



BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

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Behavior Treatment and Training Center (BTTC)

- Children ages 8-17 with IDD & challenging behavior
- Short-term, residential setting in Richmond, TX
- ABA
- Serve approximately 40 children per year
- Serves the entire state of Texas
- Mission: Helping children and their families improve their lives together.



Learning Objectives

- Define ABA, social skills, and explain how appropriate social behavior is important for success in life
- Observe and assess an individual's current level of social behavior, and choose where to begin intervention
- Review methods for teaching social skills
- Create and implement a program to teach and increase appropriate social behavior
- Identify materials or services that may be helpful to increase or teach social skills

ABA and Social Skills



Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

- ABA: the scientific study of behavior, developed by B. F. Skinner in the 1930s
- Application of systematic environmental modifications to produce socially significant changes in behavior
- Procedures based on and supported by scientific research
- Focus is on objectively defined and observable behavior
- Least restrictive, most humane and effective treatment
- Each program is individualized, and changes based on the individual's success

Board Certification in ABA

www.bacb.com

BCBA

- ▶ Master's degree
- ▶ 225 classroom hours in ABA, plus
- ▶ 1500 hours Supervised Independent Fieldwork, or
- ▶ 1000 hours graduate level university practicum program, or
- ▶ 750 intensive practicum hours

BCaBA

- ▶ Bachelor's degree
- ▶ 135 classroom hours in ABA, plus
- ▶ 1000 hours Supervised Independent Fieldwork, or
- ▶ 670 graduate level university practicum, or
- ▶ 500 graduate level university intensive practicum hours

Characteristics of ABA

- Applied: socially significant
- Behavioral: observable & measurable
- Analytic: a functional relationship between the manipulated events and behavior is established
- Technological: procedures identified and clearly described



ABA Myths

- ❑ ABA is rigid and mechanical, and turns people into robots
- ❑ ABA is only for young children
- ❑ ABA is only used to treat autism or challenging behavior
- ❑ ABA is easy to learn



Social Skills

- Social behavior: A variety of behaviors that involve interactions between two or more people
- Deficits are commonly seen in individuals with IDD
- Why is it important to build social skills?
 - Necessary for making and keeping friends
 - Can help avoid social isolation
 - Important for success in:
 - School
 - Community activities
 - On the job

Keep In Mind

- Social Skills...
 - Must be taught to everyone, not just those with IDD
 - Are as important as academic skills for success in life
 - Must be taught continuously throughout the day, as the opportunity occurs
 - Are not easily generalized

Assessing Social Skills



Levels of Social Skills

- **Beginning Skills** (Lerman, Volkert, & LeBlanc, 2007)
 - Greetings
 - Making eye contact
 - Sharing
 - Requesting preferred items/information
 - Reciprocating comments about objects

Levels of Social Skills

- **Intermediate** (Lerman, Volkert, & LeBlanc, 2007)
 - Initiating interactions
 - Requesting attention or acknowledgement of others
 - Answering social questions
 - Inviting others to do an activity
 - Following eye gaze & point of another to a specific object
 - Commenting to others about leisure activities

Levels of Social Skills

- **Advanced Skills** (Lerman, Volkert, & LeBlanc, 2007)
 - Asking questions during reciprocal interaction
 - Engaging in conversation
 - Resolving conflict
 - Problem-solving
 - Responding correctly to questions about the perspective of others
 - Demonstrating good sportsmanship skills

How Do You Select Skills To Teach?

- A variety of assessment tools are available for professionals
 - Assessment of Basic Language and Learning - Revised (ABLLS-R) (Partington, 2006)
 - Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and and Placement Program (VB-MAPP) (Sundberg, 2008)
 - Childhood Autism Rating Scale, Autism Diagnostic observation schedule
 - Vineland
- Easy-to-use assessments (in your packets)
 - Social Skills Menu (Baker, 2003)
 - Modified Skills Assessment (Lerman, 2010)

Ways to Teach Social Skills



Ways to Teach Social Skills

1. Prompting and reinforcement (Coe, Matson, Fee, Manikam, & Linarello, 1990)

- Prompts: Cues or assistance to help the learner (visual, verbal, pointing, modeling, physical touch)
- Reinforcement: Something in the environment that occurs after the skill that increases the occurrence of that behavior in the future
- Verbal instructions are a type of prompt
 - Includes explaining to the individual how to perform the skill
 - May be recommended for individuals with more verbal skills

Ways to Teach Social Skills

2. Social Scripts (Charlop-Christy & Kelso, 2003)

- ▣ Written words that tell the learner what to say or do

3. Video Modeling (Nikopoulos & Keenan, 2004)

- ▣ Actors (instructors or age-matched peers) model the skill on video

Teaching Strategies

Example of Using Prompts and Reinforcement

Types of Prompts

From most to least intrusive:

- Physical: touch or physical assistance
- Model: partial or full demonstration of correct response
- Gestural: any physical movement, such as pointing, motioning, nodding
- Verbal: hints, clarifications, reminders



Types of Rewards (Reinforcers)

- Praise/Social interaction (high-5, tickles, hugs, joking, hand-shakes)
- Preferred food or drink (can be healthy)
- Preferred leisure materials/toys
- Preferred activities (watching TV, video games, privileges, sporting events, manicure)



Greeting and Farewell

- “Hi” and “Bye”
 - Teaching:
 - Verbal Greetings: Model prompts
 - Non-Verbal Greetings: “Most-to-Least Prompting”
 - Teach in different settings, with different people, and with different greetings
 - Can set up the environment or use naturalistic opportunities to teach greetings

Using Prompts for Verbal Greetings

□ Prompt Delay:

- Initially, provide an immediate prompt (model) when the learner should respond (someone says “hi”)
- Gradually delay the prompt (model) over time
- If the learner responds incorrectly, immediately deliver the prompt
- Give the learner a reward for responding correctly, even if you had to prompt

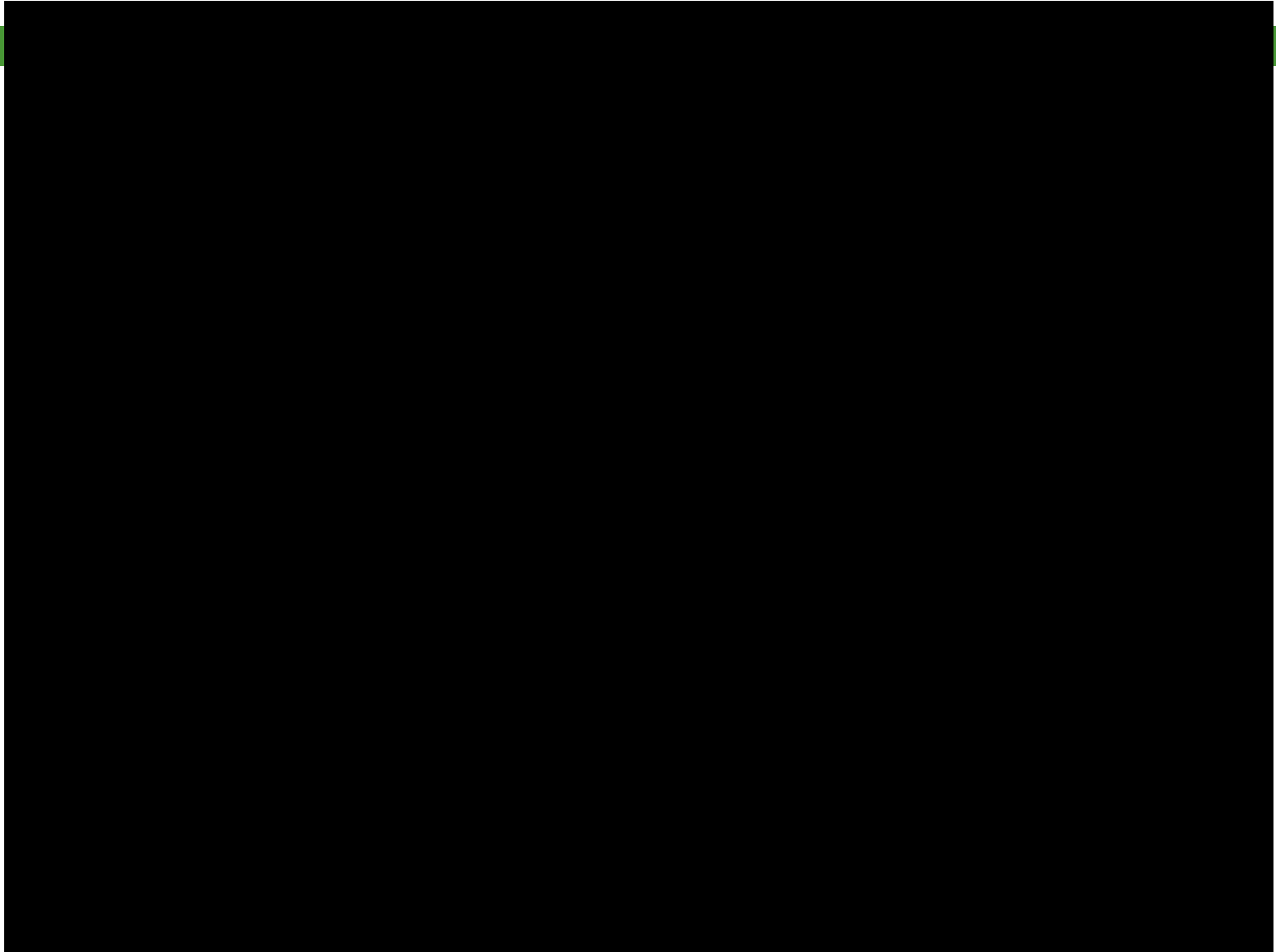
Using Prompt Delay

- How to fade:
 - One correct response (prompted OR unprompted) at a given delay interval → increase delay by two seconds
 - The delay should not be increased if the prompted response does not occur.

Prompt Delay: Reciprocated Greetings

- Teacher: “Hi” → Immediately Prompt “Hi” →
Learner: “Hi” → Reward
- Teacher: “Hi” → Wait 2 sec then Prompt “Hi”
Learner: “Hi” → Reward
- Teacher “Hi” → Wait 4 sec then Prompt “Hi” →
Learner: “Hi” → Reward
- Remember: Big reward if the learner says “Hi”
before prompt is given

Video of Prompt Delay



Prompt Delay: Initiated Greetings

- Teach similarly to reciprocated greetings:
 - When learner approaches recipient:
Teacher immediately prompts (models) “Hi”
Learner: “Hi” → Reward
 - When learner approaches recipient:
Teacher waits 2 sec and then prompts “Hi”
Learner: “Hi” → Reward
 - When learner approaches recipient:
Teacher waits 4 sec then prompts “Hi”
Learner: “Hi” → Reward

Using Prompts for Non-Verbal Greetings (Wave)

- Most-to-Least (MTL) Prompting:
 - Initially, give the most amount of assistance needed (example: full physical assistance)

 - Gradually reduce assistance over time
 - Full Physical → Partial physical → gesture → independent

 - If your learner responds incorrectly, immediately give more assistance

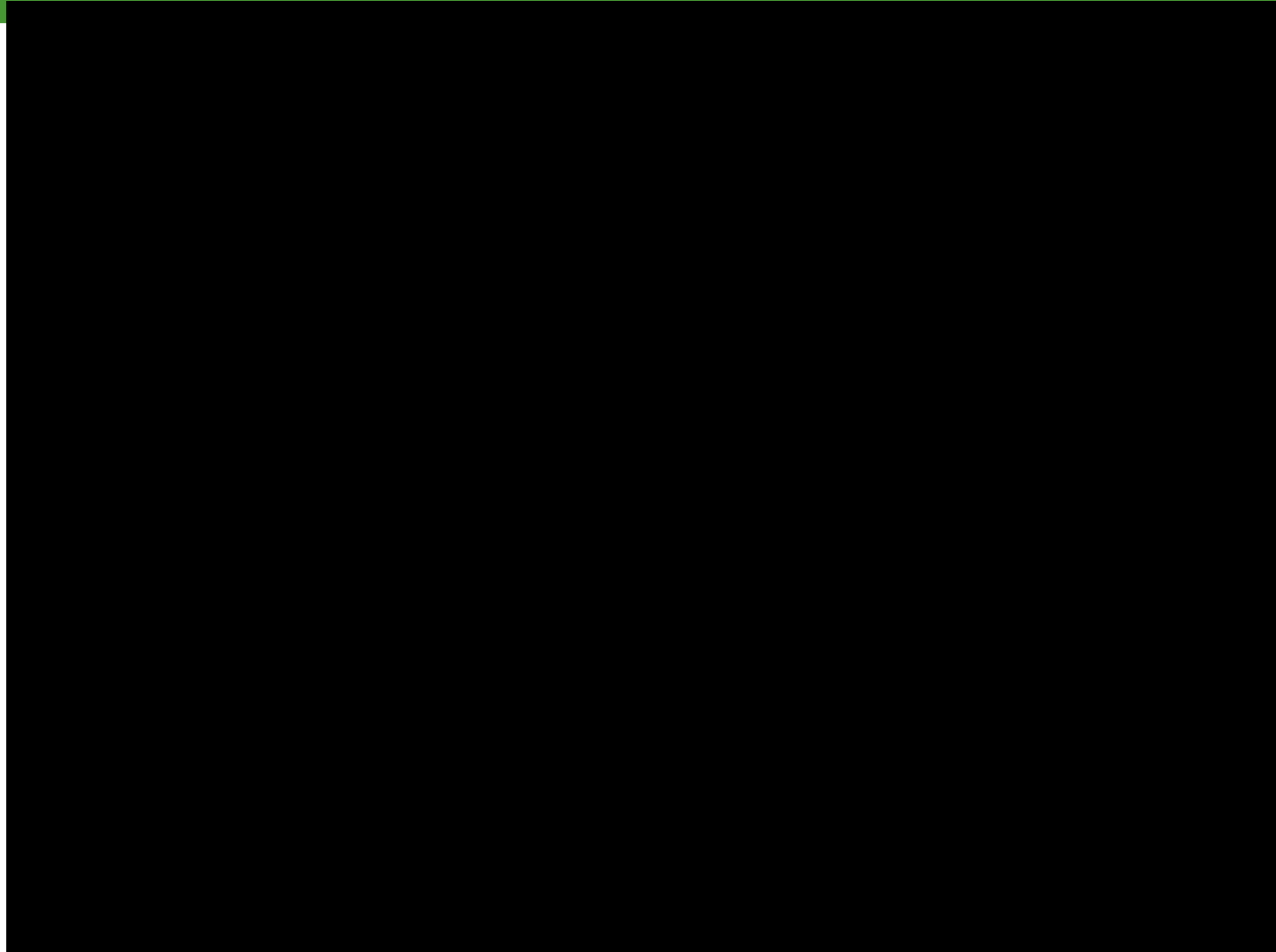
MTL: Reciprocated Greetings

- Teacher: “Hi” → Full Physical Prompt to Wave
Learner: Waves → Reward
- Teacher: “Hi” → Partial Physical Prompt to Wave
Learner: Waves → Reward
- Teacher: “Hi” → Model Prompt to Wave
Learner: Waves → Reward
- Teacher: “Hi” → Gesture Towards Learner’s Hand
Learner: Waves → Reward
- Teacher “Hi”
Learner: Waves → Reward

Using Prompts for Non-Verbal Greetings

- How to fade:
 - If a correct response occurs → give less assistance next time
 - If an incorrect response occurs → give more assistance next time

Video: Prompt for Nonverbal Greetings



Sharing

- Difficult to teach for any child
- Get everything ready
 - Need adult or peer to ask for item
 - Use a mildly-preferred item
- Adult or peer requests item from learner
 - Most-to-Least Prompting
 - Deliver reward if child shares item
- If successful, gradually introduce more preferred items

MTL Prompting: Teaching Sharing

- Adult/Peer: “Can I see that?”

Teacher: Full physical prompt

Learner: Gives item → Reward

- Adult/Peer: “Can I see that?”

Teacher: Partial physical prompt

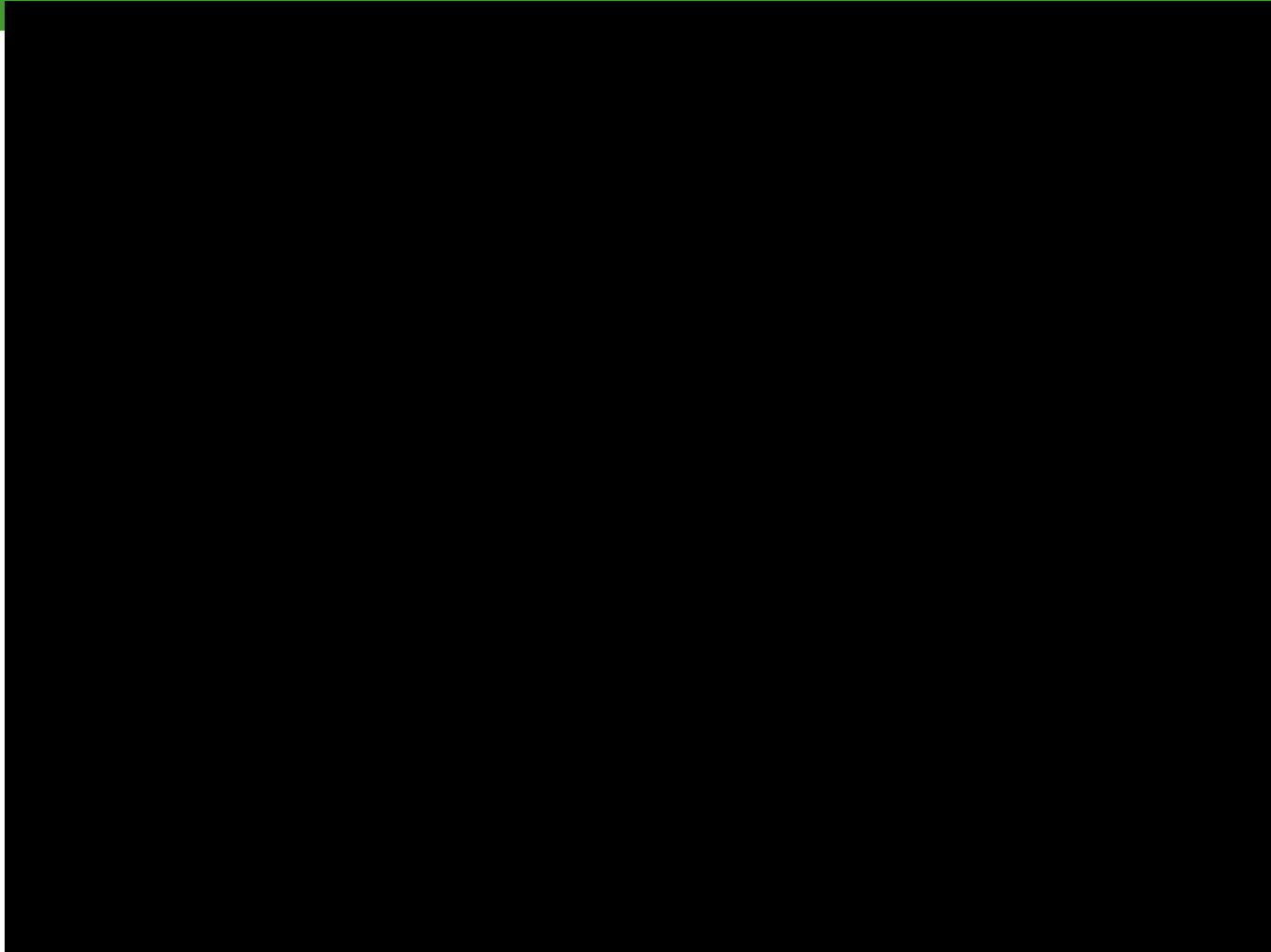
Learner: Gives item → Reward

- Adult/Peer: “Can I see that?”

Teacher: Gesture prompt

Learner: Gives item → Reward

Video: Teaching Sharing



Teaching Strategies

Social Scripts and Video Modeling



Social Scripts

- Written words that show what to say

- Teacher: “How are you?”

- Show note card: 

- Teacher: “I’m good!” (while giving reward)

- Fade out over time

Ways to Use Scripts

- Hold up scripts during conversation
- Practice entire script for an interaction

Using Scripts During Conversation

- Create note cards with conversational phrases
 - Ex: “I’m fine. How are you?”
- Teach learner to read cards
- Hold up cards during conversation
- Prompt learner to read the card during conversation
- Gradually fade script over time

Using Scripts During Conversation

- Example:
 - Teacher: “How are you?” → Immediately shows script
Learner: “I’m fine. How are you?” → Teacher answers and praises
 - Teacher: “How are you?” → waits 2 sec and shows script
Learner: “I’m fine. How are you?” → Teacher answers and praises
 - Teacher: “How are you?” → waits 4 sec and shows script
Learner: “I’m fine. How are you?” → Teacher answers and praises
- Always provide script following incorrect responses
- Give extra praise for unscripted responses
- Can increase number of interactions

Video of Script Cards



Practice Entire Social Script

- Create a situation
 - Choose a topic to discuss
 - Create specific statements and questions
 - Review completed script
 - Practice in natural environment

Example 1: Entire Social Script

□ Movies

□ **Teacher:** “What’s your favorite movie?”

□ **Learner:** “I like X-Men Movies. What about you?”

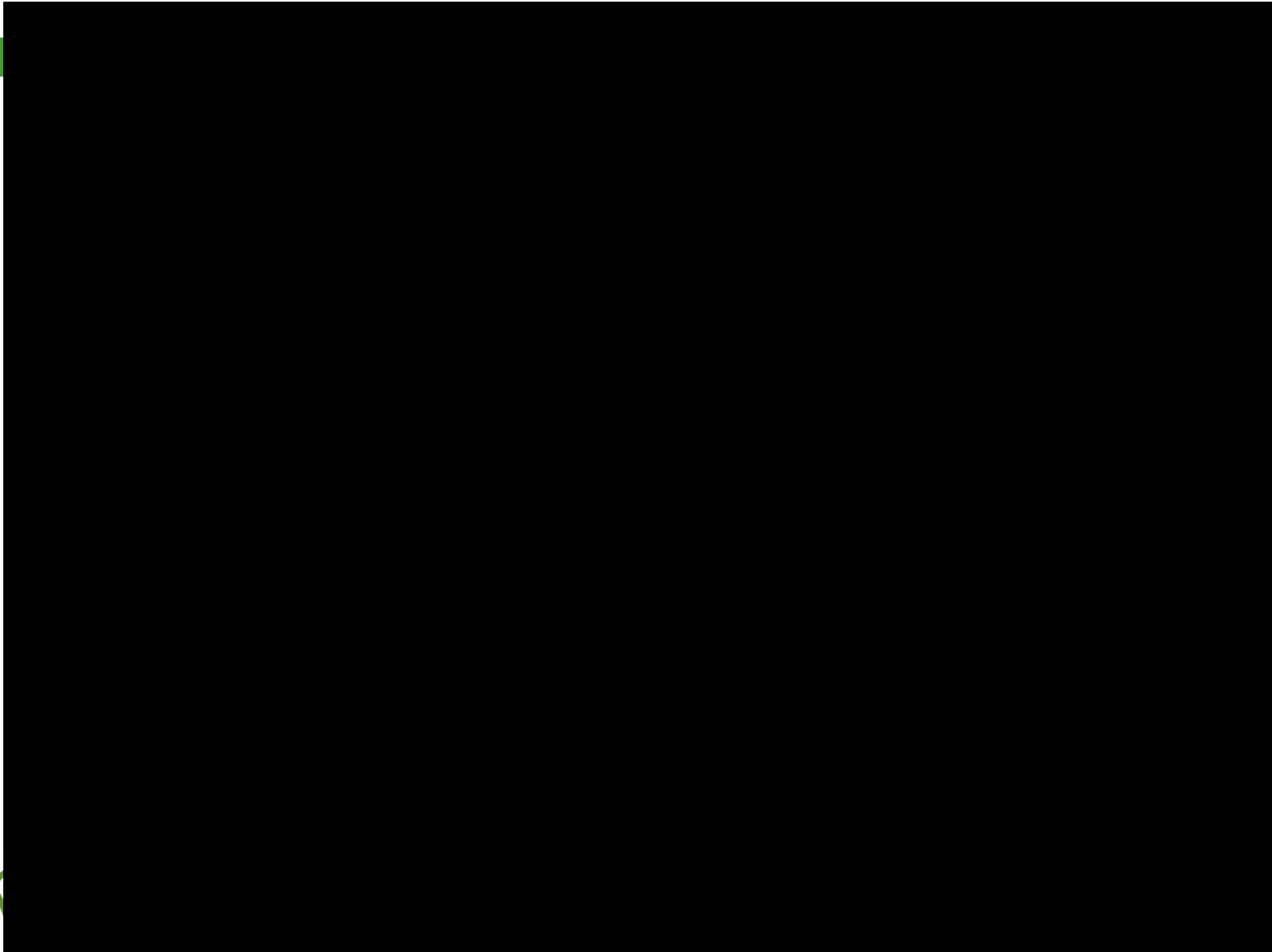
□ **Teacher:** “I like X-Men movies too. I like Wolverine. Do you like him?”

□ **Learner:** “Yeah, he is awesome.”

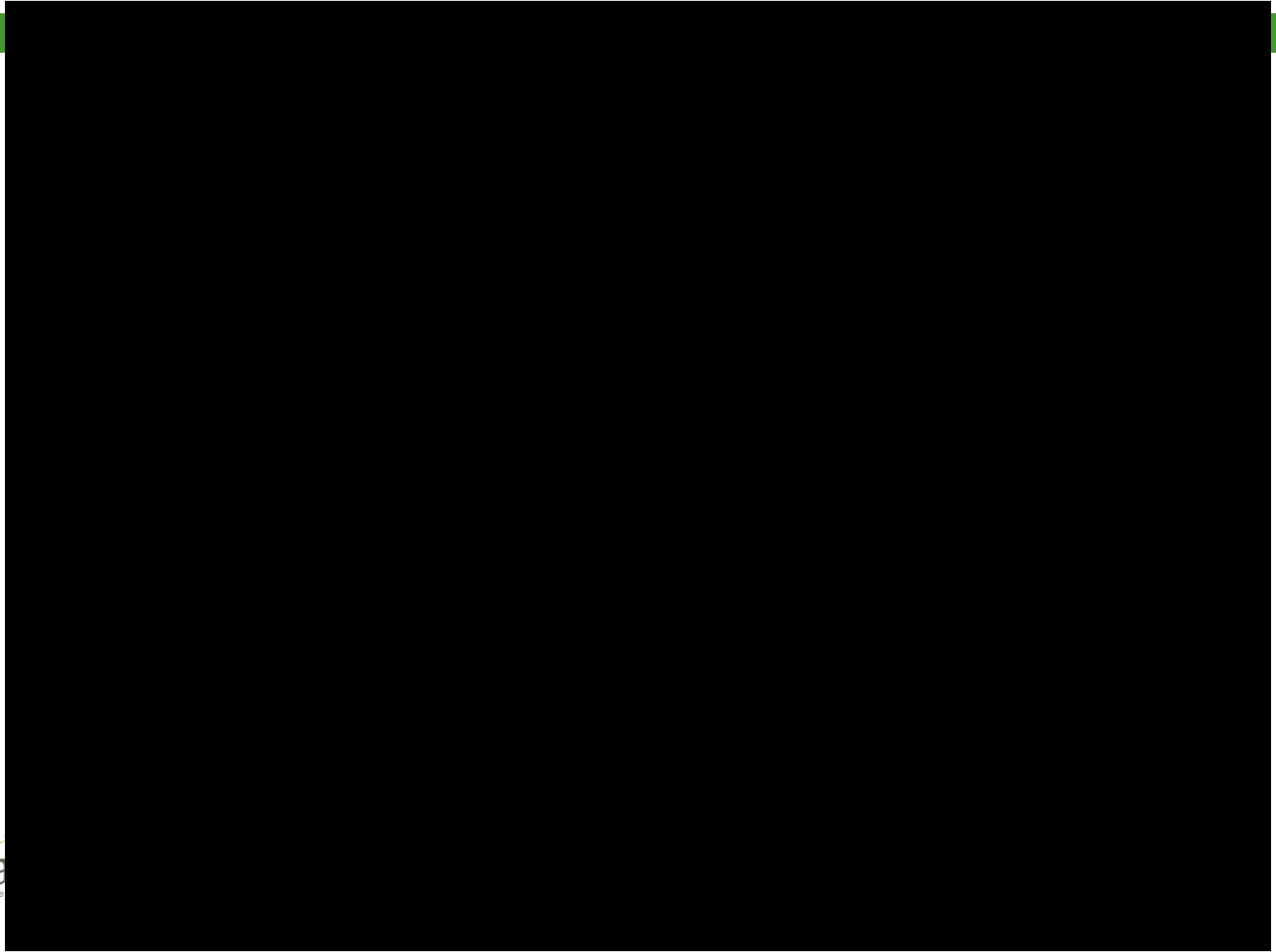
Example 2: Entire Social Script

- Topic: Bowling
 - **Teacher:** I like bowling. My favorite part is the shoes. What's your favorite part?
 - **Learner:** My favorite part is rolling the ball down the lane. Do you like the sound it makes?
 - **Teacher:** Yes, its so loud! Have you ever gotten a strike?
 - **Learner:** Yes, the other day! I got a 95! What's the highest score you've gotten?
 - **Teacher:** Wow, I only get a 70! You must be a really good bowler!
 - **Learner:** Yeah I am!

Video of An Entire Social Script



Video of Entire Social Script



Video Modeling

- Videos showing what the learner should do
 - Can be adults or peers
- Can be more effective than real-life modeling
 - Focuses on the important aspects of the interaction
 - Fun to watch videos
- Some video modeling protocols can be purchased or found online (YouTube.com is a great resource!)

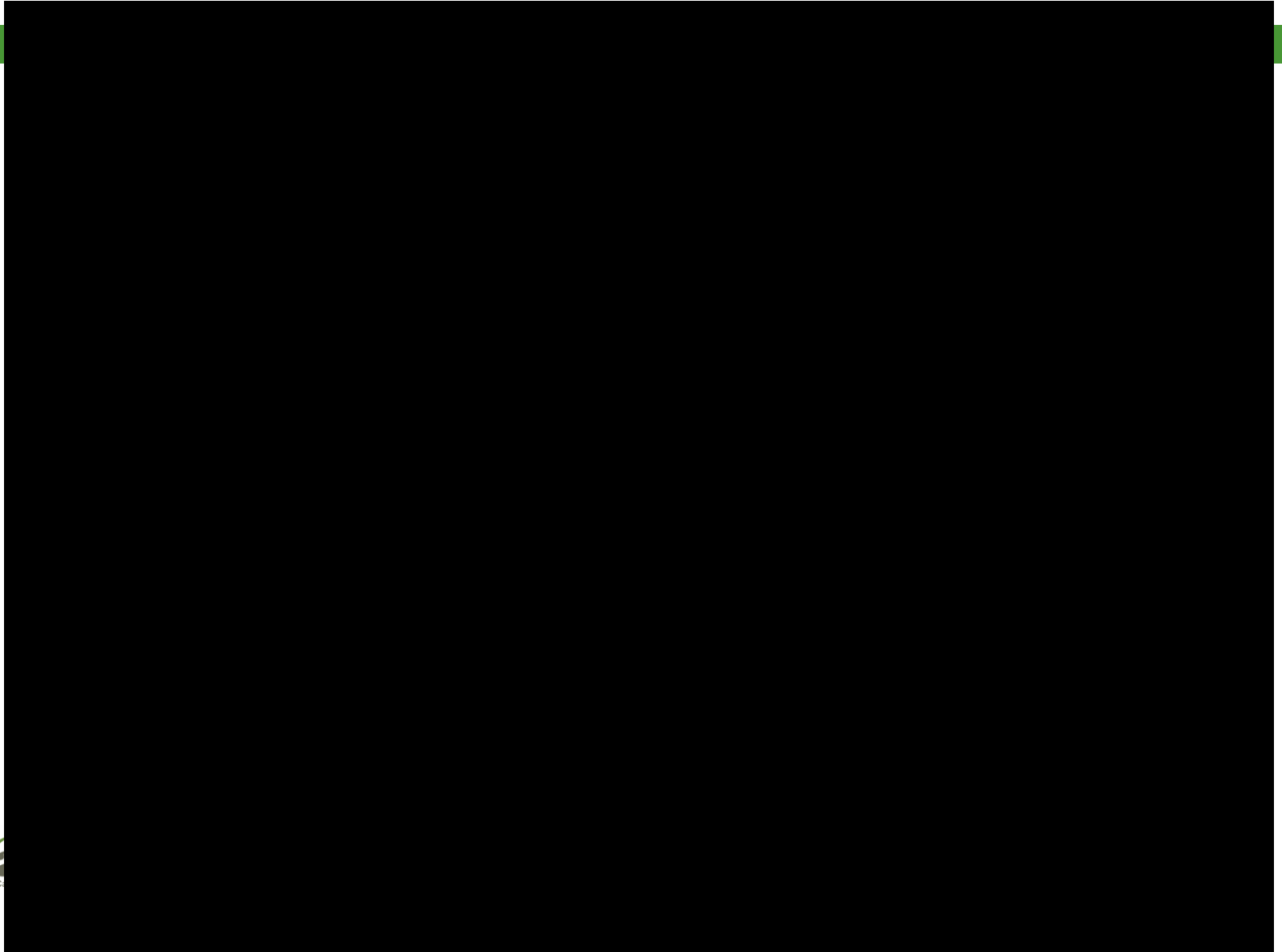
Creating Videos for Modeling

- Choose behavior to model
 - Our example: Sharing
- Write a script to follow in video
- Videotape actors using script
- Watch video with learner
- Recreate situation in video and practice after watching video; use prompts if needed

Example: Sharing Script

Exchange	Adult		Child	
	Actions	Statement	Actions	Statement
1	enters the room, looks at the child		looks up from the toy, looks at the adult	"Hey there!"
2	maintains eye contact, sits at the table	"Hi!"	looks at the toy, looks at the adult	"I'm playing with Barbie"
3	looks at the toy, looks at the child	"That looks like fun!"	looks at the toy, looks at the adult	"Would you like to play?"
4	looks at the toy, looks at the child	"Yes! Thank you!"	looks at the toy while the adult plays, looks at the adult	"May I play some more?"
5	looks at the toy, looks at the child	"Sure, here you go."	looks at the toy, plays with the toy, looks at the adult	"Thank you!"

Video of Video Modeling – Saying “Sorry”



Things to Consider

□ Social Scripts

- Requires basic reading skills, or instruction to learn script
- Can be used for a variety of interactions (i.e., initiations, comments during play, etc.)

□ Video Modeling

- Requires actors, video equipment, & editing software (some commercial videos available, some free YouTube videos)
- Requires learning a script
- Can be used to teach verbal and non-verbal social behaviors
- Doesn't require reading skills

Creating a Program



Plan Ahead!

- ALWAYS have a plan for:
 - Activities for each day
 - Different activities for different days
 - How you will respond to challenging behavior

- Set behavior goals
 - Define your behavior
 - Know how you will prompt the behavior
 - Have rewards available

Making a Schedule

□ Tips:

- Choose activities that match your individual's abilities
- Order the activities so that they precede “fun” or desired activities (e.g., before snack time, before jumping in the pool)
- Keep the routine similar each day, but vary the activities → greetings, talk about the weather, game, snack, wash hands, game, arts & crafts, etc.

Challenging Behavior!

- Remember, challenging behavior can occur – even if the activities are meant to be fun!
- Either use your individual's behavior protocol or best practices:
 - Attention: do not provide extra attention following challenging behavior
 - Tangible: do not provide an item/food/activity directly after challenging behavior
 - Escape: do not allow your individual to get out of a task or instruction following challenging behavior
 - Automatic: require your individual to complete the desired behavior **WITHOUT** stereotypic behaviors

Steps for Setting Behavior Goals

1. Define the behavior

2. Prompt and practice

3. Reinforce

4. Collect Data

1. Define the Behavior

- Use **observable** and **measurable** terms
- Clear and specific descriptions



Considerations

- What are the circumstances under which the behavior is likely to occur? Unlikely to occur?
- What is the effect within the environment of the behavior occurring?
- What prerequisite skills are required?

What is the Behavior?

- Eye Contact
- Sharing
- Conversation Skills
- Play Skills

Example Goal

- We want Johnny to play with friends.

“Play”

- Things to think about:
 - What game or games specifically?
 - Does he/she have the skills to play independently?
 - Initiations versus responses
 - When and/or how long do you want this behavior to occur?

Define “play”

- Johnny will ask same age peers to play tag with him on the playground.
- Johnny will run after and tag peers on their shoulder when he is “it”.
- Johnny will run and hide from the person who is “it”.

2. Prompt and Practice

- Use prompts and prompt fading until they are completing the skill independently
 - Begin with the MOST INTRUSIVE prompt
 - Fade your prompts until your individual is performing the skill independently

- Practice with multiple peers
 - Use good peer models initially
 - Have the peers deliver the reinforcer/reward

- Practice in multiple locations
 - Home
 - Park

- Shadow
 - Once your individual is consistently performing the skill independently, you may consider the behavior mastered and begin teaching a new skill

Shadowing

- Initially stand directly behind, then gradually fade back
- Providing necessary prompts to increase the likelihood that the individual will engage in the target response while fading yourself out of the interaction as much as possible

3. Reinforce

- Present a preferred stimulus immediately following the behavior
 - Can be edibles, items, breaks, tokens, etc.
 - Make rewards individualized → not everyone wants the same thing

- ALWAYS provide praise!!

4. Collect Data

- It is important to collect data to evaluate if the program is effective
 - It is good to take data on both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors
- Data can also help to determine when one skill is mastered and it's time to work on a new skill



Social Skills Resources

Materials and Groups

Social Skills Materials

- Books and Curricula
 - Social Skills Training (Jed E. Baker, 2003)
 - Super Skills (Coucovanis, 2005)
 - Social Skills Activities for Special Children (Mannix, 2009)
 - Superflex: A Superhero Social Thinking Curriculum (Madrigal & Garcia Winner, 2008)
- Video Modeling
 - Model Me Kids
 - BeCool

Houston-Area Social Skills Groups

- Sample of Houston-Area Groups:
 - Social Motion Skills (www.socialmotionskills.org)
 - DePelchin (www.depelchin.org/social-thinking-groups)
 - Houston ABA (www.houstonaba.com)
 - Shape of Behavior (www.shapeofbehavior.com/services/social-skills.html)
 - Tangible Differences (www.tangibledifference.com/social-skills-younger.html)
 - Steps to Progress (www.stepstoprogress.com)
 - Social Skills Playhouse (www.socialskillsplayhouse.com)

- Use Google to search in your area!

Wrap-Up

- Importance of teaching social skills
- Variety of teaching methods available
 - Prompts
 - Scripts
 - Video modeling
- For generalization utilize different settings, people, times, and behaviors
- Program for maintenance issues
- Get appropriate resources, find local groups

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Questions or Comments?

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