Assessing Social Communication Skills in Students with ASD

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Learner objectives

● Review Section 1 of the Wisconsin DPI Autism Eligibility Checklist and expand considerations of which observable behaviors align with the criteria description.

● Identify formal and informal tools to assess social communication skills of 1) Emergent Communicators, 2) Basic Communicator, and 3) Atypical Communicators.

● Apply best practice suggestions by implementing a team approach that conducts a comprehensive evaluation and considers differential diagnosis.
What is social communication?

ASHA Definition: Social communication is the use of language in social contexts. It encompasses social interaction, social cognition, pragmatics, and language processing.

Additional Resources

ASHA's Components of Social Communication
ASHA's Social Communication Benchmarks

A team approach

Conduct a thorough review of existing data.
What information do you already have? What do you need to collect?
Who is the best team member to collect each set of data?
Divide and conquer.
What are we looking for in terms of eligibility?

The child displays difficulties or differences or both in interacting with people and events. The child may be unable to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with people. The child may seek consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting rigidity in routines.

The child displays problems which extend beyond speech and language to other aspects of social communication, both receptively, and expressively. The child’s language may be absent or, if present, lacks the usual communicative form which may involve deviance or delay or both. The child may have a speech or language disorder or both in addition to communication difficulties associated with autism.

Museum Walk

Objective 1b: “Expand consideration of which observable behaviors align with the criteria description.”

Turn and Talk: A/B Partners

Based on this information:
A. What am I doing well right now?
B. In what areas do I need to grow?
Gathering the information

Be a detective!

The type of communicator will guide your formal & informal measurement selection

Dodd, 2010; Dodd & Frankie, in prep

Emergent Communicator (EC)
Basic Communicator (BC)
Atypical Communicator (AT/AT2)

Emergent Communicator (EC)
Communicates primarily through gestures and behaviors
Uses primarily non-symbolic forms of communication
Communicates primarily for the purposes of fulfilling basic wants/needs
Uses non-intentional communication with the emergence of intentional forms of communication
Basic Communicator (BC)

Uses symbolic forms of communication including pictures, symbols, single words, and simple sentence patterns

Communication is primarily intentional and directed towards a variety of communicative partners

Uses language for an increasing number of communication functions such as shared attention

Significant difficulty with receptive language

Atypical Communicator (AT/AT2)

Uses words and novel sentence patterns

Uses over-learned phrases and pedantic language

Uses syntax and morphology that is consistent if not advanced in comparison to age-matched peers

Relating of past events is often fragmented and disorganized

May fail to provide sufficient background information to insure their listener's understanding

Conversational topics may be restricted to personal interests

May lack, misuse or fail to recognize social conventions such as eye contact, body language, and personal space

Formal Tools
### Standardized Assessment Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Name</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Type of Communicator</th>
<th>Target Areas</th>
<th>Checklist Alignment</th>
<th>Level of Preparation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales (CSBS)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Emotional Evaluation (SEE)</strong></td>
<td>6.0 - 12.11</td>
<td>Basic Communicator (BC)</td>
<td>Expressions, Emotions, Reactions, Social Gaffes, Sarcasm &amp; lies</td>
<td>Perspective of others, Emotional states, Social situations</td>
<td>Minimal: CD administration for # subtests</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Language Development Test (SLDT)</strong></td>
<td>6.0 - 11.11, 12.0 - 17.11</td>
<td>Atypical Communicator (AT/AT2)</td>
<td>Inference, Perspective Interpretation, Negotiation, Friendship, Introducing Perspective Conversation</td>
<td>Moderate: Scoring conventions</td>
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</table>

- **Communication & Symbolic Behavior Scales (CSBS)**
- **Infant-Toddler Checklist: 6-24 months**
  - Emotion, Eye Gaze, Communication, Gestures, Sounds, Words, Understanding, Object Use
- **Developmental Profile: 6 months - 2 years**
  - Delays in social communication, language, symbolic functioning.

- **Social Emotional Evaluation (SEE)**
  - Recalling Facial Expressions
  - Identifying Common Emotions
  - Recognizing Emotional Reactions
  - Understanding Social Gaffes
  - Understanding Conflicting* Messages (humor, sarcasm, and lies)*

Separate norms provided to compare against students identified with ASD.
Social Language Development Test (SLDT)

Elementary Version:
- Making Inferences
- Interpersonal Negotiation
- Multiple Interpretations
- Supporting Peers

Adolescent Version:
- Making Inferences
- Interpreting Social Language
- Problem Solving
- Social Interaction
- Interpreting ironic Statements

Informal Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Name</th>
<th>Author / Institution</th>
<th>Type of Communicator</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Target Areas</th>
<th>Level of Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Communication Matrix</td>
<td>Charity Rowland, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Emergent Communicator (EC)</td>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>Reading comprehension for individuals who use some form of language meaningfully and fluently</td>
<td>Minimal: online questionnaire; developed for parents, educators, SLPs; customized reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Social and Communication Skills for Individuals with Autism, Revised (ASCAS-R)</td>
<td>Kathleen Fair-Gall, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Basic Communicator (BC)</td>
<td>Young Children</td>
<td>Play Group Skills; Nonverbal social interaction skills; Functional communication</td>
<td>Moderate: interview, observation, or direct sampling; comprehensive assessment; strong observation and documentation skills required; summary of findings needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Thinking Assessment Protocol®</td>
<td>Michelle Garcia Winner, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Atypical Communicator (AT/AT2)</td>
<td>Over 8 years old</td>
<td>Nonverbal communication; Adaptation; Perspective-taking; Social thinking; Eye gaze; Nonverbal thinking</td>
<td>Maximum: material preparation; strong observation and documentation skills required; summary of findings needed</td>
</tr>
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Data-driven observations

Provides documentation of impact in real-life social situations

May be conducted in natural environments (classrooms, home, playground) or structured settings (therapy, social skill groups)

Observers should use systematic recording methods to ensure reliable and accurate data, collect baseline data, and allow for accurate progress monitoring

Data should document if supports and prompting were provided

Data-driven observations

Naturalistic Observations:

- "Real world" setting
- Records behavior across settings and people
- Allows observer to record information on environmental stimuli
- Allows observer to record information of social behaviors of other children
- Creates a "norm group"
- Time consuming
- Child may not exhibit behaviors during the observation

Structured Observations:

- Less time consuming
- Allows observer to record larger quantities of information related to target behavior
- Skills observed may not be generalized to natural settings
- Does not allow observations on environmental stimuli
- Does not allow observations of social behaviors of other children

Data-driven observations: Types

Frequency: how often a behavior occurs during a specific time period

Duration: recording the length of time a behavior occurs from beginning to end

Time Sampling: how often a behavior occurs at specific points in time

Latency: amount of time elapsed between a stimulus and response

Response ratio: total of number of responses by number of opportunities to respond
Data-driven observations: Examples

Social participation
Social initiations
Social responses
Conversational turns
Conversation length
Response time
Sustained attention during play

Best Practice Suggestions

Differential Diagnosis: An evaluation focused on only one eligibility area leads to predetermination and eliminates the opportunity to consider other similar disability areas. Instead, provide a comprehensive evaluation that considers a variety of eligibility areas (e.g., autism, EBD, OHI).

Team Member Selection: Consider which colleague has the skills needed, rather than making decisions based on one’s job title.

Interdisciplinary Report Writing: Each area assessed is listed and various evaluators contribute their observations and findings that relate to that area of the criteria.

Turn and Talk: A/B Partners
A. What is one thing I learned and what will I do with it?
B. How will I apply this information to my assessments?
Programming and Goal Development

Application
Activity: Putting It All Together

Use example summary of findings to create a draft goal

Turn and Talk:
Who's skill sets are needed to meet this goal?

Identify the people in your building/district that have these skills.

Silent Reflection:

Questions?
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