

Skill Area(s):
 Non-Verbal Language
 Conversation
 Perspective Taking
 Feeling/Emotions

Teaching Social Skills Through Acting

Level: intermediate, advanced

Goal: to help people with social cognitive deficits learn facial expressions, listen for voice changes, and learn how to judge non-verbal cues to help them understand others and to become effective communicators.

Materials needed: Teaching Asperger's Students Social Skills Through Acting, by Amelia Davies. You can get this at the Autism Book Store, www.Autismshop.com. You'll need a group of 5-8 high functioning students with needs in social awareness and cognition, an indoor space without nooks and crannies, about an hour block of time, ten weeks of that scheduled hour, permission to make a lot of noise, and a group of parents and student aids willing to follow you into the Land of Silly.

Activity:

The book provides wonderful information that explains how to use the book effectively. You should read through the introduction first and then explore the 3 parts of the book which are, getting started, the exercises, and lastly the plays.

Getting Started: This part of the book discusses how to get the group together and what all will be required to have a successful group. Make sure you get the parents involved. There are sample letters you can send out to the parents and suggestions on how to get the students invested in the group. This part of the book stresses that you must keep the group fun and open to allow the students to feel free to express themselves. You also must let them know that this is a serious group and there are expectations. The book suggests starting your class either during the summer, one to two months after school begins, or in late January, early February. If you start your class when school starts, parents may have a hard time scheduling you in and kids will be sleepy and stressed.

The Exercises: Each section of exercises is important to the development of the actor. It is not necessary to do all of the variations to each exercise, but it is important that you follow the order of the exercises. The exercises work the large muscle groups, encourage group dynamics and coordination. The exercises are all written out and explained as to what you need to do. The book says it will take you through about 10 hours of acting class or probably more. The book suggests that your final class run through all of the exercises while parents either watch or more preferably participate.

The Plays: After you've done all the exercises and taught the children the skills it is up to you and the students as to what you do next. The book suggests students memorize and act out a play that work hard on and finally perform in front of an audience. The book contains a few plays that are directed toward more advanced students, but suggests more simple plays for students that are not quite that advanced.