

EMOTIONAL
CONNECTIONS WITH
CHILDREN WHO HAVE
SOCIAL COGNITIVE
DEFICITS AND OTHER
CHALLENGES

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Emotional Connections with Children who Have Social Cognitive Deficits and Other Challenges

- Social skills are used whenever we share the same space as others (virtual space, too)
- Typically developing people understand at very early ages how their behavior impacts others
- Typically developing people understand that others' thoughts and feelings affect the way they treat people
- Social cognitive or “social thinking” skills impact social relationships, including those of parent/child and grandparent/child

I LAUGH Model (Michelle Garcia Winner)

Type of Deficit	How it affects social interaction
I = Poor Initiation of communication or action	Doesn't initiate appropriate social interactions
L = Listening with eyes and brain	Does not observe others' social cues, does not process the meaning of others' messages, doesn't "think with their eyes"
A = Abstract and inferential	Does not infer meaning from social cues or decipher meaning from words
U = Understanding perspective	Difficulty recognizing and incorporating others' perspectives to regulate social relationships or share space effectively
G = Getting the big picture	Tangential, off topic
H = Humor and human relatedness	Miss subtleties of humor, may not understand if they are being laughed at or with, difficulty putting humor into context

And basically...

- Some kids don't understand how to be likable
- Some kids are hard to like

But this talk is not about that

- “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.” – Fred Rogers
- Loving a child with social cognitive deficits and/or other challenges can be a struggle.

Parent Concerns

- Telling my kid to stop talking on and on on a subject I care not at all for... Especially when from 3-5 1/2 I was so desperate to understand what he was trying to say.

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 1. Give yourself a break.
 - ▣ Your child can still be “a stinker.” You still get to be annoyed.
 - ▣ We don’t have to be grateful *all the time*.

Parent Concerns

- My daughter engages in play with others easily, but drops out suddenly and without explanation. I know that it has been very difficult for my parents to deal with this and that my dad, particularly, struggles with feeling rejected. I'd love to hear Dr. Barlow's thoughts on how I can help my dad to understand this situation better.

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 2. Reframe, reframe, reframe
 - Step back and figure out your child's strengths and weaknesses. Think about those qualities in a positive light.
- 3. Turn that into “she’s the kind of kid who...” and present it to others strategically
 - ▣ “There she goes again. That girl is so *in* to what she’s into...and then, just like that, something else captures her. Playing hard to get, but you gotta love her. I love trying to figure out what will capture her next.”

Parent Concerns

- My kiddo has an extremely narrow range of interests--even for a kid with ASD. He generally responds only to physical horseplay and sensory play--all his other interests are solo (iPad, movies, etc). Our older parents especially have difficulty engaging in this kind of play to connect with him. Most of their enjoyment of him is watching him play with us, which is not always possible since we're often attending to our other three kids. I'd love to find more ways that they can connect with him actively rather than just enjoy watching him with us. I'd love more ideas we could use in engaging with him ourselves, too. Time and energy levels do not always permit raucous tickle fights, swimming, and a mess of shaving cream.

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 4. You don't always have to be engaged, you can just be there.
- 5. For the sensory or active interests, suggest gifts to grandparents (i.e., a swing) that you suspect your child will love. Capture the joy in photos and videos. Grandparents can be reminded that they gave the gift, they provided that smile.
- 6. Use others. Let your big kids get physical and you sit back and watch.
- 7. Videos of physical activity – when you can't get physical yourself and your kid also likes to watch videos, put on physical comedy and laugh together.

Parent Concerns

- Both sets of grandparents really struggle with finding things to bond with my kids over. One set continually tries things her other grandchildren liked but when she doesn't get same response from my kids she is always surprised. We've learned from experience just not to have certain expectations for situations but the grandparents have not.

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 8. Provide a social story for *others* involved
 - ▣ Prepare other adults and children for what they can expect using your reframe and knowledge of your kid
 - ▣ Predicting what may happen helps you feel in control, others feel less responsible, and may prevent problems
 - “Mikey’s always a little uncomfortable when gifts are wrapped. He seems to feel nervous when he doesn’t know what to expect. It’s usually better to give him gifts unwrapped so he can focus on the gift and we can eliminate some stress for him.”

Parent Concerns

- Most of my family is very open and great with my boys. My father has probably struggled the most. He had 3 girls so I was really excited when I found out I was going to have a boy. Unfortunately we live 3 hours away but it was still great. Before the diagnosis, we were bad parents, according to him. I still remember when my 11 year old ASD son was 3, my Dad sat me down to lecture me on how my husband and I should be better parents and control our son. After he was diagnosed, it was better between us and the two of them, but I can tell my Dad is hurt that he can't bond with my boys the way he dreamed he would. Alex also struggles with play with his cousins and often only wants to play one game and gets very upset if the rest of them decide not to. This is a good reminder to talk to him about this because we are going to be having a party together this weekend.

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 9. Know when to ask for help and when to set up boundaries
 - ▣ Understand the well-intentioned others may give “advice” because they think it will help. Ask for help when you want it or think you need it and present the situation firmly and confidently when you don’t.
 - “We’re having trouble figuring out how to help Sarah cooperate more with her cousins. Any ideas?”
 - “Birthday parties are very stressful for Sarah. We’ve come

Top 10 actions a parent can do tomorrow

- 10. Assess (or have a professional assess) your child's functioning across domains of social functioning. Figure out where he/she is now and make a plan for how to address these deficits. How can the school be a part of the plan? Which professionals can help and how can they be a part of the plan?

Actions a parent can do today

- Give yourself a break
- Find others to connect with
- Acceptance and appreciation (of your child and yourself, but not every single second of every single day)
- Seek support

Additional Resources

- www.socialthinking.com
 - ▣ Michelle Garcia Winner's website is filled with resources, articles, explanations and tools for a wide range of social thinking topics and across the lifespan. Westlake Porter Public Library/CFK has many of the books available to borrow.
- Grandparent toolkits from “diagnosis specific” resources
 - ▣ Autism Speaks has toolkits for Grandparents, Parents, Siblings, and Friends at <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/toolkits/family-support-tool-kits>)
- Speech and Language therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists, behavior therapists

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Question and Answer

- Questions, Answers, and Discussion