



Hearing Accepting Valuing Every Neurotype

Creating supportive social groups for neurodivergent young people in schools

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Overview

- Background to the project
- **Phase 1:** Interviews with young people ➡ development of the HAVEN training package
- **Phase 2:** Delivering the HAVEN training to school staff
- **Phase 3:** Assessing the impact of the HAVEN training package

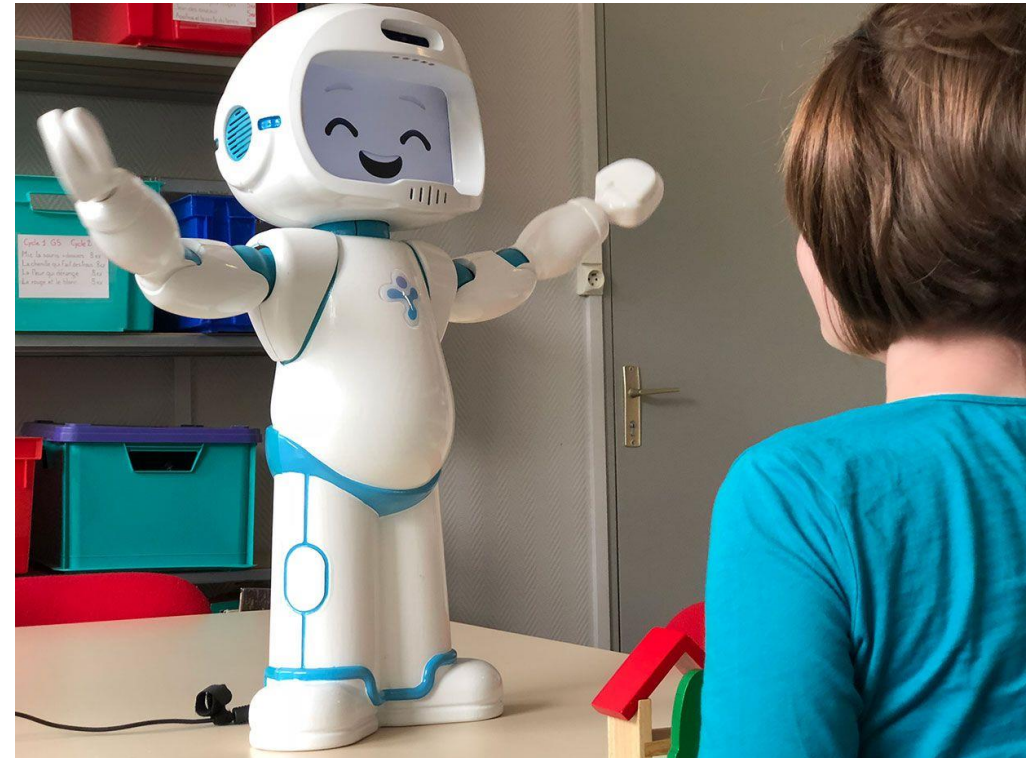


Background: Ye Olde Social Skills Interventions



- Making eye contact
- Taking turns in conversation
- Talking about other people's interests
- Expressing empathy
- Asking questions
- Giving compliments

Ye Olde Social Skills Interventions



Research

Remedial and Special Education
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Literature Reviews

The Effects of Social Skill Interventions for Adolescents With Autism: A Meta-Analysis

Salena Babb, PhD, Tracy J. Raulston, PhD, David McNaughton, PhD, Joo-Young Lee, MEd, and Rachel Weintraub, BS

Abstract

Communicating with peers often poses challenges for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); these social interactions, however, can be especially difficult during the teenage years. For many adolescents with ASD, peer interaction is often limited or nonexistent, even for those taught in general education settings. The purpose of this meta-analysis was to investigate social interaction interventions for adolescents with ASD within public school settings, with a focus on studies that utilized single-case design. Studies were evaluated per the What Works Clearinghouse guidelines. This meta-analysis includes 24 studies with participants with ASD ranging in ages from 13 to 21 years. The effects of social skill interventions were evaluated using visual analysis, Tau-*U*, and a parametric effect size (*d*-Hedges-Pustejovsky-Shadish [DHPS]). Combined effect sizes were calculated and compared. Results provide evidence that interventions can produce positive change in social behavior of adolescents with ASD. Effect sizes were generally large. Interpretations and implications are discussed.

Autism



Impact Factor: 5.2 / 5-Year Impact Factor: 6.2

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Restricted access | Review article | First published online July 7, 2021

A systematic review of school-based social skills interventions and observed social outcomes for students with autism spectrum disorder in inclusive settings

Michelle Dean and Ya-Chih Chang [View all authors and affiliations](#)

Volume 25, Issue 7 | <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211012886>

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Abstract

This review examined school-based social skills interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder who were educated in inclusive school settings. Secondary aims sought to explore observation protocols and the resulting social outcomes used to measure the social behaviors of students with autism spectrum disorder within authentic social environments at school. To meet the inclusion criteria, 18 studies (a) tested school-based social skills interventions for students with autism spectrum disorder who were educated in inclusive settings; (b) included typically developing peers to some degree within the intervention condition; (c) used naturalistic observation protocols; and (d) scored "strong" or "adequate" for group design, or "high quality" or "acceptable" for single-case design on methodological rating scales. Interventions were largely rooted in evidence-based practices, but were varied in terms of type, dose, and duration, and the extent to which typically developing peers and school personnel were trained to participate in the intervention. Observable social outcomes were similar across studies, and salient outcomes were able to measure post-intervention change across a wide age range. The identification of the active ingredients used in school-based social skills interventions as well as the salient social outcomes provides a roadmap for school



Related content

Similar articles:

Restricted access

Emerging problems



- Variable results
- Schools were inconsistent in their implementation
- Outcomes: Initiations; Responses; Other-focussed conversation; Moving from one topic to another
- NOT social isolation / social connectedness / genuine friendships
- Skills did not generalize
- Young people could be resistant
- Peers lost interest & did not perform consistently

The turning of the tide



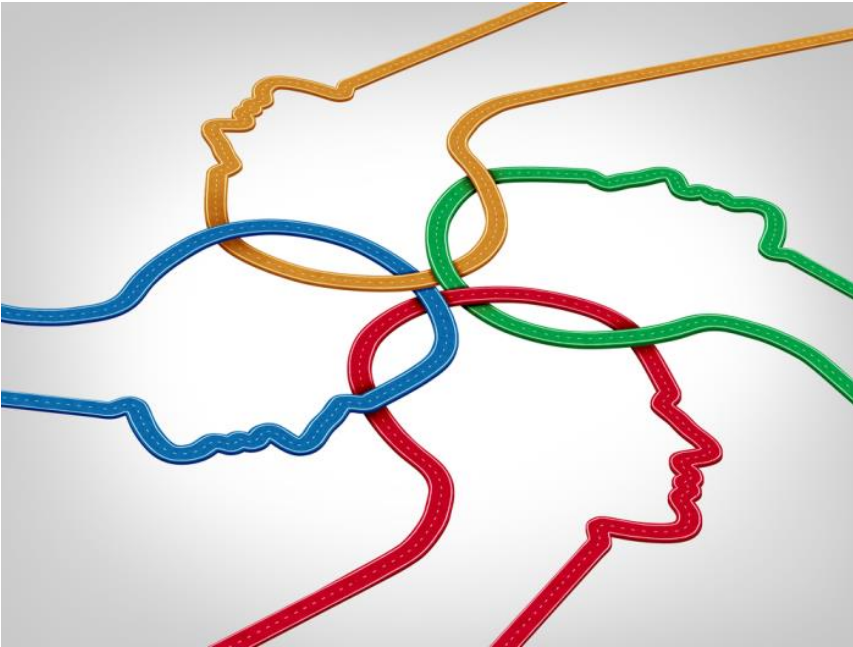
- The Neurodiversity Movement
- Autistic people's advocacy
- The Double Empathy Problem
- Diversity in social intelligence

When we know better, we do better

- Moving away from medical deficit-focussed model
- Acceptance and environmental goodness of fit
- Environment in which young people feel comfortable, understood and supported
- Peers that they can relate to or have shared interests with
- Natural interaction
- → felt less isolated / better connected / have genuine friendships



Aim of HAVEN



- To develop staff and students' understanding of neurodiversity.
- To provide support for neurodivergent young people in mainstream schools to have opportunities for positive social experiences and natural relationships.
- To develop a training package for teaching staff to help schools to create a supportive group environment.

Gathering data

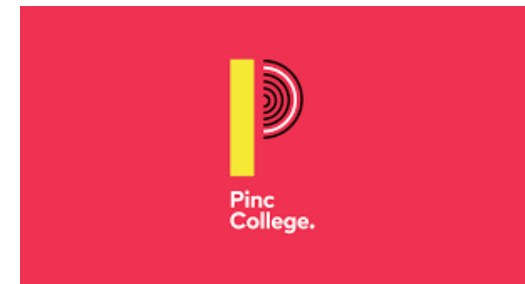
15 neurodivergent young
people (10 females, 5 males)

Age 16-24

High school experiences and
opinions on the training

A range of recruitment channels:

- Project inc
- I Am Autism
- Autism@Manchester
- Space4Autism



Experiences-
Theme 1:

Preference for
quieter
environments
and smaller
groups (40%)

“yeah it was really busy, and
really loud”

“I also find it a lot easier to
talk to people when I am not
with a group of people but
preferably 1 or 2 people”

Experiences Theme 2:

Different preferences for support with friendships (40%)

One participant said that “Laid back environments where everyone is neurodivergent” would encourage better communication

“Some of the things that they were into was like, a bit odd to me”

Not all ND individuals want support with friendships, so it’s important not to force it

33% of
participants
reported...

Joined clubs out of interest for
the topic

Communication barriers e.g.
difficulty understanding subtle
messages, misinterpreting others

Sense of togetherness in clubs –
feeling accepted



Feedback on the Training plan

Good to hear from autistic people in the training for real life accounts (40%)

“I think having neurodiverse people involved in writing, presenting and any other part of the training process possible would be really good”

George- Importance of not forcing friendships



How the interviews informed the training package

- Positive feedback about our ideas.
- Focus on neurodiversity and valuing differences in interactions relationships and communication.
- Additional emphasis on sensory environment and the size of the groups.
- Importance of the role of the facilitator.
- Video excerpts from interviews embedded into the training.





What do the groups look like?

“A safe, positive and supportive group environment for neurodivergent students”

Small groups
(max 6
students)

Facilitated by
SLT/Teacher/TA

Interest-based
(activities chosen by young
people)

Safe-space to
be themselves

Celebrating
and valuing
Neurodiversity

Regular times –
timetabled

Regular and
loose structure

Where are we now?



55+ staff have attended 1 day training from approx. 20 secondary schools in Manchester



Recent pilot in primary schools



Preliminary feedback from staff, students and parents

Staff feedback from the training sessions

Hearing the lived experiences of autistic individuals helped to understand the students' differences

Learning about alternate ways of communication/ adapting language, redefining and rephrasing words.

Learned that the structure can be flexible, and how to step in and out as a facilitator

consider how to embed the training into the school day

This is very exciting, I feel I'm part of a wider change in how autistic people are treated/ understood in schools

•Recognise students can "mask" anxieties

I'll include more sensory aspects

"Finally give the pupils the opportunities to build the relationships they crave"

Student Experiences

- Many asking for more sessions.
- Observations of increasing confidence, engagement and interactions within the group.
- Increased motivation to go to school.
- Some unmasking.
- Teachers have observed relationships and confidence generalising to other environments (e.g. break time).

To Miss P

We are informing you because we would ~~like~~ like you to keep the Happiness Group going. We all enjoy it, and it makes us happy and feel safe. We learn a lot of ways of understanding emotions and how to help other people feel protected and joyful again, as they should be.

Without this group, we ~~su~~ would feel sad and we'd stay in the blue zone. But, if you can let it carry on, we will stay in the green zone 😊. We will miss the group if we can't do it; we will ~~be~~ be frustrated too, and that's why we sent you this letter.

We would be delighted if you can keep the group.

Kind regards,

The members of the Happiness Group.

Masters project

Collecting data from HAVEN facilitators post-running groups

Interviews with 6x facilitators: teachers, TAs, Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists

Online conferencing

Audio recorded

Transcribed

Analysed using thematic analysis

We need some more data before we publish – but preliminary findings are overwhelmingly positive

Qualitative findings from facilitator interviews

MAIN THEME 1: Endorsement of the HAVEN group

Endorsement of HAVEN project by educational staff

Endorsement of Training & Resources offered by HAVEN

Endorsement of HAVEN Programme by Students

"I'm really in agreement with the principles behind it, about bringing young people together based on their interests."

"[the training] included older children sharing their experiences and insights into life as autistic individuals. This perspective is valuable not only for the staff working with older students but also for the primary school staff."

Qualitative findings from facilitator interviews

MAIN THEME 2: Effects of the HAVEN programme

Positive effects of HAVEN training and resources

Positive effect of HAVEN on staff

Positive effects of HAVEN on students

Adjacent benefits of the HAVEN programme

Unexpected side-effects of HAVEN

Shouldn't be forcing people into conversation, training helps with this thinking."

Thank you, Miss, it was the best day of my life,"

"We ... students that don't talk or ... talk very little. Slowly, slowly. The girls slowly started talking overtime."

Qualitative findings from facilitator interviews

MAIN THEME 3: Practicalities of running HAVEN group

Staffing considerations

Grouping children

Getting the environment and resources right

Parental involvement

Activity planning

“One of them said it was embarrassing to come and have juice and biscuits... it's absolutely fine”

“Sitting down activities... low demand activities helped conversation to flow”

“students are ... comfortable with a fixed schedule; however, there were challenges in activity planning and scheduling, like baking, due access issues.”

Qualitative findings from facilitator interviews

Main THEME 4: Educational Staff recommendations for developing HAVEN

HAVEN skills evolves through running groups

Measuring outcomes needs adjustment

Adaptations for future groups

"Establishing a routine with the children is absolutely crucial. It serves as the cornerstone for fostering a safe and productive environment in which they can thrive."

"The questionnaire had words like 'glad' ... to describe being autistic. It's just part of the way they are and couldn't say whether they were glad or not to be neurodiverse, so they didn't like that"

"It is called Hearing and Valuing Every Neuro-type, so next year we ... will include activities that are generally enjoyed by both neurodiverse and neuro-typical individuals."



Questions / Discussion

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