cues that are irrelevant to what is actually happening socially.

NOTICING VISUAL CUES:
Faces have low visual contrast; students with low visual acuity may not see cues like smiles, winks, or raised eyebrows.

NOTICING AUDITORY CUES:
Students with hearing losses may simply not hear the words which are spoken, or the tone of voice which shows intention.

Scenario: Back at the Lockers “The Wink”

It was almost time for recess. Brenda was standing at her locker, and had just put on her hat, when she felt someone tear it off. She swung around to see that Eddie was holding it. She saw him grinning, but didn’t notice his quick wink. She assumed he was being mean to her, and she started crying.
Emotional Regulation: Calming Down

When people are very upset, angry, frustrated, excited, or tired, etc., they may fail to notice relevant social cues. In fact, they can easily over-focus on one cue, to the exclusion of all others. Here are some examples of how intense emotions and emotional states can limit attention to social cues:

- A man is awakened by the telephone at 5:30 in the morning. It’s a wrong number and he is furious. The intended number was just one digit different from his own, but he does not notice this because he is exhausted.

- In a school corridor, a student rounds a corner and causes another student to fall. The student who fell is so upset that he does not notice that the corner has blocked the other student’s vision.

- “Dad, can I have Terri over? Please? PLEASE?” Dad studies his calendar and hedges with “Well, maybe.” His daughter wants the play date so badly that all she notices is his studying the calendar. She takes this as a “yes.”

So, what’s a Teacher to Do?

Perhaps you have identified Social Perception: Noticing Cues as the skill you want to teach next. To get you started, here are some ideas from commonly used curricula:

- On the walls of your classroom, display pictures of facial expressions that show a range of emotions or emotional states. Label each one.

- Prepare cards to display emotions. On each card, draw or paste the picture of someone displaying a feeling, and label the picture with the feeling term. Distribute the cards to students who will take turns acting out the feeling. Classmates will then guess what their peer is demonstrating and tell what non-verbal facial expressions and body language they noticed to reach their conclusion.

- While reading a story, stop and ask students what the character seemed to be feeling, and why they think so. Describe any similar situation they have experienced themselves.

- Describe common situations that occur and ask students to describe how they might feel during the situation, and why. Ask others to share when they also experienced that feeling, or experienced a different feeling during a similar experience.

- When social conflicts occur during the day, set the tone of a “learning experience” rather than a “courtroom” by involving students in the solution. Begin by asking students how they are feeling, and how they think other participants are feeling.

- Focus upon a favorite hero or villain in a story. Discuss anger: when do students think they become angry, how they express anger, and productive ways to express emotions.
WRITING SOCIAL-COGNITIVE OBJECTIVES ALIGNED WITH STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

In the following section we will provide steps for writing and aligning social skills objectives with your own state learning standards. It is our intent that the following discussion and sample objectives will make it easy for you to generate social thinking skills objectives for your students from a social-cognitive perspective. We will guide you as you locate the essence of the learning standard when writing an objective for students not ready for the grade level learning standard. You will then be able to generate social skills objectives that address the student’s grade level but are targeted to his or her learning level, and are aligned with your state’s learning standards, too.

Legal Foundations for State Standards Aligned with Objectives

Self-reminder of the legal foundations for writing objectives aligned with state learning standards. Why all the fuss about aligning objectives with state learning standards? Because it is good instructional practice, AND the law.

Read the summary of key legislation below to remind yourself of the legal foundations directing us to make sure that we teach students to master the learning standards our own states have set for them. In the following section you will be reading a short paragraph about each of the major policies and laws that created the requirements you follow in your classrooms—those that require you to align your teaching objectives and curriculum content with the learning standards developed by your own state.

The comprehensive text (Zatta, 2003), from which the outline below was abstracted can be found in Appendix C.

The following is a chronological listing of key legislation leading to the need for aligning objectives with state learning standards (Zatta, 2003).

A Nation at Risk (1983). This publication, released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), concluded that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (NCEE, p. 5). This report espoused the necessity of creating an education system that serves to achieve excellence for all students.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227) declared that “all children can learn and achieve to high standards and must realize their potential if the United States is to prosper” (P.L. 103-227).
Tool 1: What are social thinking skills anyway?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students who effectively evaluate results look like?</th>
<th>What do students who ineffectively evaluate results look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are able to compare what happened to the goals they had set, and then decide if there is a match or a mismatch.</td>
<td>They may not directly compare what happened to the goals they had set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are able to accurately assess whether other problems were created in the process of meeting their own goals.</td>
<td>They may not weigh whether other problems were created by the strategies they used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They wait until they are calm and rested before they assess results.</td>
<td>They may evaluate results when they are excited/angry/exhausted, rather than waiting until they are calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They consider both concrete and social results in their evaluations.</td>
<td>They may consider only concrete results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think broadly of overall results, not just those they had planned/hoped for.</td>
<td>They restrict their analysis to the specific goals they had set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They take the time to consider all results.</td>
<td>They may consider their evaluation finished when they have looked at just one result.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some Social Challenges

COMPARING WHAT HAPPENED TO GOALS THAT WERE SET:
Evaluating/inferring can be limited for students with learning problems. They may not recognize matches/mismatches between their goals and what actually happened.

ASSESSING ALL RESULTS, INCLUDING PLANNED AND UNPLANNED EVENTS:
Some students with disabilities may be aware of only the planned results, not broadly considering everything which happened. Students with visual or auditory impairments may not have enough informed social experience to develop the social knowledge that there can be multiple responses to one action.

CALMING DOWN BEFORE EVALUATING:
Students with emotional disturbances may impulsively and mistakenly decide that a strategy worked…..or that it did not work. They may make judgments while they are still angry, or frustrated, or tired, or overly excited. Without first distancing themselves from the situation, they may not be able to accurately determine whether strategies have been successful.
Emotional Regulation: Calming Down

When people are very angry, frustrated, excited, or loud, they may make mistakes in interpreting social cues. Being upset can influence their ability to “read” the intent of other people. In order to more accurately assess social situation, they need to have their feelings in control.

So, what’s a Teacher to Do?

In your classroom, you might have noticed that social situations escalate into a flurry of emotions when accidents occur and some students are convinced that they are being targeted by others. To get started, here are some ideas taken from commonly used curricula, and from strategies other teachers have recommended:

- Identify cues in pictures that hint at why a person is behaving in a certain way.
- When watching a movie with your class, stop to discuss reasons a character was acting or responding in a social situation.
- Have students draw pictures of social situations. Discuss what emotions might be represented and what each person’s intent might be.
- Include discussions of emotions and intents in the literature students read throughout the school day.
- Role play various interpretations of the same social situation.
- Recognize bodily cues of tension. Practice relaxing through breathing.
- Practice sharing emotional experiences; this will improve students’ ability to take other peoples’ perspectives.
Some Social Challenges

GENERATING MULTIPLE GOALS:
Students with visual impairments may not see or hear how peers have solved problems, or what options are available in their environments. Secondary to this inability to notice social cues, they may not be aware of a wide range of realistic goals. Some students with learning problems move to the next step of generating strategies once they have identified just one goal.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF GOALS:
Some students do not understand that different people have different (and sometimes conflicting) goals in the same situation, or even that one person can have different goals in the same situation.

CHOOSING AMONG GOALS:
Some students with learning problems may choose immediate, concrete goals (like getting the first cupcake) over socially oriented goals like making friends.

What’s Social Knowledge got to do with it?
A student’s first impulse may be to set concrete goals (e.g. be the line leader, get the piece of cake with the most icing, be the first one down the playground slide). They may not realize that they are setting goals at all. They may not understand that friendship/relational goals are an option, or that they can be combined with concrete goals. They may not have noticed that more socially skilled classmates prioritize friendship goals. To the extent that they are able to develop this background knowledge, they can be more effective in setting goals.

Emotional Regulation: Calming down
When people are very upset, angry, frustrated, excited, or tired, etc, they may choose inappropriate goals or set goals impulsively. They may settle for the first goal they think of, or they may set a non-relational goal that they would not have set if they were calm. This may have been why Brenda, in the story above, at first wanted to get her hat back from Eddie more than anything else. If she had taken a few minutes to settle down, she might have achieved the emotional distance necessary to set a relational goal or to set multiple goals.

So, what’s a Teacher to Do?
Encourage children to apply the concept of goals, which they may already be familiar with from an area such as sports or academics, to social situations and to think about what their goals are for these situations. When social conflicts arise, first check that your students notice the relevant social cues and that they interpret them correctly. Next, help them to articulate the goals they are setting. After they are calm, help them to understand that there are different goals for different situations, and even among different individuals within the same situation. Try to steer your students to focus on interpersonal goals even if they already have set concrete goals. Encourage them to generate several goals before they choose one or two of them. To get started, here are
### Tool 1: What are social thinking skills anyway?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students who set appropriate social goals look like?</th>
<th>What do students who set inappropriate social goals look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They understand the concept of goal and think about their goals in social situations.</td>
<td>They don’t understand the concept and/or don’t apply it to social situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are aware of both concrete and social goals.</td>
<td>They may be aware of only concrete goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For any situation, they try to balance social, concrete, and avoidance/safety goals. For example, they take into consideration social goals, like making someone else comfortable or getting invited to a party,</td>
<td>They are rigid/imbalanced as they choose among social, concrete, and avoidance/safety goals. For example, they focus on concrete goals like winning a game or getting the biggest slice of pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They balance approach and avoidance in their goal setting.</td>
<td>They may be so concerned with avoiding hurt/trouble that they are immobilized in choosing concrete or social goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generate several goals before making their choice of one or two</td>
<td>They move to the next step (selecting strategies) after generating just one goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They cool off before choosing a goal</td>
<td>They choose a goal while they are still upset/afraid/exhausted, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They understand that there are different goals for different situations</td>
<td>They don’t think about other peoples’ goals, or assume that everyone has the same goals as they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They take the situation into account when deciding which goals to pursue</td>
<td>They set the same goal, regardless of the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think about the goals of both themselves and others.</td>
<td>They think only of their own goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They understand that goals can be conflicting, even within one individual and within one situation. (A child may want to swing on the monkey bars, but also wants to play with a friend who doesn’t like to do this.)</td>
<td>They are not aware that they want more than one goal at the same time, or they’re confused when they realize that their goals conflict.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL-COGNITIVE PROCESSES

In this section, you will find a detailed description for each of the six social-cognitive processes. To be sure that we convey the theoretical underpinning and classroom applications for each one in a style that can be grasped quickly, we went into schools to ask teachers to help us design the individual descriptions. Some teachers preferred bulleted lists that included ideas for using the processes with students, and some preferred reading about students with disabilities who overcame barriers and learned to use the social-cognitive processes. Some wanted the formal theoretical vocabulary, and some the student-level language. Overall, most were drawn to brief phrases illustrating what the process would “look like” when used by students.

In order to generate teacher-friendly references for you to use when learning about social-cognitive skills, we incorporated the varied approached mentioned by teachers for each Social-Cognitive Process. Each of these approaches is labeled and described in the table below.

Multiple Ways to Present Each Social-Cognitive Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kid Talk</th>
<th>Provides a simplified definition of each process using language typical of elementary school students. Also describes the process using examples from everyday life.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Challenges</td>
<td>Provides statements about the implications of particular disability conditions on ability to perform the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario</td>
<td>Presents a fictitious story of two students engaged in an ongoing interaction portraying the problems that can occur when students are not performing a particular process. Takes the form of a single story with multiple “episodes”, each highlighting one process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What it “looks like”</td>
<td>Presents short statements about what students who can and cannot use the process “look like”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s social knowledge got to do with it?</td>
<td>Provides examples of the background knowledge and skills students need to perform the process well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional regulation: Calming Down</td>
<td>Describes the ways that a lack of emotional regulation challenges the ability to perform specific processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, what’s a teacher to do?</td>
<td>Ideas are presented here to get you started in your thinking about teaching the different social cognitive processes. The ideas presented have been chosen from commonly used social skills curricula. (More detailed guidelines as well as preplanned lessons will be presented in Tool 2!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OBJECTIVES FOR INTERPRETING SOCIAL CUES:
“Understanding what’s going on”

Once students notice social cues, they need to interpret them accurately. There are several aspects to this process. First, students need to understand how they, themselves are feeling. Are they angry? Sad? How intense are their feelings? Are they only slightly annoyed or irate? Are they calm or is frustration building? Next, students need to identify and label what other people in given situations might feel. - not just based on the words they are saying, but on how they look, their body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Once students have an initial grasp on other people’s feelings, they can make a socially-educated guess at the intent of their actions. Did something happen by accident or on purpose? Were they mean or not mean? Finally, students need to know that while all feelings are acceptable: some ways to show their feelings are OK and other ways are not OK.

Remember, students who correctly interpret social cues:

- Accurately conclude whether events happened by accident or deliberately.
- Interpret basic emotions in themselves and others correctly.
- Consider context.
- Look for all possible explanations for behavior.

Carol’s Social-Cognitive Needs: Carol is a bit timid and assumes that peers don’t like her and wish her harm. While this is far from the truth, classmates and her teacher are becoming frustrated with her mistrust of their intentions. Soon as Carol learns to trust her classmates she and they will be able to move on to working and playing together more smoothly.

An Objective for Carol. Carol will distinguish between benign and hostile intent for observed actions during authentic and hypothetical conflict situations. Teacher will present 5 different video scenarios to Carol and ask her to identify if the character was acting mean, or not mean. Following 4 consecutive social interactions with another student, the teacher will ask Carol if her classmate was acting mean or not mean. Carol will respond to all requests with 100% accuracy.

Other Sample Objectives for Interpreting Social Cues. (Determine your own performance criteria and context such as materials or social situations to customize the objectives to your own students learning needs.)

- When presented with social problems, student will accurately determine whether events happened by accident or deliberately.
- Student will correctly infer what basic emotions others are experiencing based on observed subtle social cues, including facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.
- Student will distinguish between benign and hostile intent for observed actions during actual and hypothetical social conflict situations.
- Student will explain what intentions or emotions social cues convey when presented with actual and hypothetical social conflict situations.

http://www.csde.umb.edu/tools
What Are Social Thinking Skills Anyway? 
...from theory to practice

We employ a conceptual framework for defining social skills adapted from theories of social cognition (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994). We believe that our conceptual framework is well suited to provide a process-oriented approach to social skills instruction for all children, including those with intellectual disabilities* and other special needs, for four reasons.

First, it is supported by findings of four decades of research concerning the social skills of children with intellectual disabilities (see Leffert & Siperstein, 2002, for a review). Second, this framework, which has served as the foundation for an experimental program of social skills interventions for at-risk children, has had encouraging results (Coie, 1997; Conduct Problems Research Group, 1993). Third, because social skills and academic success are intertwined, we contend that social skills instruction should be considered as an integral part of the general education curriculum for all children, especially those with intellectual disabilities and other special needs, occurring alongside as well as integrated with instruction in academic subjects. Fourth, and perhaps most important, because it is derived from theories of social cognition, the proposed framework illuminates the link that exists between the problems processing information that many children with special needs have and their problems functioning socially in the general education classroom.

In other words, the Social-Cognitive perspective offers teachers a way to develop the social competence of their students, particularly those with special needs, by using the same type of process approach used to teach reading and other academic skill.

Our conceptual framework specifies six underlying social-cognitive processes that all children, including children with intellectual disabilities and other special needs, must employ if they are to continually adjust their social behavior to fit the varied and changing situational circumstances that they encounter in general education settings. Each of these six social-cognitive processes, or plays a distinct and critical role in successful adaptation to changing social situations.

*Note: The term intellectual disability is synonymous with the term mental retardation. Intellectual disability has become the more accepted term in recent years.
12. Is the student gullible or naïve (too trusting) about peers?

**Goal Setting**

13. Does the student understand and use the concept “goal”?

14. In social situations, does the child focus too much on:
   a) *Instrumental goals* -- getting his/her own way, satisfying his/her wants?
   b) *Relational goals* -- pleasing others; making and keeping friendships?
   c) *Retaliation goals* -- getting back at others?

15. Does the student appear to balance relational and instrumental goals in a positive way?

**Strategy Generation**

16. Does the student think of/ demonstrate a variety of strategies for resolving social problems?

**Strategy Selection**

17. Does the child select strategies that seem to fit his/her social goals?

18. In selecting strategies, does the child consider evaluative dimensions such as safe – dangerous, friendly – unfriendly, or fair – unfair?

19. Does the child select social strategies that are likely to have a positive outcome for the situation?

20. Does the child select strategies that tend to keep friendships going instead of simply seeking immediate personal gain/gratification?

21. Does the student vary his or her strategy based on the situation or does the student tend to use the same strategy over and over?

22. Does student speak up for him/herself when appropriate?

23. Does the student seek adult assistance when appropriate?

24. Does the student bargain and compromise when appropriate?

25. Does the student go along with another person’s wishes when appropriate?
Guide for Observing the Child’s Performance of Social-Cognitive Processes

The Observation Guide Questions that follow are categorized by each of the social-cognitive processes. Forms for recording individual students and group responses appear in Appendix B.

Emotional Regulation

1. Does the child stay calm when annoyed or provoked by others?

2. When the child does become upset, does the child calm himself/herself down?

3. Is the child aware when his or her emotions are becoming too intense? That is, can the child recognize the difference between overly intense and a manageable level of emotions?

Noticing (Encoding of) social cues

3. Does the student realize that a social problem has occurred?

4. Does the student accurately describe social problems when they occur?

5. Does the student notice social cues that convey emotions in self and others through tone of voice or body language? (if yes, check those that apply)

   __ mad  __ happy  __ sad  __ surprise  __ frustration

   Others: __________   __________   __________   __________   __________

6. Does the student notice social cues that convey intentions? (if yes, check those that apply)

   __ facial expression  __ tone of voice  __ body language  __ context/cause & effect

7. Does the student notice social cues with subtle messages such as sarcasm and insincerity?

Interpreting social cues

8. Does the student identify (verbally name) his/her own feelings?

9. Does the student correctly identify others’ feelings?

10. Does the student accurately interpret others’ intentions? For example, does the student often think that others are being mean without good reason.

11. Does the student recognize that people can have mixed feelings, such as being happy that they won the game but sad that their friend lost?
Will I Know A Socially Thinking Student When I See One?

This second section of Tool One helps you to figure out which of the social processes a particular student is already familiar with and using and which ones he/she needs to acquire. First we will review social-cognitive assessment report summaries and examine the recommendations to identify what the student would benefit from learning in the classroom. Next, we will present a set of questions you might use to conduct your own observational assessment of a student’s social-cognitive skills. Colleagues might also find this set of questions useful for the observational assessments they conduct with students.

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS’ SOCIAL SKILLS FROM A SOCIAL-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

There is nothing new about assessing social skills—but assessing these skills through a social-cognitive lens is new. Take a look at the following examples of brief assessment summaries and look for any differences between what you read below, and the reports you typically review for students within your school. Our social-cognitive-oriented reports look at the processes the students were using that underlie their ability to behave socially. More typical social assessments would provide information about diagnoses, such as ADHD, or Intellectual Disability; and general statements about observed behavior such as “has difficulty with peers,” “difficulty working in a group,” or “follows directions well.” While both types of information can be useful, our belief is that assessment of the social-cognitive processes directly informs instruction. For example, a social-cognitive assessment indicating that a student runs to the teacher to solve every type of social conflict might lead you to teach the student to generate more strategies such as taking turns, saying, “No, thank you,” or ignoring a tease.

The following are two examples of social-cognitive assessment report summaries. The parts of the report telling about the procedures and background information have been removed since most teachers and educators are already familiar with what those look like.
SOCIAL-COGNITIVE PROCESSES EVALUATION REPORT

SUMMARY 1: Shaun

Summary of Results. The results, which focus on four social-cognitive processes, are:

The Noticing Social Cues part of the assessment examined the ability to recognize and name four basic emotion states (happy, sad, angry, and scared) from photos of facial expressions and to describe situations that produce these emotions. Shaun was successful at identifying three of the emotion states that were presented, but he had difficulty identifying the emotion state of fear. It is notable that Shaun’s body language often suggests a sense of being nervous and anxious, but seems to have limited skill in identifying and discussing these emotions. When asked to identify an event that made him (or someone else) feel each of the four emotions, Shaun was able to identify an event for happy, sad, and angry, but not for scared. Instead, he asked to skip this particular question.

The Interpreting Social Cues part of the assessment examined the ability to “read” social situations by attending to and accurately interpreting social cues. Included is the ability to describe a social problem that has occurred and to interpret accurately a peer’s intentions (as depicted in videotaped vignettes). Shaun was very adept at noticing and identifying details and social cues that were present in the social problem vignettes he viewed. He attended well to both auditory and visual cues that indicated the nature of the social problem and the other child’s intentions. However, his interpretation of the meaning of cues was not always accurate. Shaun tended to view peers as having negative intentions during conflict-laden interactions, even when there no indication was present of malicious intentions on the part of the other child.

The Generation of Social Strategies part of the assessment examined Shaun’s knowledge of appropriate social strategies for resolving social problems and for calming himself down when upset. Shaun showed knowledge of two appropriate strategies for resolving social problems: asking the teacher for help and leaving the situation. He showed some ability to vary his strategy according to the situation. Shaun suggested telling the teacher only in those situations that involved physical aggression, such as a peer knocking over one’s play materials. For other typical social problems, for example if a peer said that only two could play at a game, he suggested the strategy of withdrawing from the problem situation. Like telling the teacher, leaving the situation can be a very effective strategy for avoiding unnecessary social conflict and is useful in many circumstances. However, Shaun tended to overuse this strategy. He never suggested strategies of speaking assertively, or negotiating with the other child, which might enable him to get all or part of what he wants without leaving the situation.

When asked to suggest a strategy for calming himself down when upset or angry, Shaun was unable to think of a useful strategy. For example, he stated that he would not talk to anyone, go to another location, or play with someone else. Lack of knowledge of strategies for calming down (and when to use them) may make it difficult for him to regulate his emotions. It may also make it difficult for him to resolve social conflicts successfully.
Tool 1: What does a social thinking skills objective look like?

- Student will describe several possible explanations for why negative events happened, given hypothetical situations.
- Student will recognize sincere and insincere statements based on the speaker’s tone of voice and/or context information when watching video clips depicting social scenarios.

**Link to State Learning Standards.** Massachusetts Mental Health 5.7 Identify and describe the experience of different feelings and how they affect daily functioning.

**OBJECTIVES FOR SETTING GOALS: “What do I want to happen?”**

Once students can notice and interpret social cues, they can set goals to meet their own personal and at times competing needs. Students typically set goals to meet their needs in more than one area at the same time (maintaining a friendship, trying out for chorus). Goals related to social skills fall into three categories: Social/interpersonal (making friends, having good conversations, feeling comfortable); Concrete results (finding a seat at lunch, having something to do at recess, being line leader); and, Avoidance/physical safety (getting out of the situation to avoiding being hurt, ostracized, or getting in trouble).

Goal setting explains and directly affects social behavior. Students may notice relevant social cues and interpret them correctly, but if they decide on inappropriate social goals they’re not practicing strong social skills. For example, Lenny reaches across the snack table and grabs the one remaining cookie. He can clearly read the disappointment on his best friend’s face but the goal of his snack time behavior was to satisfy himself and not act as a “friend” to Bobby.

Remember, students who set appropriate goals:

- In any situation, find a balance among relational, concrete, and avoidance/safety goals.
- Focus on friendship and interpersonal goals, such as making someone else comfortable or getting invited to a party.
- Cool off before choosing a goal
- Generate several goals before making their choice of one or two.
- Understand that there are different goals for different situations.
- Know which goals are most appropriate for given situations.
- Recognize when two goals they have are incompatible or in conflict.

**Billy’s Social-Cognitive Need.** Billy always wants to take the first turn when playing a game, and he pushes in front of the other children playing. This behavior suggests that Billy is pursuing self-focused goals (wanting to take the first turn in the game) without regard for interpersonal ramifications (i.e. that the other children may no longer want to play games with him).
The Selection of Strategies part of the assessment examined Shaun’s ability to reason about the likely consequences of using various social strategies (i.e., accommodating the other person, appealing to the teacher, assertive/bossy, aggression) in order to resolve a social problem with a peer. Shaun demonstrated a degree of flexibility in consequential reasoning. He was aware that some strategies, such as accommodation and appealing to authority, lead to positive consequences, while other strategies such as bossiness or aggression, lead to negative consequences. His responses show that he views teachers as a helpful resource to turn to for help in resolving social problems and, moreover, that he understands that when a child behaves in a hostile manner toward a friend, it will be detrimental to their relationship.

**Recommendations.** While this evaluation did not cover all skills that should be a focus of social skills instruction, it did address several key skills and processes that play an important role in children’s ability to resolve social problems with their peers. Overall, while Shaun was adept at many of the skills that were evaluated, the assessment identified some areas in which he needs instruction. It is recommended that social skills instruction include the following areas:

1) Recognizing facial and other cues that indicate that someone is scared or worried and discussing, recognizing gradations of these feeling, and coping with situations with give rise to these feelings.
2) Learning and practicing strategies for calming oneself down when angry or upset (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, counting to10) and recognizing when to use them.
3) Interpreting social cues indicating another child’s intentions, particularly when a negative event occurs despite by accident or otherwise without malicious intentions on the part of another child.
4) Expanding his repertoire of appropriate social strategies to include friendly-assertive strategies such as negotiation and accommodation compromise. These strategies involve staying in the situation to try to get all or part of what he wants.

What did you notice about the assessment summary of Shaun?

The recommendations focus upon building underlying “social situation attack skills”, similar to the word attack skills one would teach an emerging reader. When Shaun masters the recommended social thinking skills, he will be better equipped to interact socially, just as a reader with decoding and comprehension strategies will be better able to read a new text.

- Learn to recognize social cues, just as a student would learn to recognize letters that form a word.
- Learn to focus on relevant aspects of the situation, or the scramble of letters on a page.
- Learn to “decode” or interpret the meaning of another’s actions, as with learning the sounds of the recognized letters.
- Learn more than one way to solve a social problem, as with learning how to use context, sound, root words, syntax and sight vocabulary when” solving” the comprehension of a sentence.
Tool 1: Will I know a socially thinking student when I see one?

**Social-Cognitive Processes Evaluation Report Summary 2: Nadia con’t…**

Prompt coping with the situation. These strategies could help Nadia to calm herself on the spot even if these other relaxing activities were not available.

**SELECTION OF STRATEGIES**—anticipates that positive consequences will likely result from using appropriate social strategies and negative consequences will likely result from using inappropriate social strategies:

Nadia performed adequately in this skill area, demonstrating a degree of flexibility in consequential reasoning. She was able to anticipate that generally appropriate strategies, such as moving away from another child who is causing a problem and appealing to the teacher for help, are likely to lead to positive consequences and that a generally inappropriate strategy such as aggression is likely to lead to negative consequences.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Overall, while Nadia adequately performed some of the skills that were evaluated, the assessment identified areas in which she would benefit from instruction. Nadia could need assistance with other social skills that were not identified by this evaluation, since the present evaluation was limited to these four key areas.

Instruction should focus on the following skills:

1) For noticing social cues, recognizing facial cues that indicate that someone is angry, and distinguishing between angry and sad expressions.

2) For interpreting social cues, using all of the social cues that are present in social problem situations (concerning the physical environment, others’ actions, their verbalizations, facial expressions, and body language) to accurately interpret non-hostile intentions. Nadia already has some skills in this area; as she is aware of other children’s tone of voice and certain verbalization such as saying one is sorry and understands that this means the child did not was not being deliberately mean. She needs to become aware of other available cues so that she can “read” others’ intentions with more consistent accuracy.

3) For appropriateness of social strategies, expanding Nadia’s repertoire of strategies for calming down to include strategies such as taking a deep breath, counting to 10, and using self-talk to soothe himself and guide her to cope effectively with the situation. Nadia may also need to learn to recognize situations in which she is feeling upset and then to self-initiate one of these calming down strategies.
Tool 1: Will I know a socially thinking student when I see one?

Some recommendations for obtaining information about the child’s social-cognitive skills from others

- You might also offer the questions to colleagues as they prepare their assessments and reports of your students, such as for the IEP meetings. The questions might lead them to include any information they have gathered through their own assessments that respond to the social-cognitive-oriented questions.

- Share the Observation Guide Questions with IEP team members and other colleagues who will be observing your students. Tell them what you are interested in knowing about the student, and why. Solicit their help in obtaining information about the child’s social-cognitive skills performance so that it will come from several different professional perspectives. School Psychologists and Guidance Counselors typically assess social skills and, if they understand the importance of your request, might be able to add the questions to their own assessment batteries.

- When working with colleagues, such as the Speech and Language Therapist, ask him or her to include the information from the Observation Guide Questions in his/her own observations during therapy sessions with your student. Together, plan ways to improve these “social pragmatics” across settings.

- Additional sample assessment report summaries are provided in Appendix A. They might be helpful when you and your colleagues begin to include social-cognitive oriented information about students in your own assessments. The set of sample assessment reports present varied profiles of social-cognitive skill performance for fictitious students. These reports, which we adapted from actual student data obtained in a research project, describe profiles of children with differing strengths and weakness and differing levels of cognitive and language skills. We intended these reports to provide educators with a model for integrating data about multiple processes into a comprehensive picture of the students’ overall performance. Also, since social-cognitive assessment in the schools is an innovation, we believed it is important to provide realistic illustrations of what this data looks like.

Forms to use when observing a single student or a group of up to 20 students are provided in Appendix B.

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goals but not their social goals. The most socially adept people are not only fully aware of their own goals, but are also able to consciously consider how other people set theirs. Whether it is implicit or explicit, goal setting directly affects social behavior. People may notice relevant social cues and interpret them correctly, but if they then decide upon non-social goals or inappropriate social goals, they are not practicing strong social skills. Moreover, people may select and apply brilliant strategies and evaluate results clearly, but if they are basing these strategies and evaluations on inappropriate social goals, they are again not practicing strong social skills. As teachers discern the social goals students have set, they can more effectively assess social situations. As they guide students in adjusting their goals, they can more effectively teach appropriate social skills.

**Scenario: A Social Skills Story: “What does Brenda want?”**

*It was almost time for recess. Brenda was standing at her coat hook and had just put on her hat, when she felt someone tear it off. She swung around to see that Eddie was holding it. She saw him grinning, and this time she noticed him wink; she understood from this that he was just trying to get a game going. It was a brand new hat, though, and Brenda wanted it back right away more than she wanted to play with Eddie. She started crying.*

What was the first breakdown in this social situation?

Brenda noticed and interpreted Eddie’s social cues, but her goal setting was done while she was upset, it was limited to one goal, and this goal was not inter-personal. What could she have done?

- She could have taken a few seconds to calm down before she decided she had to have her hat back right away.
- She could have set the goal of getting along with Eddie, rather than getting her hat back right away.
- She could have adjusted her goal, still wanting to get it back, but maybe a little later, rather than right away.
- She could have set two goals, getting her hat back *and* getting along with Eddie. There might be a way to achieve both.
Matt’s Social-Cognitive Need. Whenever Matt encounters a social problem with one of his peers, he reacts by seeking out the help of an adult authority figure, i.e. a teacher. He does so when this strategy has proven to invoke negative consequences and even when it makes worse the original social problem with his peer.

An Objective for Matt. Matt will predict the consequences (both positive and negative) of strategies he generates to reach his identified goal.

Other Sample Objectives for Generating Strategies. (Determine your own performance criteria and context such as materials or social situations to customize the objectives to your own students learning needs.)

- When faced with a hypothetical situation presented by the teacher, student will generate multiple strategies for engaging in the situation.
- Upon request from the teacher, student will generate at least 2 strategies for authentic and hypothetic situations and predict the consequences (both positive and negative) of each strategy generated.
- Student will list several strategies to solve a social problem when goals have been specified.

Links to State Learning Standards. These objectives can be linked to learning standard 5.5 for Mental Health in the Social and Emotional Health strand of the Health Curriculum of the Massachusetts Frameworks for Pre-K through grade 5. Standard 5.5 is under the heading “decision making” and it states, “Explain and practice a model for decision-making that includes gathering information, predicting outcomes, listing advantages and disadvantages, identifying moral implications, and evaluating decisions”.

OBJECTIVES FOR REVIEWING OUTCOMES: “Did It Work?”

Once strategies have been generated, selected, and tried out, students need to evaluate the results. Students must ask themselves: Did the strategy lead to (or meet) the goals that were set?; Did it lead to other unanticipated positive or negative results?; Did it solve the problem without creating other problems? Students who are socially competent are able to look objectively at the consequences of their strategies to evaluate their effectiveness.

Remember, students who effectively review outcomes:

- Are able to evaluate what happened with the goals they set and decide if they were met
- Are able to accurately assess if other problems were created by their strategies.
- Wait until they are calm and rested before assessing results.
- Consider both concrete and social results in their review of outcomes
- Can look at all the results, not just those they planned/hoped for.
- Take time to consider all results.

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
SOCIAL-COGNITIVE MODEL PROCESSES
AND SOCIAL THINKING SKILLS

Throughout “Tools for Teachers” the terms “social-cognitive model” and “social thinking skills” are used interchangeably. Here’s why - both phrases refer to the same overarching approach. The first refers to the theoretical process, while the second refers to the skills we would see a student performing the process. We also use an even more simplified definition, and describe the way “kids talk!”

Below we list the six individual social-cognitive model processes and a description of the social-cognitive foundation skills, (social knowledge and emotional regulation), that influence our ability to perform each of the processes successfully. It is important to remember that both our background knowledge and our emotional state influence how well we think about social situations. When teaching children to use social thinking skills, we must attend to both their previous knowledge and emotional regulation ability.

### Social-Cognitive Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social-Cognitive Foundation</th>
<th>The Theoretical Label</th>
<th>The Simplified Definition (Examples of Corresponding Social Thinking Skills)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>KID TALK: “What I already know.”</td>
<td>For example: -child understands basic emotions and emotional states. -child understands what it means to be a friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Regulation</strong></td>
<td>KID TALK: “Calming down”</td>
<td>For example: -child has ability to remain calm when frustrated with others. -child has ability to calm self after becoming upset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Social Perception</td>
<td>KID TALK: “Paying attention to what’s going on.”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to recognize a social problem has occurred and can describe the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticing Social Cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Social Perception</td>
<td>KID TALK: “Understanding what's going on.”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to accurately interpret available social cues regarding another person's intentions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of Social Cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Social Problem Solving</td>
<td>KID TALK: “What do I want to happen?”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to recognize multiple goals in a social problem situation and selects socially adaptive goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Consideration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Social Problem Solving</td>
<td>KID TALK: “What could I do?”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to generate a variety of strategies to resolving social problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Generation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Social Problem Solving</td>
<td>KID TALK: “What would happen if I tried?” “What will I decide to do?”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to anticipate the consequences of carrying out different strategies: both long term and abstract consequences as well as short-term and more tangible consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Evaluation &amp;Selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Social Problem Solving</td>
<td>KID TALK: “Did it work?”</td>
<td>For example: Child demonstrates the ability to reflect upon the results of using a strategy to achieve a goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tool 1: What does a social thinking skills objective look like?

students have to know and be able to do to demonstrate that such students are proficient in the skills and knowledge framed by the content standards.”

When demonstrating mastery of content standards a student uses the same cognitive processes that as for “social” behavior. In the table above, students used the same cognitive process skills to demonstrate three different performance standards: Decoding a word, Solving a fractions problem, Keeping both a friend and a dish of plants.

Research suggests that social cognition is essential to learn content. Therefore, the need for social skills instruction becomes all the more necessary in light of the overwhelming evidence that children's social functioning plays a critical role in their overall academic functioning, and in fact, that social skills and academic progress are intertwined (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O’Neil, 2001). Next we will provide examples of instructional or IEP objectives that address social thinking skills.

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL THINKING SKILLS OBJECTIVES

Use these examples as a starting point when you develop social thinking skills objectives. Alter the setting, materials, criteria, level of independence and other factors as fits best for your own student(s).

Remember--the social-cognitive model we use to guide our work consists of these six distinct social processes:

- Noticing Social Cues (Paying attention to what’s going on.)
- Interpreting Social Cues (Understanding what’s going on.)
- Setting Goals (What do I want to happen?)
- Generating Strategies (What can I do?)
- Selecting Strategies (What would happen if…? What will I actually do?)
- Reviewing Outcomes (Did it work?)

It might be useful to think of the above social-cognitive processes as sequential when you determine which social thinking skills objectives you will write. For example, the skill of Interpreting Social Cues will need to be addressed before a student is able to be more successful when Setting Goals.

Each set of examples of social thinking skills objectives will be begin with a brief definition of the particular social-cognitive process we are focusing upon, followed by a reminder of what a student will likely be able to do if he or she can perform the process. Then we will introduce a student and read the objective written to address an area of his or her social-cognitive need. You notice that the objectives we have written to get you started are also aligned with learning standards from one of several states. Just “notice” how they fit together, and later we will work more on how to align the social thinking skills objectives with learning standards.

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OBJECTIVES FOR NOTICING SOCIAL CUES:
“Paying attention to what’s going on”

“Paying attention to what’s going on.” It’s gathering information about social situations, from spoken words, from body language, from facial expressions, and from tone of voice. It’s also being aware of environmental cues – the setting of the social interaction. Is the situation formal or informal? Do the people involved know each other well? Remember, students who are able to notice social cues:

- Can look for indications of basic emotions in others such as happy, sad, surprised, embarrassed, frustrated, angry and also emotional states such as lonely, confused, nervous, scared, calm, and excited.
- Identify internal sensations that are indications of emotions
- Have an emotional vocabulary; they can label these emotions.
- Anticipate social cues regarding others’ intentions from body positions, movements, facial expressions, tone of voice, and words.
- Notice these cues when they occur.

Sam’s Social-Cognitive Needs: Sam is a young man with low vision who will be part of an inclusion preschool. He has acquired academic readiness concepts and skills so well that he will serve as a fine model for some of the other students. However, this is his first opportunity to interact socially with a new level of independence. His teachers and peers will help him learn about how to read the social intentions of his classmates so that he can be a fine friend.

An Objective for Sam. Sam will name basic emotions including happy, sad, surprised, embarrassed, frustrated, and angry, and also emotional states including lonely, confused, nervous, scared, calm, and excited when presented with pictures displaying these emotions and emotional states with 100% accuracy.

Other Sample Objectives for Noticing Social Cues. (Determine your own performance criteria and context such as materials or social situations to customize the objectives to your own students learning needs.)

- When presented with a scenario in which someone experienced a given feeling, student will provide examples of social cues that indicate the feelings, including facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.
- Student will identify a time when he felt emotions. He will then show what his face looked like for each emotion experienced for at least 4 different emotions or emotion states.

Links to State Learning Standards. These objectives can be linked to learning standard 5.1 for Mental Health in the Social and Emotional Health strand of the Health Curriculum of the Massachusetts Frameworks for Pre-K through grade 5. Standard 5.1,under the heading feelings and emotions” states, “Identify the various feelings that most people experience and describe the physical and emotional reactions of the body to intense positive and negative feelings.”
Tool 1: Will I know a socially thinking student when I see one?

Review Outcomes

26. Does the child recognize when a social strategy doesn’t work (and stop using it)?

27. If a strategy doesn’t work, does the child come up with an appropriate follow-up strategy?

Speaking with others

Please speak with another staff person at the school about this student’s social skills.

Who? ___________________________ ______________________________
Name                                                               Position

Please note any ideas that come from that discussion:
What was the first breakdown in this social situation?

Everything worked well at first. Brenda calmed down, noticed and accurately interpreted Eddie’s social cues, and set appropriate goals, but then she fell apart in generating strategies. Although she kept her goals in mind and thought of several possible actions, they were all ineffective. The first strategy, tattling on him, involved an adult; she was unable to follow through on it. The second, standing by and looking sad, probably would not help her reach her goals. She had correctly interpreted the situation so she knew Eddie was not trying to be mean; sulking might well defeat her goal of keeping him as a friend. The third strategy, yelling at Eddie, would most likely cause new problems because he might not want to continue playing and be friends with her. The fourth, offering her mittens instead, may be an attempt at compromise, but it would probably be satisfactory to neither Brenda nor Eddie. Brenda did not carefully think through, “What would happen if….?” Moreover, she selected just one strategy to try, rather than a range of strategies to try one at a time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students who appropriately generate/select strategies look like?</th>
<th>What do students who inappropriately generate/select strategies look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They take the time to cool off before generating strategies.</td>
<td>They generate strategies hastily/impulsively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They know a wide range of strategies that have worked in the past.</td>
<td>Their repertoire of successful strategies is limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are aware of the advantages of different strategies and think through the implications of strategies. They consider only those that lead toward reaching their goals without causing more problems.</td>
<td>They do not think about the implications of the strategies. They generate strategies in terms of whether they might cause even more problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generate a wide range of strategies to choose from.</td>
<td>In every social situation, they employ the same strategy, whether it is appropriate or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generate strategies that they can follow through on independently.</td>
<td>The only strategy they know may be to seek help from an adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generate strategies that are direct and assertive. (“Excuse me, but would you please ….””)</td>
<td>Their strategies may be passive, like doing nothing except stand nearby and hope that their goals will be reached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They generate strategies that are polite.</td>
<td>Their strategies may be rude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their strategies often involve compromise, where everybody gives in a little bit as long as everybody is satisfied with the result.</td>
<td>They may not be able to think of compromises where everybody gives in and yet everybody is satisfied with the result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They select a sequence of strategies: what to try first…second…third.</td>
<td>They may sequence strategies randomly or in other ways which are not effective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tool 1: What are social thinking skills anyway?

What’s Social Knowledge got to do with it?

Objective evaluation of results depends upon a social awareness of what is likely to happen and how social strategies might go wrong. When socially adept students evaluate results, they know that it is important to keep peoples’ goals in mind in determining whether they were met. They know that they need to observe the responses of all children and adults around them as objectively as possible, and to look for not only the results that they expect, but also the results that they do not expect.

Emotional Regulation: Calming Down

It can be easy to come to conclusions too quickly, prematurely and inaccurately deducing either success ("Ah, I did it!") or failure ("See, I knew it wouldn’t work!") It is often important to step back, count to ten, take a big breath, or in other ways gain some distance before viewing results and evaluating whether a social strategy was successful.

So, what’s a Teacher to Do?

As teachers, you can use both formal instruction and social coaching throughout the school day to guide students in evaluating the results of their strategies. As you help students to accurately weigh the results of their social strategies, consider the following ideas. These are taken from published curricula, but also from informally shared tips from teacher-to-teacher.

- Much of children’s literature can be seen through the lens of problems and solutions. As your students read stories involving social situations, encourage them to analyze solutions to problems. Did they meet the characters’ goals? Were there any unexpected side effects, either positive or negative? Did solution of one problem lead to a new problem?

- As students deal with social conflicts throughout their days and school, guide them in evaluating the results. After students have generated and applied strategies, it may be helpful to call a class meeting and have each child who was involved in the incident report on his/her satisfaction with what happened.

- Using the technique of teacher think alouds, reflect on your own evaluation of various social stories. ("Hmm, I was hoping the boys would be able to play basketball without bothering the other second grade class out on the playground. The ball stayed inbounds. That’s good. Did the boys playing basketball still have fun? Could the other class hear each other talking?")

- In coaching conflicts between students, have them form and execute strategies, then persist in having each student clearly explain how they felt about the solutions.
SOCIAL-COGNITIVE PROCESSES EVALUATION REPORT
SUMMARY 2: Nadia

NOTICING SOCIAL CUES—The ability to recognize and name four basic emotion states (happy, sad, angry, and scared) from photos of facial expressions and to describe situations that produce these emotions:

Nadia was able to identify three of the four depicted emotions from facial expressions. Anger was the one emotion that she had difficulty identifying. At times, she misidentified children who had angry facial expressions as being sad.

Nadia did demonstrate an adequate level of skill in connecting events to emotions. When asked to identify an event that made her (or someone else) feel each of the four emotions, Nadia was able to think of a plausible event for each emotion. For example, she said that she felt scared when her sister said “Boo”.

INTERPRETING SOCIAL CUES—The ability to "read" social situations correctly by being aware of social cues and accurately interpreting another child’s intentions:

Nadia has some emerging skills in “reading” social situations but still needs improvement in this skill area. Specifically, she had 50% accuracy in interpreting other children’s non-hostile intentions in social problem situations. These are situations in which the social cues show that although another child caused a negative event to occur (e.g., disrupted a play activity), this wasn’t intended (e.g., it clearly happened by accident and the other child said “Sorry” right afterwards.) The other 50% of the times, Nadia concluded that the other child was deliberately acting “mean”, even though the social cues suggested the opposite interpretation. It was interesting to note that at times Nadia recognized non-hostile interpretations based on the other child’s “nice” tone of voice or words such as “sorry”, at but other times when those particular cues were not present, she allowed the negative event itself to shape her conclusions about the other child’s intentions.

GENERATION OF SOCIAL STRATEGIES—Knowledge of age-appropriate strategies for resolving social problems, including strategies for calming down:

Nadia demonstrated adequate knowledge of age-appropriate social strategies for resolving social problems. Specifically, she suggested a number of appropriate strategies, such as turning to an adult for help, talking politely but assertively to another child who is causing a social problem, proposing a compromise solution, accommodating or deferring to the other child, for example by repairing the damage and letting the other child join the activity, and leaving the situation to seek gratification elsewhere.

Nadia showed a need for improvement in her knowledge of strategies for calming herself down when upset or angry. As calming down strategies, she was only able to suggest drawing a picture and listening to opera music. However, she did not appear to be familiar with strategies, such as counting to 10, doing deep diaphragmatic breathing, or using self-talk to reassure herself and
story about another child who acted a certain way--the child may gasp to indicate how bad this strategy is! Other children, however, can apply a richer and more sophisticated set of concepts. For example, a strategy might be dangerous or safe, friendly or unfriendly, easy or difficult to carry out, low risk and mellow or high risk and kind of pushy, or something that’s okay to do with close friends but not with acquaintances. Having a well-developed treasury of concepts and associated cause-and-effect connections makes it possible for a child to evaluate strategies and determine which strategy is most appropriate for a given situation.

**Emotional Regulation: Calming Down to Generate and Select Strategies**

When people are very upset, angry, frustrated, excited, or tired, etc, they may create strategies impulsively, or they may stop generating strategies when they have thought of only one. They may also generate strategies without thinking through their implications. That is, they may immediately tattle, grab the ball, push another student in order to be first in line. Unless they are thinking clearly, people may give up when the first strategy they select fails and not select a second. If people would wait until they were calm and rested before they generated and selected strategies, they would probably be much more effective in reaching their social goals.

**So, what’s a Teacher to Do?**

Through both formal lessons and incidental social coaching throughout the day, you can help your students to generate multiple, effective strategies and to appropriately select among them. To get started, here are some ideas taken from commonly used curricula, and from strategies other teachers have recommended:

- As part of a group discussion, give your students some hypothetical social problems and have them set appropriate goals for these problems. Then generate as many strategies as possible. They should predict outcomes of each strategy and decide whether it would meet the stated goal without creating more problems. Have them sequence these strategies in terms of what they would select first, second, and third.

- Introduce the concept of compromise by using a balance scale. Put an even number of objects on each side and show how balance is maintained when you take the same amount from both sides. Talk about how compromise is like this; both people give in a little bit so the solution is balanced or fair.

- As social problems come up in stories, stop reading and have students identify characters’ goals, then generate strategies to meet these goals. Resume reading so the students can learn what strategy the characters actually tried. At the end of the reading, discuss whether the strategies worked, and why or why not.

- Model compromising. When you offer students choices at school and they don not reach consensus, let them see how you think of some compromises where everybody gives a little yet everybody is satisfied with the outcome.

- Throughout the day as social issues come up, encourage students to put into words, “What am I going to do?” “What do I think will happen if I do this?”
SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING: Review Outcomes

**KIDTALK: “Did it work?”**

Once strategies have been generated, selected and applied, people need to evaluate the results. Did the strategies work? That is, did they lead to (or meet) the goals that were set? Or, did they lead to other, unanticipated results, either positive or negative? Did the actions solve the problems at hand without creating other problems like getting in trouble or making an enemy? People who are socially competent are able to objectively regard the consequences of the strategies they use in order to evaluate their effectiveness.

**Scenario: A Social Skills Story: “Did Brenda get what she wanted?”**

It was almost time for recess. Brenda was standing at her coat hook and had just put on her hat when she felt someone tear it off. She swung around to see that Eddie was holding it. She saw him grinning and she noticed him wink, so she understood that he was just trying to get a game going. Next, she took a breath and counted to five. Then she thought to herself, “I sure wish I could get my hat back, and play with Eddie, too.”

She tried tattling and that didn’t work, but then a friend, who had been watching the whole incident, suggested that Brenda beat Eddie at his own game. She suggested that Brenda grab his hat, too, giving him a friendly wink in the process. Brenda did exactly that.

Eddie was delighted at this game. He and Brenda made a pact, he gave her back her hat, and they started a free-for-all in taking all the other students’ hats and mittens. What happened next? Their teacher came into the hall and made them all stay in for recess. Her classmates were furious at her.

Brenda was pleased, she had reached both goals, playing with Eddie and getting her hat back.

What was the first breakdown in this social situation?

Brenda noticed and accurately interpreted Eddie’s social cues, set appropriate goals and, with the help of a friend, generated and selected a strategy. She tried it. But then she was too narrow in evaluating the results. She evaluated them too quickly, when she was still very excited from the game she and Eddie had made up. She was pleased that she had achieved the goals she had set (playing with Eddie and getting her hat back) but seemed blind to its broader social consequences (that everyone had to stay in for recess and that her classmates were angry at her.)

http://www.csde.umb.edu/tools
SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING: Generating Strategies and Selecting a Strategy

**Kid Talk:** “What could I do?”
“What would happen if I tried?”
“What will I actually decide to do?”

Once people calm down, notice and interpret social clues, and set goals, they are ready to generate possible strategies to reach their goals, and to choose among these strategies to decide which one they will actually use.

Strategies are plans that people make to solve their problems. Good or effective strategies are those that solve problems without creating other problems, such as getting in trouble or making an enemy. In other words, the most effective strategy may be the one that enables the child to meet several goals at one time. Effective strategies could mean being assertive, where people say directly and politely what they want; or, effective strategies could involve compromise, finding ways to solve problems in which each person gives in a little bit, as long as the solution is satisfactory to both/all people. Alternatively, they could mean keeping quiet or even walking away. Every situation is unique and a strategy might be right for one situation, but not another.

People who are socially competent often generate more than one strategy to reach a goal, and draw on past experience to select which ones they will try. They may even sequence these strategies: what to try first, second, and third. To decide which of these strategies to act on, they try to use prediction. That is, they try to figure out if a strategy is good by asking themselves, “What would happen if …?”

**Scenario: A Social Skills Story: “What does Brenda do?”**

*It was almost time for recess. Brenda was standing at her coat hook and had just put on her hat when she felt someone tear it off. She swung around to see that Eddie was holding it. She saw him grinning and she noticed him wink, so she understood that he was just trying to get a game going. However, she felt herself getting angry so she took a breath and counted to five. Then she thought to herself, “I sure wish I could get my hat back, and play with Eddie, too.”*

Now it was time for Brenda to generate some strategies to reach these goals.

- “I could tell on him. I know our teacher will get my hat for me and make him play with me, too.”
- “Maybe I’ll just stand here by my coat hook, looking sad. He’ll notice and feel sorry for me. Then he’ll give me back my hat and play with me.”
- “I could yell “You give me back my hat this minute!” He’ll be so scared that he’ll give it back and then play with me for the whole recess.”
- “Or, I could tell him he can have my mittens, instead.”

*Brenda decided to try the first strategy: tattling.*

http://www.csde.umb.edu/tools
**Julia’s Social-Cognitive Need.** Julia and Lizzie are best friends who will start this year’s first soccer practice on the same team. Since both have outgrown last year’s cleats they go shopping together with their moms. Julia spots a pair with green trim, just the right size, in the closeout bin. Lizzie wants a pair, too, but the only pair remaining in the shop are a “yuckie” color. Julie and her mom buy the green ones, and Lizzy leaves the store pouting. When Julia gets in the car to leave she notices her friend’s reaction. She yells at Lizzie that it’s not her fault. She didn’t take the time to think about the situation from her friend’s perspective, or to respond in a neutral or kind way or think about a possible friendly compromise. This is a familiar pattern for Julia, and her mom asks the school for help.

**An Objective for Julia.** When faced with authentic and hypothetical situations, Julie will review the outcome and how the situation affected each participant. The teacher will provide 3 hypothetical vignettes, and question Julie following three authentic situations. Julie will respond with 100% accuracy.

**Other sample objectives for Reviewing Outcomes.** (Determine your own performance criteria and context such as materials or social situations to customize the objectives to your own students learning needs.)

- When presented with 3 hypothetical and 3 authentic situations, student will identify the successful strategy and report what types of goals the student achieved in these situations.
- Student will try his/her strategy for solving a social problem and afterward evaluate whether or not the strategy produced the desired outcome when asked by the teacher, for at least 5 situations with 100% accuracy.
- When presented with a social interaction that was unsuccessful, the student will describe the reasons why the strategy did not result in the desired outcome.

**Links to State Learning Standards.** These objectives can be linked to learning standard 3.5 for Mental Health in the Social and Emotional Health strand of the Health Curriculum of the Massachusetts Frameworks for Pre-K through grade 5. Standard 3.5 is under the heading “decision making” and it states, “Explain and practice a model for decision-making that includes gathering information, predicting outcomes, listing advantages and disadvantages, identifying moral implications, and evaluating decisions”.

**OBJECTIVES FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION: “Calming Down”**

Students must know how to manage their emotional reactions to situations. Without this self-control they are less likely to be focused enough on the situation at hand to use their social-cognitive problem solving skills. For example, Lucy often cries when someone gives her feedback or a message she doesn’t want to hear. Her tears prevent her from realizing when her friends and her teacher are kindly being helpful. Her classmate George typically yells at peers when they tell him that their team has enough players already, or that his job in their collaborative group is to find pictures of Jupiter on the computer. In both situations, crying and yelling get in the way of being able to understand what is being said, and why.

http://www.csde.umb.edu/tools
What was the first breakdown in this social situation?

Brenda was not noticing all the relevant social cues. She did not catch Eddie’s wink. Maybe it all happened to quickly for her. Maybe she couldn’t take in both the grin and the wink at the same time. Maybe she did not know to look for a wink because she was unaware that it can give key social information. At any rate, without this important cue, Brenda was unable to sort out that Eddie was being friendly, rather than mean.

**What it “looks like”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students who notice social cues look like?</th>
<th>What do students who miss social cues look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They look for signals of <em>basic emotions</em> like happy, sad, surprised, embarrassed, frustrated, and angry. They look for signals of <em>emotional states</em> like lonely, confused, nervous, scared, calm, and excited.</td>
<td>They may not notice signals of basic emotions in either themselves or others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have an emotional vocabulary They can label these emotions.</td>
<td>They may not be able to label their emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They expect and look for social cues in body positions, movements, facial expressions, tone of voice, and words.</td>
<td>They may not have a sense of which social cues are relevant or of which ones are important to notice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They notice these cues when they occur.</td>
<td>They may be unaware of the social cues that are going on around them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What’s social knowledge got to do with it?**

Through our past experiences we have all accumulated what researchers call “social knowledge.” That is, we bring what we have previously learned to each social situation and this knowledge influences how we process each social situation. This section examines the way social knowledge affects the cues that people notice in a particular social situation. That is, if people lack social knowledge, or the concept that specific words, body language, tone of voice, or contexts are relevant, they may not even notice the social cues that they are seeing or hearing. For example:

- Does a student only perceive remorse if another person says “I’m sorry?” What would they miss if they didn’t know that a bent head and tears might also indicate a person was sad about a mistake he made?

- If a girl assumed that best friends *always* played together after school, what would she think if her friend had to attend a doctor’s appointment instead?
Tool 1: What are social thinking skills anyway?

some ideas taken from commonly used curricula, and from strategies other teachers have recommended:

- Structure student discussion of social goal setting by writing two columns on a flip chart. Label one column “Relationship Goals” and label the other “Goals about Getting or Doing Something.” As students suggest goals, record them in the appropriate column. Keep this list posted for future reference. For a more challenging discussion, add a third column of “Avoidance/Safety Goals.”

- Your students may not be aware of the goals they are pursuing, or what those goals might be. When conflicts arise, ask some probing questions to help them to put into words: “What do I want to happen?”

- There is a reason why we count to ten before we act. Before your students set social goals, encourage them to wait until they are rested and calm.

- In coaching students through social situations, guide them to think of as many goals as possible, both relational and concrete, before they choose one or two. Be sure to consider avoidance goals.

- Hindsight can give some valuable lessons. Once an entire social situation has occurred, but before your students have forgotten it, help them to think back to identify what their social goals were. If their goals did not include friendship/relational goals, encourage them to list some.

- Pause in stories and films to identify characters’ social goals. Discuss whether different characters have different goals for the same situation, or the same goal. For any particular character in the story, discuss whether he/she has only one goal, or whether he/she seems to be pursuing different goals at the same time. List the goal(s.) Help your students to generate some other goals the characters might also pursue.
### Processes Underlying Academic and Social Cognition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decoding Words: Langston</th>
<th>Solving Math Word Problems: Selina</th>
<th>Being Socially Appropriate: Patrice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noticing &amp; identifying</strong> letters</td>
<td><strong>Noticing &amp; identifying</strong> the problem to be solved.</td>
<td><strong>Noticing and identifying</strong> that a classmate knocked over the dish containing my hydroponics science project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong> that sounds are associated with the letters in a troublesome word.</td>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong> that some words in the problem indicate the type of calculation(s) called for.</td>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong> that she tripped by accident, not on purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deciding that I want to</strong> read the word correctly.</td>
<td><strong>Deciding that I want to</strong> solve the problem correctly.</td>
<td><strong>Deciding that I want to</strong> be a fair classmate, and fix my science project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking of several possible ways</strong> the letters can sound, given all the funny English rules and exceptions!</td>
<td><strong>Thinking of several possible ways</strong> to calculate the results.</td>
<td><strong>Thinking of several possible ways</strong> I could react: yell at her, or take her hydroponics dish, or tell the teacher that she was mean to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selecting</strong> the sounds that follow the rule we learned yesterday in class about “…when two vowels go walking…”</td>
<td><strong>Selecting</strong> the way to solve the problem where I can draw the circle for the pizza with 8 pieces, and color in 3 of them that the problem says I gave to my friends.</td>
<td><strong>Selecting</strong> the “nice” way --I told her that I knew it was an accident, but I was upset anyway. I think she should help me clean the mess and fix up my dish of plants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It worked!</strong></td>
<td><strong>It worked!</strong></td>
<td><strong>It worked!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston said, “So that is what the word “ice cream” looks like.”</td>
<td>Selina told us, “I could see that I had 5/8 of the pizza left to share with more friends later.”</td>
<td>After speaking with her friend, Patrice reported, “She was sorta scared, but felt better when I didn’t yell at her. She thinks I am being fair, and she helped me fix my plants.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The central feature of standards-based reform is new content and performance standards. Goals 2000 defined these standards as follows: Content standards (sec 3[4]) defined as “broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire in a particular subject area.” Performance standards (sec 3[9]) defined as “concrete examples and explicit definitions of what
What Does a Social Thinking Skills Objective Look Like?

In this third section of Tool One, we provide information; examples and suggestions for you to follow when you write social-cognitive-oriented IEP or instructional objective that are aligned with your own state’s learning standards.

To use a Dr. Seuss phrase, writing objectives could be called “old hat.” Teachers routinely assess students and write objectives that focus on academic skills as a part of their instructional practice. However, teachers and research tell us that social skills objectives are quite rare. In this third component of Tool One, What Does A Social Thinking Skills Objective Look Like?, you will find examples and guidelines for writing social skills objectives to foster the social competence of diverse students.

We will lead teachers through a process of writing objectives that are:

- based upon social thinking skills assessment
- aligned with state learning standards
- adjusted to capture the essence of the learning standards for student with intellectual and other disabilities.

In addition, we will provide information about the legal foundations for writing objectives aligned with state learning standards and how the social-cognitive processes into the standards-based movement. Further, we will provide examples to demonstrate how the underlying processes for social cognition are similar to the processes used for teaching academic content. We will also provide examples of social thinking skills objectives for each social-cognitive process and information about how to “tease out” the essence of a learning standard for students with Intellectual and other disabilities. Finally, we will align Social Thinking Skills with State Learning Standards and identify the obstacles that may be encountered in finding social skills learning standards.
Tool 1: What does a social thinking skills objective look like?

103-22 Section 301 (1)). The enactment of Goals 2000 was significant because for the first time federal legislation not specifically designed to address special education required the inclusion of students with disabilities in the education reform movement. As a result of this legislation, standards based-education reform became prominent at the national level.

Title I of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. The IASA required that statewide assessments linked to state-developed standards provide the adaptations and accommodations necessary for the full participation of students with diverse learning needs.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations directly addressed the issue of alignment of general education and special education reform efforts and required that “children with disabilities be included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations where necessary” [(612)(a))17(A)]. IDEA ‘97 requires that the individualized education programs (IEP’s) for students with disabilities contain a statement of how the student’s disability affects his or her ability to perform in the “general curriculum” (i.e., the same curriculum as nondisabled students).”

No Child Left behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (PL 107-110) is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB reaffirmed the federal government’s position that all students should meet high academic standards. In order to obtain federal funding, states must demonstrate that the state has adopted challenging academic and content standards for all students in the areas reading or language arts, math and science and these state initiatives must be developed in coordination with IDEA requirements. The IEP must therefore include a statement of how the student’s disability affects his or her ability to participate in the general curriculum. The goals, benchmarks and objectives of the IEP must be aligned or tied to the general curriculum.

How do Social-Cognitive Processes fit into the standards-based movement described above AND How are the underlying processes for social and academic content cognition the same?

At first glance, social behavior does not resemble reading or math skills. However, there are at least two reasons students need both to be successful in school and teachers need to address both to follow the intent of laws. First, the underlying processes for social cognition and content cognition are the same. Second, research suggests that social cognition is essential for learning academic content. The brief examples below further clarify our belief that Social-Cognitive Processes fit into your standards-based curriculum.

Cognitive processes can be viewed as the problem solving skills that students use to learn the knowledge and skills in a content area - reading, math, history, and science etc. Cognitive processes used to acquire the knowledge and skills of social behavior are referred to as social-cognitive skills. As you might have guessed by now, the underlying processes used to learn academic content and social behavior are basically the same, as illustrated in the table below.
SOCIAL PERCEPTION: Interpreting Social Cues

*Kid Talk: “Understanding what’s going on.”*

Once students begin to notice social cues, they need to accurately interpret the cue and learn to recognize what actually happened on a social-emotional level.

The first step in this process is for students to understand their own feelings. Students can ask themselves: Am I angry? Sad? Happy? How intense are these feelings? (For example, if they are angry, are they only slightly annoyed, or definitely angry, or irate?) Are they interpreting social situations when they are calm and rested, as compared to when frustration is building and the smallest offense can seem monumental?

The second step in this process is for students to identify and label what other people in given situations might be feeling. Different people can experience different emotions, even in the same situation. Students need to listen to the words other people are saying, but they also need to be aware that sometimes words do not match what people truly mean. For a complete picture, students also need to figure out what people are feeling based on how they look: their body language, their facial expressions, and their tone of voice.

Once students have an initial grasp of other peoples’ feelings, they can make a guess about their intent. Students can ask themselves: Where are they coming from? Are they being sincere? Did something happen by accident, or was it on purpose? At the basic level, students need to think about whether people were being mean or not mean. At the same time, they need to understand that motives are broader and more complex than this. Rather than being intentionally mean, people may simply have different, competing goals from those of the student analyzing the social situation.

Overlaying this entire process, students need to consider context. For example, they may need to realize that blocking someone’s path in a basketball game is different from blocking them in the hall. Lastly, students need to know that all feelings are acceptable, but that ways of expressing them range from acceptable to unacceptable. (“Some ways to show your feelings are OK. Other ways are not OK.”)

*Scenario: A Social Skills Story: “What does a wink mean?”*

It was almost time for recess. Brenda was standing at her coat hook and had just put on her hat, when she felt someone tear it off. She swung around to see that Eddie was holding it. She saw him grinning, and this time she noticed him wink. However, she didn’t realize that a wink meant he was kidding. She thought he was taking the hat on purpose, just to be mean. She started crying.
Some Social Challenges

FINDING EXPLANATIONS:
Students with learning problems may come to a conclusion too early, before they consider a variety of explanations. Some intellectually capable students may also have difficulty taking in a range of possible explanations of behavior.

MISSING SUBLE SIGNS:
Sometimes people look and sound friendly on the surface, but actually have hurtful intents. This is common in sarcasm. Some students with learning problems may be unable to “read” this behavior; that is, they may not be able to discern that it is actually intended to be mean. They may be particularly confused if others are sometimes truly kind, but at other times seemingly pleasant but actually unkind.

MISREADING CUES:
Students from other cultures may not understand American body language. For example, they may interpret eye contact as being a threat rather than a signal of interest.

INTERPRETING DISCREPANT CUES:
When words and tone of voice give conflicting messages, students with learning problems may base their conclusions only on tone of voice. Similarly, students with non-verbal learning problems may consider only the words which are spoken and students with verbal learning problems may consider only tone of voice.

ASSIGNING INTENT:
When someone hurts them, students with intellectual limitations tend to assume that this was mean/intentional, rather than accidental.

What’s Social Knowledge got to do with it?

When students enter into social situations their prior experience influences their ability to notice social cues and also influences their ability to correctly interpret these cues. For example:

- Students might have a limited “cue vocabulary.” For example, they may not know how to interpret a wink, or a mock frown, or knitted eyebrows.
- Some of us learned that when someone smiles they are friendly. We may not have learned that a smile can hide a sarcastic tone that indicates an unkind intent.
- Students’ understanding of what is socially accepted might influence how they interpret social cues. Students with visual impairments might not understand social conventions. For instance, they might not know that “going around in a circle” is a way to take turns in speaking. As a result, they might become angry with the other children who seem to be speaking up without raising their hands or being called on by a teacher.
Tool 1: What are social thinking skills anyway?

Some Social Challenges

HAVING A LARGE REPERTOIRE OF STRATEGIES:
Students with visual or hearing impairments may have been unable to observe/hear other students modeling a wide range of strategies which can lead to reaching a social goal. Similarly, students for whom English is a second language may not have been able to access this modeling. As a result, their repertoire of strategies may be small.

TRANSLATING GOALS INTO RELEVANT STRATEGIES:
Sometimes, a child with learning problems (for example, autism spectrum disorder) may recognize a particular goal as important, but may not be adept at translating the goal into strategies that will be useful for achieving the goal. For example, a child may want to have friends, but may not realize that noticing that others’ emotions and behavior, commenting positively about their accomplishments, asking follow up questions to extend a conversation, noticing when they express a need, and offering to share materials or help, are all specific strategies that can help to make that goal achievable.

GENERATING MULTIPLE STRATEGIES:
Rather than thinking of many ways to accomplish a goal before choosing one or two, some students with cognitive impairments and learning disabilities tend to use the same strategy for every situation.

GENERATING RELATIONAL STRATEGIES:
Students with learning problems or emotional or behavioral problems may generate strategies such as impulsively calling out or reaching out. These sometimes let them achieve their goals, but in the process fail to build relationships.

GENERATING STRATEGIES THAT ALLOW INDEPENDENCE:
Students with learning problems might resort to the strategy of asking the teacher to solve a conflict with a classmate which can be seen as tattling, or “telling on” another student.

SELECTING MORE THAN ONE STRATEGY, MOVING TO THE NEXT IF ONE DOESN’T WORK:
Some students select and implement one strategy, but they are not flexible in turning to a second strategy if the first is not successful.

What’s Social Knowledge got to do with it?

The greatest source of strategies is past experience: What has been tried in other situations? Did a specific strategy, or a combination of strategies, work to achieve a social goal in the past? If the first strategy selected was not successful, did the student move down a list of strategies in order to try others? Was the student able to execute it independently? What were its effects, in terms of either increasing or decreasing friendships? When socially adept students need to generate strategies and select the one most likely to succeed in new situations, they rely on this history.

In addition, it also helps to have a rich set of concepts that can be used to weigh the pros and cons of a strategy. Some children have a broad, generalized notion that certain strategies are inappropriate and others appropriate. You may notice this in the child’s reaction when you tell a
What was the first breakdown in this social situation?

In this scenario, Brenda noticed Eddie’s social cues of smiling and winking, but she did not interpret them correctly. That is, she did not accurately assess his intentions. There are several reasons for this, such as:

- Brenda may have considered Eddie’s action of taking her hat, but not his smiling and winking. She may not have given these facial expressions enough weight in her social perception.
- Brenda may not have known what a wink meant. She noticed the wink and may have sensed that it was unusual, but did not know what to make of it.
- Brenda may have been confused. She thought that taking a hat was mean but also may have thought that smiling and winking were friendly. These are potentially discrepant messages.
- Brenda came to a quick conclusion as soon as she had one possible explanation for Eddie’s taking her hat. She did not suspend judgment until she considered all the motives Eddie may have had.
- Brenda may have been too upset to decide on Eddie’s intent. Maybe she needed to calm down for a minute or two.
- Brenda did not consider the context of an informal, unsupervised hall time just before recess, where the mood is typically frisky.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students who correctly interpret social cues look like?</th>
<th>What do students who misinterpret social cues look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They accurately conclude whether events happened by accident, or deliberately.</td>
<td>They misread intentions. They may come to the conclusion that other children are being deliberately mean to them, even when this is not the case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They correctly interpret basic emotions in themselves and in others.</td>
<td>They may misread basic emotions in either themselves and/or others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have an emotional vocabulary They can label these emotions.</td>
<td>They may not be able to label these emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They consider context.</td>
<td>They may not consider context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They look for all possible explanations for a behavior.</td>
<td>They may come to a conclusion as soon as they think of an explanation for a behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They catch subtle signs of sarcasm or “mean” intent, such as insincerity or a gap between words and actions.</td>
<td>They may be confused and vulnerable; others may take advantage of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They recognize that people can have mixed feelings, such as being happy that they won the game but sad that their friend lost.</td>
<td>They identify only a single feeling, such as being happy when they win the game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING: Setting Goals

*KID TALK: “What do I want to happen?”*

Once people notice and interpret social clues, they are in a position to set goals. Goals related to social situations fall into three categories.

First, some are social and interpersonal, revolving around making friends, having good conversation, and feeling comfortable. Second, some relate to more concrete results, like finding a seat at lunch, having something to do at recess, getting the most markers, or being line leader. They lead toward personal gratification and pleasure rather than social relating. A third set of goals aims toward avoiding negative outcomes, such as emotional or physical injury, since sometimes it is wisest to get out of the situation in order to avoid being hurt, being ostracized, “sticking out,” or getting in trouble. Social relationships and concrete gratification are “approach” goals, while safety may be an “avoidance” goal.

So far, we have mentioned the goals of social relationships, concrete gratification, and avoidance of negative outcome, but they are not the only goals that children pursue. The goal of having fun may be a terrific goal in the classroom, just as it can be in the playground, as long as it is balanced with other goals such as completing assigned tasks and avoiding trouble. On the appropriate side, a goal for some children is to follow rules, social norms, or moral principles that they have learned from their family, at school, or from their peer group. On the inappropriate side, there are generally two common goals: retaliating to “get even” with someone and seeking attention.

Socially competent people typically have more than one goal. By considering how to balance competing goals, they think of ways of meeting their needs in more than one area at the same time. For example, a student may want to try out for chorus, which meets after school, but try to find a way of doing so without disappointing her friend who usually walks home with her from school. By doing so, she is attempting to balance the competing goals of maintaining a friendship, while still getting to participate in a special activity. Even social goals, when not balanced with other goals, can become inappropriate. For example, a child may be so eager to be accepted by peers or stay friends that he will give in to pressure to act in a hurtful way to another child in the classroom. People who are socially adept also weigh goals according to the situations they are in. They allow multiple goals to co-exist but accurately discern, in given contexts, which goals are more important to act upon.

Goal setting may seem so instinctive or so habitual that people are not even aware that they are setting goals, or of what these goals are. At other times, people may be aware of their concrete
**An Objective for Billy.** Billy will identify goals for social situations that include friendship and interpersonal relationships goal AND/OR when presented with 2 goals for a social situation (such as wanting to take the first turn when playing a game and wanting to have other children to play with), Billy will explain whether the two can both be achieved or whether they are conflicting.

**Other Sample Objectives for Setting Goals.** (Determine your own performance criteria and context such as materials or social situations to customize the objectives to your own students learning needs.)

- Student will define the word “goal” spontaneously, give an example of a goal, and identify one personal goal.
- Student will articulate the goals that he/she would set for a typical social problem described by the teacher.
- Student will develop a list of possible goals that people in pictures might want to happen.
- Student will identify several possible goals for a common social problem before choosing one to work toward.

**Links to State Learning Standards.** These objectives can be linked to learning standard 5.5 for Mental Health in the Social and Emotional Health strand of the Health Curriculum of the Massachusetts Frameworks for Pre-K through grade 5. Standard 5.5 is under the heading “decision making” and it states, “Explain and practice a model for decision-making that includes gathering information, predicting outcomes, listing advantages and disadvantages, identifying moral implications, and evaluating decisions.”

**OBJECTIVES FOR GENERATING AND SELECTING STRATEGIES:**

“What can I do?”

Once students can notice and interpret social cues and set goals, they are ready to generate possible strategies to reach their goals and then choose which one to use. Effective strategies are ways to solve problems without creating other problems (such as getting into trouble or making an enemy or other instances where a student’s goal is not achieved.). Every situation is unique, and the best strategy for one situation, may not be best in another. Students who are socially competent can generate more than one strategy to reach a goal and can use past experience to decide which to use. When evaluating a strategy, they ask themselves, “What would happen if...? Remember, students who generate and select appropriate strategies:

- Know a wide range of strategies that have worked for them in the past.
- Are aware of the advantages of different strategies and consider only those that will lead to reaching their goals without causing more problems.
- Take time to cool off before generating strategies.
- Generate strategies they can follow through on independently.
- Generate strategies that are direct and assertive.
- Often think of compromises, where everyone gives in a bit.
- Select a sequence of strategies; what to try first, second, and third.

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