

# Strategies to support social communication and peer interaction

A Session for Parents, Early Years and Primary staff

# Aims of session

To:

- Develop understanding of social communication needs for verbal children in the early years
- Provide visual strategy ideas
- Provide strategies to support social communication and interaction skills through play
- Create a plan for you to use with your child

# Evaluation and Action Plan

## Evaluation Form

### Social communication training to develop communication and peer interaction (SOC-PS)

This form will help us to see the impact that the training has had on your learning and the child / young person

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's / Young person's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's / Young person's date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

NHS pc: \_\_\_\_\_

How strongly do you agree with these statements?

1. I understand what social communication difficulties are for verbal children in the early years

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre training					
Post training					
At 3 month review					

2. I can clearly identify what social communication difficulties my child has

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre training					
Post training					
At 3 month review					

3. I understand how to support social communication skills

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre training					
Post training					
At 3 month review					

## Social communication training to develop communication and peer interaction (SOC-PS)

### Summary of my child's social communication

Social Interaction

Non-Verbal or verbal communication

Play

My child's stage of play:

## SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY ACTION PLAN -

Action plan to be carried out by: Parents/Careers/School/Setting staff

Expected Outcome of Care	Activity Ideas
<p>Wave 3 - specialist input for children who require specialist approaches to address their persistent speech, language or communication needs.</p> <p>1. Key adults will attend the Social communication training and will have the skills to</p>	<p>Implement visual strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide visual support to my child to support them to understand spoken information / understand routines / to communicate (delete as appropriate) including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Develop play and imagination skills</p> <p>I will need to carry out advice to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Early pretend play</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Symbolic play</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Symbolic / socio-dramatic play</li> </ul>

# Who will this training help?

- **Social Interaction**
  - Reduced social interest/more isolated, focusing more on objects than people, be on the periphery
  - Prefer adult company to peers, or younger children
  - Can be on their own agenda
  - May be more directive with adults and peers
- **Verbal and non-verbal communication**
  - May have good language skills, but have difficulties with back and forth conversations
  - ‘Sound like an adult’ / Use of more formal language and phrases
  - Reduced use of eye gaze for a range of reasons, reduced use of gesture
  - May show differences in personal space
- **Play**
  - Repetitive actions, excessive interests and knowledge around favourite topics, reduced shared imagination / flexibility (i.e. when things change)
  - Pretend play may be repetitive, or ‘copied’

# Think about your child's communication needs...

Consider:

- Social Interaction
- Non-verbal or verbal Communication
- Play

Social communication training to develop communication and peer interaction (SOC-PS)

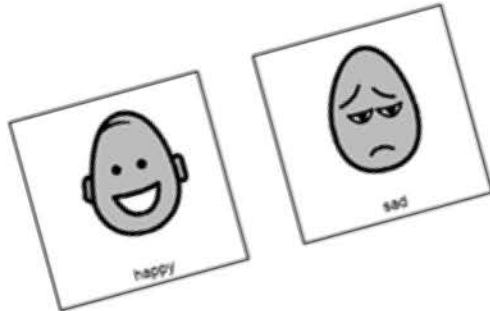
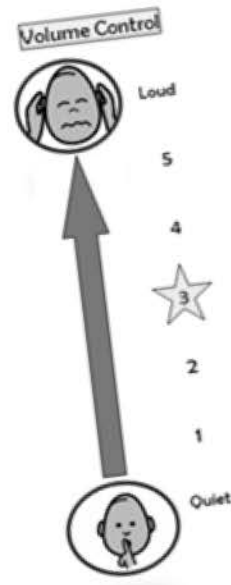
Summary of my child's social communication


Social Interaction
Non-Verbal or verbal communication
Play


# How we can help?


1. Visual strategies
2. Develop play and imagination skills
3. Develop 'use of language' with peers
4. Develop friendship skills

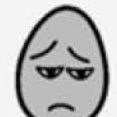
# 1. Visual Strategies



Good Listening 

1 

2 

3 



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# Visual Supports

- Important for:
  - Reducing worry about what is happening during the day
  - Coping with change
  - Understanding routine
  - Supporting comprehension
  - Expressing ideas / communicating with others
  - Making choices
  - Attention control



# Visual Support - examples

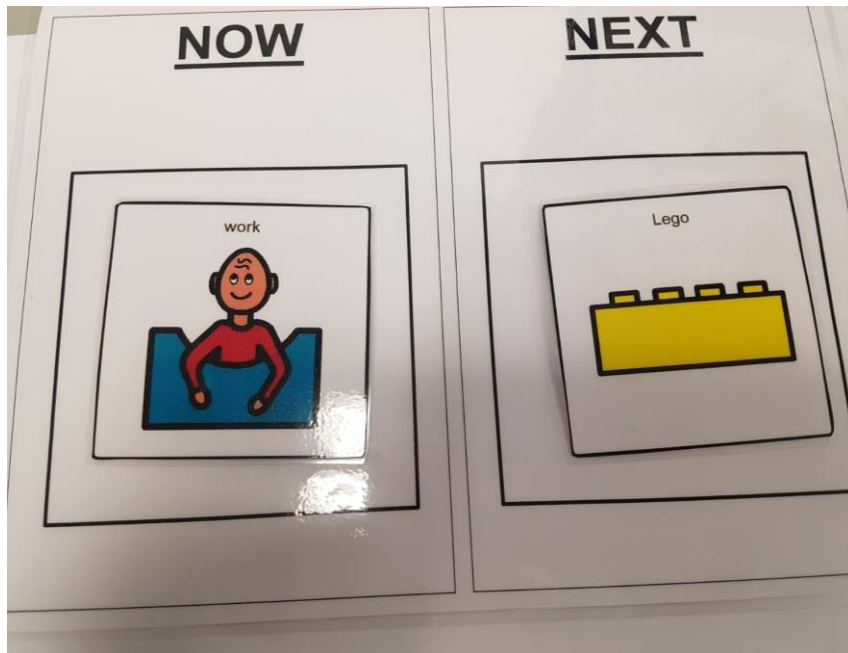
- Traffic light symbols
- Now and next boards
- Visual timetables
- Symbol instructions
- Weekly planners
- Picture sequences
- Choice boards for different activities
- Makaton
- PECS
- Home school books



# Traffic Light Symbols



## Now and Next Boards







## Activity checklists

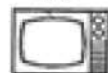





Activity: .....




1.
2.
3.
4.



### AFTERNOON

- Hang up coat and book bag  
- Eat a snack 
- Leisure time 

TV 	Video game 	Music 
Book 	Trampoline 	Swing 

- Eat dinner 
- Take a bath 
- Go to bed 

# VISUAL TIMETABLES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 <p>school</p>	 <p>school</p>	 <p>school</p>	 <p>school</p>	 <p>school</p>	 <p>swimming</p>	 <p>day out</p>
 <p>surprise</p>		 <p>rainbows</p>	 <p>after school club</p>	 <p>surprise</p>	 <p>shopping</p>	
 <p>football</p>	 <p>tennis</p>	 <p>scouts</p>	 <p>gymnastics</p>	 <p>playground</p>	 <p>restaurant</p>	 <p>McDonald's</p>
 <p>surprise</p>				 <p>cinema</p>		

# Picture Sequences



# Choice Boards



# Gestures and Visual Supports

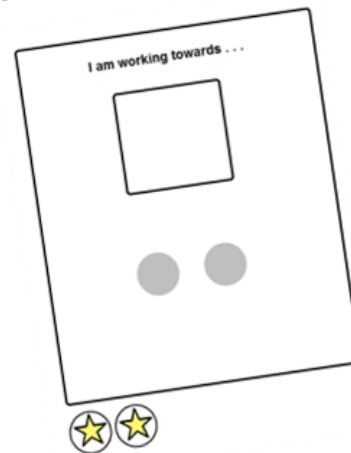


- We all use hand gestures and signing as part of everyday communication.
- Your child may find it easier to communicate with a sign rather than words at first. This is fine as long as you always acknowledge the sign with the word e.g. “Drink” ; “car”. Use gesture alongside the spoken language.
- Makaton – as Speech and Language Therapists we use Makaton signing to a greater or lesser extent within our sessions. We often use it to support our words or to help the child understand. e.g to clarify position words e.g. In/on.
- Your child may be able to copy a sign with his hands before he can copy a word or a sound. Using a sign may help ease your child’s frustration.



# Visual support – Reward charts

- Motivation is key.
- What will your reward chart look like?
- What does your child need to earn to get their reward?
- Keep the reward chart in sight to keep motivating your child.
- Be specific in what you want your child to do.
- Be specific in your praise.



'I AM WORKING FOR.....' CHART

I am working for:



'I AM WORKING FOR.....' CHART

I am working for:



I am working for



## 2. Develop Play and Imagination Skills

### Why is play important?

- Pretend play develops alongside language development.
- It allows you to see their ‘symbolic understanding’
  
- How pretend play develops social interaction and understanding of others:
  - Need to be flexible as others may do things differently to them
  - Shows understanding of what other people are thinking as they play
  - Shows ability to know that they are ‘both’ pretending together
  - Being able to predict the feelings and thoughts of others is a key communication skill

# Consider what level of play is your child at

## The Development of Play

- Relational Play – making links between objects, e.g. placing objects together such as spoon in cup, pieces in a puzzle, building towers.
- Early pretend (Pre-symbolic) – Simple play using realistic props where child copies actions of others, e.g. Brush/wash/feed a doll/move a toy car
- Symbolic play - Act out daily sequences using real objects but can be flexible in using objects that look ‘similar’ to the real thing. They may then use ‘nothing’, e.g. cooking, cleaning, talking to toys, giving characters ‘voices’
- Advanced Symbolic / ‘Socio-dramatic play’ - Highly imaginative play, acting out various roles with others. Often actions take place rather than using real objects

# How to help with play skills

- First you need to **Follow the Child's Lead** so . . .  
**Watch and Wait and Imitate**
- You need to **watch** what the child does to see what they are interested in and how they are communicating. The more interested they are in something, the more likely they are to communicate about it, and they will be interested in it for longer.
- **Waiting** is one of the most powerful things you can do during an interaction. It gives the child the chance to process what you have done/said and to have a go at communicating themselves.
- The best way to **watch** and **wait** is to get **face to face**
- Also remember to **'listen'** to their communication (interpret body movements, gesture, sounds and words)
- Join in with the child's play – try copying their actions/words then wait to see what they want to do next

# How to help with play skills

- Model activities at the next play level

To develop play at the:

- Early pretend (Pre-symbolic) stage – Ask questions relating to what they are doing. e.g. if pushing a car, ask where it is going, add a character to ‘get a lift’. Act out familiar routines, e.g. feed a baby.
- Symbolic play – Use ‘let’s pretend’ and give them an item that represents something else, or use nothing!
- Advanced Symbolic / ‘Socio-dramatic play’ – Create a ‘problem’ for them to solve, or add a new idea to what they are doing, e.g. “Oh no, there’s no food left!”, “We need to escape from...”

Ref: Talkability (Sussman 2006)

# 3. Develop 'use of language' with peers

- Playing alongside others
  - Precursor to interactions, talking with peers and friendships
  - Playing alongside each other
  - Think about space
  - Duplicate toys, then 'shared toys'



# Opportunities for peer interaction

- Provide opportunities for your child to make comments and ask questions to peers
- During play/conversation with their peers, adults can support children to engage in interaction with an increasing amount of support as required.

a. **Talk about something that a peer is doing / saying**

e.g. 'X is building something next to you'. 'I think X's tower is great!'

b. **Get them thinking more about what a peer is doing**

e.g. 'I wonder what they are building' / 'I think they are building', or even use a gesture to help them to notice.

c. **Give a more specific example of what they could do**

e.g. 'You could ask them what they are building' or...

d. **Model what they could say**

e.g. 'Say, "What are you building?"', or "I love your tower!"

# ‘Social coaching’

- Talk about something that a peer is doing / saying  
e.g. “Look, X is colouring a picture”
- Get them thinking more about what a peer is doing  
e.g. “I wonder/I’m not sure what they are colouring”
- Give a more specific example of what they could do/say  
e.g. “You could ask them what they are colouring”  
Model what they could say  
e.g. “Say, ‘What are you colouring?’”
  
- Give the child a ‘specific role’

Increasing amount  
of support



# Activity

- Consider an activity your child likes to do alongside their peers.
- Consider what you would say to support them to engage with others using this tiered approach:
  - Talk about something that a peer is doing / saying
  - Get them thinking more about what a peer is doing
  - Give a more specific example of what they could do
  - Model what they could say

# Provide opportunities to make requests

- Limit the amount of equipment there is during an activity, e.g. in a group of 5, provide only 2 pairs of scissors, or only one pot of paint for each colour
- Place the equipment near another child so that your child has to ask them to pass it to them
- **Wait** for your child to realise they need this item, rather than stepping in to help them
- If your child asks the adult for the item, rather than the child, follow this sequence of events to support them to carry out a request:
  - Start by just stating that you don't have them, and wait again. E.g. "X has the scissors".
  - If they don't respond, **give a more specific example of what they could do** e.g. "You could ask X for the scissors", (and then wait)
  - Again, if more help is needed, **model what they could say**, e.g. 'Say, "X, please can I have the scissors"?'
- Within the activities, the adult should also take part so that they can model the phrases to use, e.g. "I need the scissors, please can you pass me some scissors?"

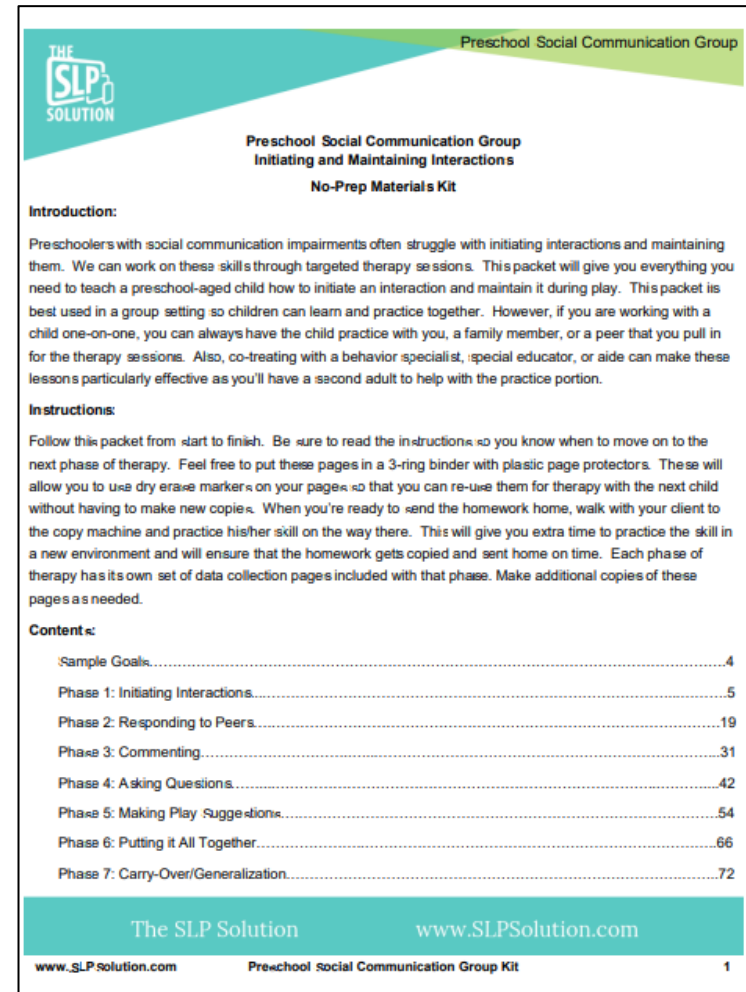
# Research summary

- The evidence around supporting children and young people with social communication difficulties suggests implementing strategies in **everyday situations**.
- There is evidence to support the effectiveness of a **range of intervention approaches** but there is no evidence that one approach is more effective than others.
- **Social skills groups can be effective to teach specific social communication skills, but then the children need to be supported within everyday situations to use these skills**

# Pre-School Social Communication Group

## Aims of group

- Initiate an interaction with a peer
  - Respond to peers
  - Comment
  - Ask Questions
  - Make play suggestions
- Contains session plans, a ‘story’ about each skill and ideas of how to practice each skill



## 4. Developing Friendship Skills

- There are distinct stages to developing friendships (Tony Attwood)

**Level 1:** Approximately 3 to 6 years

- Understands basic need to take turns / share
- Your friend (in that moment) is the person who gives you things or someone you play with because they are around or sharing your materials. *“He helps me”*
- Friendship is based on proximity and physical attributes and when asked *Why is \_\_\_\_\_ your friend?* The typical response is *He lives next door! He sits next to me!*

# Supporting Level 1: 'Understand basic needs to take turns'

## Early turn-taking games

- Cars and trains- take turns to 'drive' round tracks/ roads
- Build towers- take turns to add a block
- Post shapes or pictures into a 'post box' i.e. shoe box
- Use instruments to take turns to make sounds.
- Use finger puppets- take turns at making them say hello & bye bye

## Later turn-taking games

- Try to also include games that involve communicating with one another, e.g. giving instructions such as 'Simon Says' 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' 'I spy' etc.
- Take turns in games such as 'Pop up pirate' / Snakes and Ladders
- Completing a 'joint task' such as making a specific model, completing a puzzle, cooking
- Barrier games – Take turns to give instructions to each other



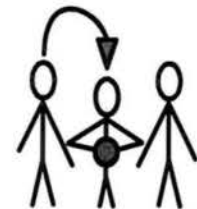
# Turn-taking visuals



Taking Turns



wait



my turn



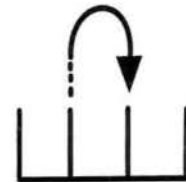
your turn



go



snap



next

# Supporting Level 1: ‘Someone you play with because they are around or sharing your materials’

- **Opportunity** – Having somewhere where they can be together and play!
- Provide rule-based semi-structured activities available – create options based on their interests
  - How long will they last /where will they be?
- Use the resources to create opportunities for play activities
  - Consider the child’s interests
  - Having materials they may be likely to share
  - Consider well-defined spaces and groupings, e.g. pairs
  - Provide duplicates to provide ‘copying’ opportunities
  - Place sociable children with them!
- Keep the time short
- Social coach: mediate, join in if required, make play suggestions, model sharing and taking turns

# Teaching children about friendships – ‘The social curriculum’ (Tony Attwood)

- May learn by watching others and ‘having a go’
- Teach the concepts of ‘good friend’ / being ‘friendly’ / ‘not friendly’
  - Point out these skills when watching others in the park, at nursery
  - Watch videos and ‘pause’ them when you see examples of this
  - Talk about the facial expressions, the gestures they use to help them to be ‘friendly / not friendly’
- Observe what other children are doing to interact
  - How do they join in?
  - What phrases do they use?
  - Then practice these skills together, using role play, toys, and through discussion. Role play – Do the ‘wrong thing’ / be rude and ask them what they should have done
- Provide encouragement and positive feedback – tell them when they got it right using description of what they did well

The Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule

## The Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: 1 = Limited 2 = Reasonable 3 = Good 4 = Age appropriate

### STAGE 1

FRIENDSHIP SKILLS		RATING OF FRIENDSHIP OR TEAM SKILLS										COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS		
Entry Skills	Recognises the cues													
	Appropriate Greeting													
	Welcoming Others													
Assistance	Given													
	Sought													
	Copes with													
Accepting Suggestions	Incorporating other's ideas													
	Indicates agreement													
Reciprocity	Conversation													
	Activities													
	Not dominant													
	Not subordinate													

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Page 1 of 5

The Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule

FRIENDSHIP SKILLS		RATING OF FRIENDSHIP OR TEAM SKILLS										COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS		
Sharing	Resources													
	Attention													
Interest	Listening													
	Looking													
Avoiding	Seeks solitude appropriately													
Ending	Closure													
	appropriate													

# Emotions – Considerations and activities

- Discuss how different facial expressions can indicate different emotions and use pictures to demonstrate this to your child. Take it in turns to make different facial expressions in front of a mirror, e.g., a sad face or a happy face.
- Encourage your child to verbalise emotions. Always link these to what has happened.
- Be very specific in labelling emotions and their causes, “I am happy today. I have just got a new tablet for my birthday”
- Label what people are thinking and feeling in real life and on TV or in books, e.g. “I *know* they feel happy because they are smiling”, “I *think* they will feel excited about going to the party!”

# Now...

- Consider the comments you made earlier about your child's social interaction, communication and play.
- How do you think you may try to manage it?
- What strategies would be most useful?

# What happens next?

- Use the strategies we have discussed today to help support your child at home and at nursery/school.
- See what works best for you and your child.
- Be aware that needs may change over time
- School staff working with your child need to access this virtual training to support their transition when they move next year
- This training was recommended to you by the Neurodevelopmental Pathway Assessment (NDP) Team.
- If you have ongoing concerns after 6 months of implementing the strategies, or new concerns in relation to your child's speech, language or communication skills arise, you can request a referral to the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Team.

# Overview of session

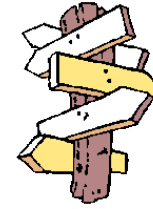
- Develop understanding of social communication difficulties in the early years
- Provide strategies to support children's social communication skills and play
  - Watch, Wait and Imitate
  - Develop 'use of language' with peers
  - Develop friendship skills
- Provide visual strategy ideas
- Create a plan for you to use with your child



# Summary

- Children can experience different types of social communication difficulties
- Use the strategies we have discussed today to help support your child to develop play and interaction with their peers
- See what works best for you and your child
- Be aware that needs may change over time

# Signposting – who else may be able to help



## Occupational Therapy:

- Sensory needs (having a significant effect on young person's ability to function at home or in school)
- Organisational skills (planning, sequencing, dressing)
- Fine/Gross Motor skills (shoe laces, buttons, use of cutlery)

## Family support/Local Authority

My Life Warrington / Early Help Service

(see Early Years 0-4 Graduated Approach Guidance Booklet and Graduated Approach Descriptors)

## Behaviour courses:

- Speak to Health Visitor Team

**Recommended reading** : The Incredible Years by Caroline Webster-Stratton (for parents of children 2-8 years)

# Resources

- Conklin, C., Weitzman, E., Pepper, J., McDade, A. (2013) 'It Takes Two To Talk', Hanen Centre Publication
- Sussman, F. (2012) 'More Than Words', Hanen Centre Publication
- Tony Attwood – [www.tonyattwood.com.au](http://www.tonyattwood.com.au)
- The Autism Education Trust (AET)
  - Early Years Autism Standards and Competency Framework
  - Understanding Autism Training
  - Early Years Training Hub

# Resources for developing friendship skills

- *Understanding and Teaching Friendship Skills by Tony Attwood and Carol Gray – Cloud 9 Children's Foundation (withyoueverystepoftheway.com)*

## **PRESCHOOL AGE:**

- Baby Faces (1998) . New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books.
- Conlin, S. & Friedman, S. L. (1991, 1993) . All My Feelings At Preschool. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.
- Funny Faces: A very first picture book (1996,1999) . New York, NY: Lorenz Books.
- Hallinan, P. K. (1999) . Heartprints. Nashville, TN: Ideal Children's Books
- Rogers, R. (1996) . Making Friends. New York, NY: The Putnam & Grosset Group
- Offerman, L. (1999) . Little Teddy Bear's Happy Face Sad Face. Brookfield, CT: The Millbrook Press, Inc.

# Resources for developing friendship skills

- *Understanding and Teaching Friendship Skills by Tony Attwood and Carol Gray – Cloud 9 Children's Foundation (withyoueverystepoftheway.com)*

## **SCHOOL AGE:**

- Brandenberg, A. (1993) . Communication. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books
- Brown, L. K. & Brown, M. (1998). How to be a Friend. USA: Little, Brown & Company
- The Care and Keeping of Friends (1996) . Middleton, WI.: American Girl Library Editor, Pleasant Company Publications.
- Conlin, S. & Friedman, S. L. (1989, 1993) . All My Feelings At Home. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.
- Holyoke, D. (1997) . Oops!: The Manners Guide for Girls. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company Publications
- Kipfer, B. A. (1994) . 1,400 things to be happy about. New York, NY: Workman Publishing
- Krueger, D. W. (1993). What Is A Feeling? Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc

# Thanks for listening



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Healthcare at the heart  
of your community