



The WCPA News

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Social Skills Training: Empowering Students

By Jennifer Gauvain, LCSW

Today's students face a variety of social challenges in their daily lives. From the home environment to the educational system, every day occurrences involve interaction with others. Peer relations contribute substantially to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not academic success or classroom behavior, but rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children (Hartup, 1991). Children who are not liked by their peers and who often engage in inappropriate behaviors with adults and authority figures are at risk of developing maladaptive social behaviors later in life. While some children are naturally adept at good social skills, many children need to be taught these skills.

The most effective social skills training techniques must empower children to attend to the needs of others while also embracing their own self-worth. These techniques must combine modeling, coaching, and reinforcement. Collaboration and coordination among parents, school and social skills "coach" is imperative in order for new skills to become functional. Adult guidance and consistency is the key when attempting to create a substantive change in the social competence of a child (Jewett, 1992). In other words, it really does take a village! Important techniques for fostering social skills that should be duplicated by those adults involved in the process include:

- Helping children label and verbalize their feelings
- Teaching problem-solving skills
- Teaching developmentally-appropriate anger management skills
- Guidance on reading social cues
- Discussion of interpersonal conflict and appropriate solutions
- Promotion of cooperative rather than competitive behavior
- Enabling children to get to know each other and trust each other
- Promoting good communication skills

It is clear that more and more parents and teachers are concerned about the day to day issues children are facing, such as making new friends, maintaining relationships, and ultimately becoming responsible adults. Success is not just measured on a student's academic or athletic abilities but on his or her ability to be a decent and empathetic person. For those students who have difficulties with this task, there is room to grow. Social skills training is a developmental necessity which should be supported by parents and teachers alike. West County Psychological Associates is now offering social skills groups for students of all ages. For more information, please contact the office at 275-8599.

Jennifer Gauvain is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with clinical expertise in the areas of marriage and family therapy. She currently provides training and consultation within the Comprehensive School Services program, and therapy to children, adolescents, families, and couples.

Check out our website!
WCPASTL.COM

The Nuts and Bolts of Drug Testing

By: Michael E. Mahon M.A.

Our Philosophy

We believe that individuals and systems:

- Are capable of permanent change
- Function best with clearly defined authority that stems from a family systems hierarchy
- Are accountable for both positive and negative aspects of behavior
- Achieve success by conscious choices that lead to strength and development of personal responsibility
- Control their environment by establishing boundaries that are consistent with their values

WCPA promotes change and growth by:

- Helping to establish order within the environment
- Meeting consistently in a collaborative relationship to achieve identified goals
- Helping to identify and process significant issues
- Aiding in resolving issues as they arise

The result for the system or individual is the development of a strong sense of identity and boundaries that allows for the achievement of goals.

There exists a lot of confusion over what drug testing is and what it can do. I find this in both the adolescents and parents I counsel and the school personnel with whom I work. This article aims to explain the facts about drug testing and give parents and school professionals needed information with which to make choices for the health and safety of students.

First of all, there exist two basic drug testing methods; one tests urine and the other tests hair. There are advantages and disadvantages to each method. Urine testing is most appropriate when testing for alcohol and when testing immediately after consumption. This is true because hair testing does not test for alcohol and because it takes approximately seven to ten days for evidence of drug use to be translated into the hair follicle. Therefore, a hair test cannot tell us if a person used yesterday whereas a urine test can.

On the other hand, a hair test is accurate for ninety days whereas urine is only accurate for forty eight to ninety six hours. Therefore, a urine test gives information about a person's behavior for the previous three to four days whereas hair gives you a glimpse of a person's behavior for the previous three months. Another advantage of hair testing is that the test is much less invasive. Rather than collecting a sample of the individual's urine, a small sample of the person's hair is collected. Hair from the top of the head is preferred. However, hair can be collected from anywhere on the body and fingernail shavings can be substituted for the hair sample if need be. Hair tests will also screen for the popular drug "ecstasy," for which urine tests do not screen. Other than the two exceptions listed above, both tests screen for the major drugs of abuse including marijuana, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and PCP. Other tests can be run to test for a specific drug if need be. Based on what information is needed, a decision can be made about the appropriate test. If either test is acceptable, hair testing is often preferred.

Second, it is important to understand that a negative drug test does not mean that an individual has not used a particular drug. It is often the case that parents and adolescents will use a negative drug test to "prove" that the adolescent is not using a drug. However, negative results only mean that a person has not used in enough quantity to produce a positive drug test and should not automatically be interpreted as meaning that the person does not use at all. It is possible for an adolescent to smoke marijuana as much as once per week without producing a positive drug test. Because of this fact, it is important the drug testing be done only by qualified professionals and never be used as the sole form of assessment of the individual.

Finally, there is great confusion over the tamper-ability of drug testing. It is true that individuals can purchase substances that, when taken internally or added to a urine sample, will produce a negative test. However, all of these substances can be controlled for during the drug testing process. These controls test the integrity of the sample to make sure it is unadulterated urine. The drug testing professional can determine if tampering has occurred and, if so, can infer the type of tampering that has taken place. For hair testing there has been no clinical evidence to show that tampering with hair has any effect on the validity of the test. An individual can even "bleach" their hair with no negative effect on the test's accuracy.

West County Psychological Associates provides individual drug testing along with in-depth drug use assessments and treatment, when necessary. Parents may call us for an initial appointment if there are concerns about a particular student. WCPA also provides bulk and random drug testing on-site at schools. If you would like more information about drug testing or would like to discuss your school's policies for the prevention of drug use, please feel free to contact me at (314) 275-8599.

A Letter from WCPA's New Speech-Language Pathologist

Note: We believe that a child's ability to communicate and use language to learn is imperative to their success in school. We are therefore so pleased to introduce Rebecca Goldman as the new WCPA speech-language pathologist.

Dear school professionals,

I appreciate this opportunity to introduce myself. My background includes receiving my M.A. from Saint Louis University's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, and working as a speech-language pathologist in a variety of settings, including St. Louis Children's Hospital and the Central Institute for the Deaf. I have my Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) and I am licensed with the Missouri Board of Healing Arts. At each step in my career, I have had the opportunity to participate in the creation of Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) for students, and I am committed to helping schools create success for students with speech / language needs.

My services are available both in the WCPA office and on-site at schools. In-office services include evaluation of children with speech-language concerns and therapy to address those difficulties. Evaluations include testing of speech, expressive and receptive language, expressive and receptive vocabulary, and an oral mechanism examination when necessary. All evaluations include a written report, feedback to the family, and a thorough set of recommendations. On-site school services consist of faculty or family inservices on a variety of topics, including when to refer for speech-language services, incorporating speech/language goals into the classroom, and ways to help the child who stutters. Specific inservice topics can be arranged to accommodate your staff. Preschool screeners are available on site. Each child would receive a parent/teacher letter the day that they are screened reporting if the child passed or failed and the recommendations. Case consultation is also available.

I am often asked why families choose to receive private evaluation and/or treatment for speech-language difficulties, instead of using the free services of their local public school district. While the answer is different for different families, I find that two general themes emerge. First, many families find lengthy waiting lists for evaluation. It can be very discouraging for some families to wait several months to learn about their child's problem. Secondly, some families come to private services disagreeing with the public school's findings, and desiring a second opinion. I am always glad to work with families to meet their individual needs and those of their children and school. Families should check with their insurance providers, as some providers cover all or a portion of these costs.

You can reach me by email at rgoldman@sbcglobal.net, or by phone at the WCPA office, (314) 275-8599. I look forward to meeting you and working with you in the future.

Rebecca S. M. Goldman, MA, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist

From the Director

I was recently given an article to read by one of our consultants, who had received it from a principal with whom she works. The article was written by Susan Reimer, a columnist for The Baltimore Sun, and the title was "My Mother Will Kill Me If..." The first line of the article was "Bring back fear!" The article went on to describe the author's wish to bring back children's respectful fear of their parents, teachers, and other adults. When I myself was growing up, I can remember thinking that my mother really would kill me if I did any number of things, and that knowledge made me STOP and THINK. Did I really want to risk her wrath? If you knew my mother you would know the answer was a resounding no. But in the last 15 or 20 years, it doesn't seem to be politically correct to say that we want our children to fear us. Yet in those instances when they are making the choice of good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, wouldn't it be comforting to know that our response to their behavior could be a deterrent? How many students today fear their teacher's consequences to their misbehavior? How many fear being called to the principal's office? Maybe what my mother had was a strong enough sense of herself that she didn't fear me or what I might do if she told me "No."

Ms. Reimer ends the article by saying "And at all other times of decision and conscience, I want them to worry about what God would think if He knew what they were doing. Because God will know, even if they fool me." We know that children need to learn to anticipate our reactions to their behaviors and to make choices that reflect that anticipation! How much safer and more secure would our children be if they knew they could anticipate us and perhaps fear us a little?

Mary Fitzgibbons, Ph.D., Director