



Tools for Teaching Social Boundaries to Tweens and Teens

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Objectives

Discuss common difficulties with social boundaries, why they occur, and their impact.

Discuss strategies for helping make social boundaries more clear and concrete.

What is a Social Boundary?

Social boundaries are a set of unwritten rules that suggest certain appropriate types of behavior in a given society.

- Establishing physical, social, and emotional boundaries help us to judge the acceptable and unacceptable in all our social interactions.
- Establishing healthy boundaries allows people to feel secure and in control of their personal safety.
- The ability to understand social boundaries can provide the opportunity to start and maintain friendships, engage in ongoing romantic relationships, and successfully obtain and sustain employment.
- Being able to successfully engage in social activities can also improve self-esteem and reduce the risk of depression and anxiety.

The Behavior Iceberg Model



Impact of Difficulties with Social Boundaries

- Confusion!
- Less ability to establish and maintain friendships, jobs, romantic partners
- Possible disciplinary consequences at school or work
- Possible trouble with the law
- Potential of abuse
- Family stress
- Need for increased supervision and a more restrictive/less independent school or living situation

Social Boundaries: Behaviors or Struggles of Concern

- Behaviors that were just “annoying” when an individual was younger can present as off-putting, dangerous, or as harassment when they are a teen or young adult.
 - e.g., touching others, staring or following, blurting out unexpected topics or thoughts, struggling managing frustration, not regulating vocal volume, sharing things that are private/oversharing with strangers

Share out examples in the chat!

Common Difficulties with Social Boundaries



Personal space

Appropriate touch

Maintaining a conversation on a given topic

Private vs. public behaviors and discussion topics (and social media)

Private vs. public body parts

Managing enthusiasms, interests, and obsessions

Understanding the course of a relationship

Self-regulation in public

Dating and attraction

Understanding consent and sexual abuse

Big Ideas

- Due to challenges with various aspects of social communication, some tween, teens and young adults will benefit from *explicitly learning skills* associated with successful and safe friendship, dating, and vocational experiences.
- Teens and young adults may need support in developing basic friendship and dating readiness skills, safety skills related to dating, and social skills.
- School staff and families/caregivers *both* play important roles in supporting in these skill areas.

Need #1: Basic Friendship or Dating Readiness Skills

- Identify the purpose of friendships and dating
 - Dating is a shared experience between two people, and it should involve someone who the teen likes and who likes them back.
- Understand the differences between acquaintances, friendships, and dating
 - Define expected behaviors in different relationships.
- Establish a shared understanding of the dating process
 - Evolves over time
- Demonstrate dating readiness (grooming habits, independent skills, confidence)
- Be aware of, and develop a plan for, dealing with sensory sensitivities and anxiety/mood issues

Need #2: Safety Skills

Due to immaturities in social understanding, some teens might be vulnerable to being abused by others or more likely to behave inappropriately themselves. Teaching teens to identify abusive and illegal behaviors, as well as the “grey” areas to consider, protects the teen and others.

- Spend time reviewing behaviors in different social contexts, including how to behave with strangers, community members/helpers, family friends, and romantic partners
- Identify consent, abusive behavior, and illegal sexual behaviors and how to avoid them
- Discuss relationship dangers faced on the internet
- Discuss the consequences of sexual activity

Need #3: Social Skills

- Demonstrate perspective taking and social communication skills for dating
 - Conversation skills
 - Asking questions
 - Active listening
 - Looking at nonverbal communication

- Identify social mistakes related to dating

Szidon, K. & Hedges, S. (2015, June). *Supporting Success and Safety in Relationships* (Autism at-a-Glance Brief). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, CSESA Development Team.

Scenario

Lenore is a fan of manga. She spends a lot of time reading manga online and participating in a manga fan website. She and her online friends often discuss their favorite characters. Lenore's parents saw that in a recent conversation, Lenore was asked to send a photo to an online friend. Lenore's parents were alarmed to find that she had shared several photos with a stranger on a website.

Lenore's parents discussed their concerns about internet safety with Lenore's special education teacher. The team decided that it was critical that they spend instruction time reviewing behaviors in different relationships including how to behave with strangers, community members/helpers, family, friends, and romantic partners. They wanted to make sure that Lenore understood how to protect herself from people who might want to take advantage of her.

Strategies for Supporting Success and Safety in Relationships and Dating

Consider explicit teaching strategies that make hidden social rules and “grey areas” more clear.

- Visual Supports
- Video Models/Opportunities for Role Play
- Social Narratives

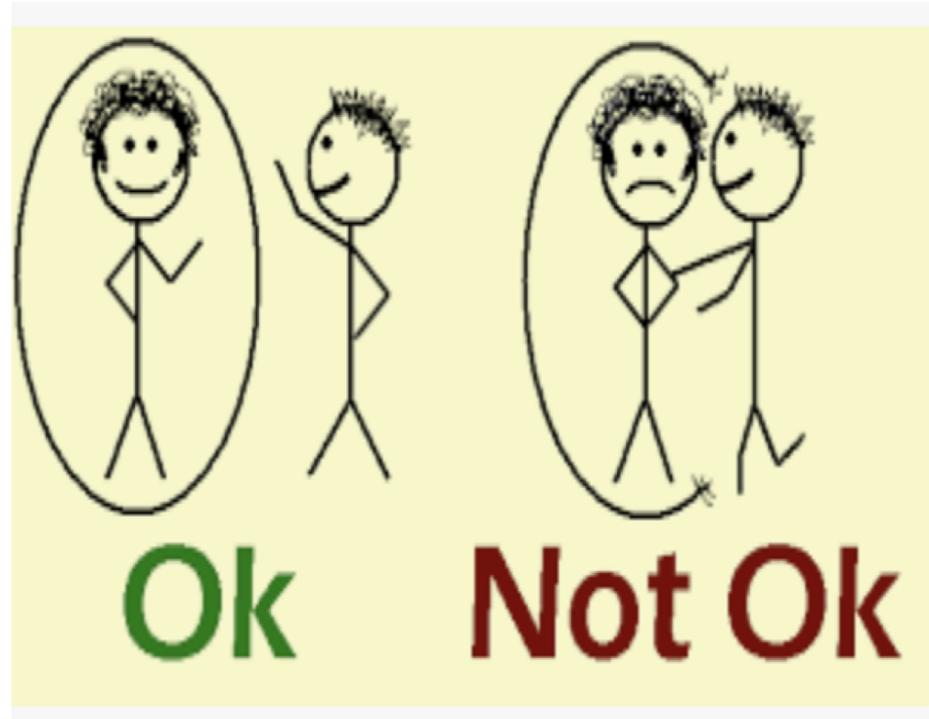
Szidon, K. & Hedges, S. (2015, June). *Supporting Success and Safety in Relationships* (Autism at-a-Glance Brief). Chapel Hill: The University of
Graham Child Development Institute, CSESA Development Team.

Strategy #1: Use Visual Supports

Provide visual images to emphasize expected social behaviors.

- Great for individuals with strong visual skills than verbal skills
- Use photos to provide practice in identifying people's emotions (comment on movies, photos on social media, etc.)
- Use visual scripts or comic strip stories to rehearse key dating concepts

Visual Supports for Expected Behavior



Comic Strip Conversations

Easy technique for helping debrief what happened, differentiating between internal thoughts and what the person says

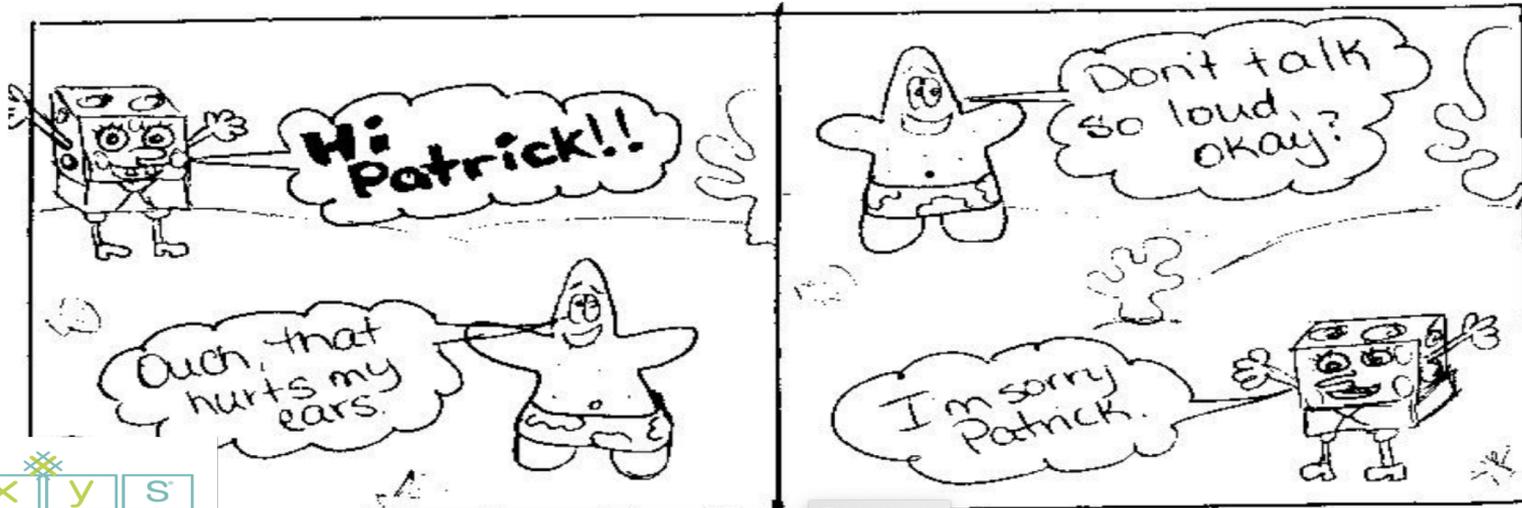
Can teach the individual to draw these as well (just use stick figures!)

Comic Strip Conversations



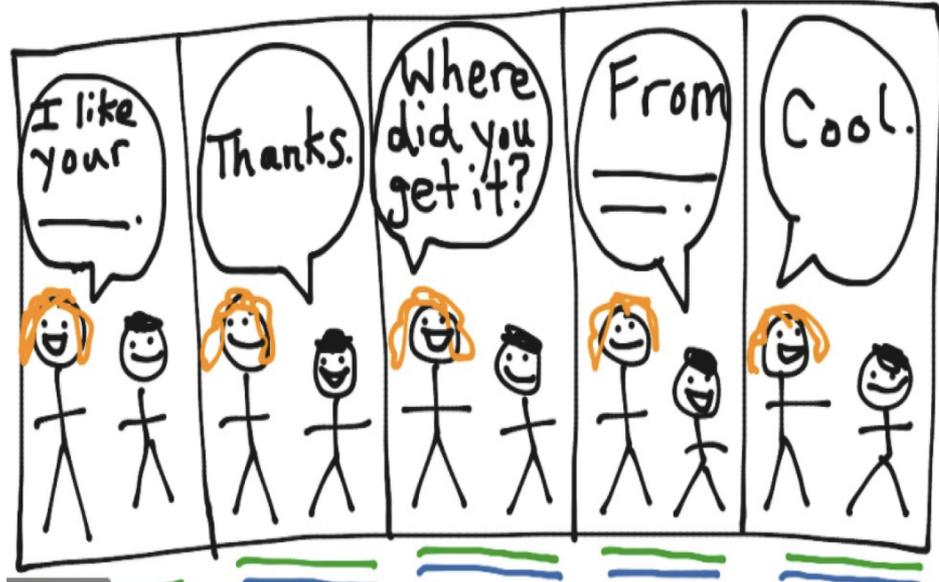
Example.....

Jimmy reacts inappropriately when people in his environment use a loud voice. His favorite show on TV is *Sponge Bob Square Pants*. This comic strip conversation was created to provide him with the appropriate response of “Ouch, that hurts my ears. Don’t talk so loud, okay?” instead of Jimmy hitting the loud person in his environment.

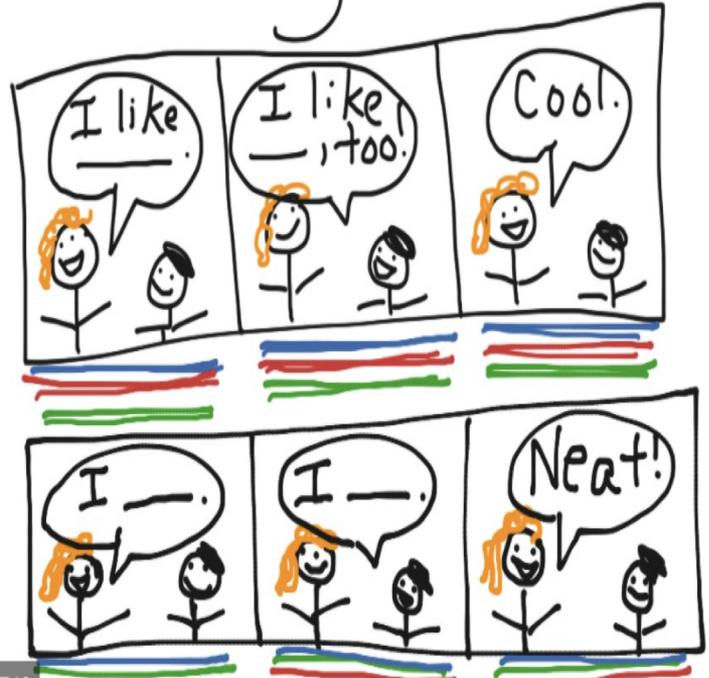


Comic Strip Conversations

The Compliment Conversation



Mirroring Comments

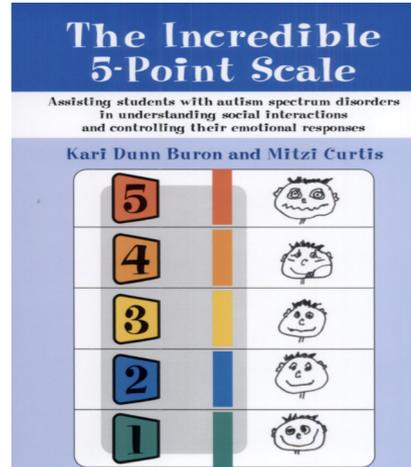


Comic Strip Conversations



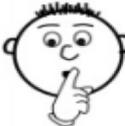
5-Point Visual Scale <https://www.5pointscale.com/>

- Breaks behavior into parts to make it easier to understand different *degrees* of behavior
- Can help make confusing situations more clear
- Can help with self-regulation

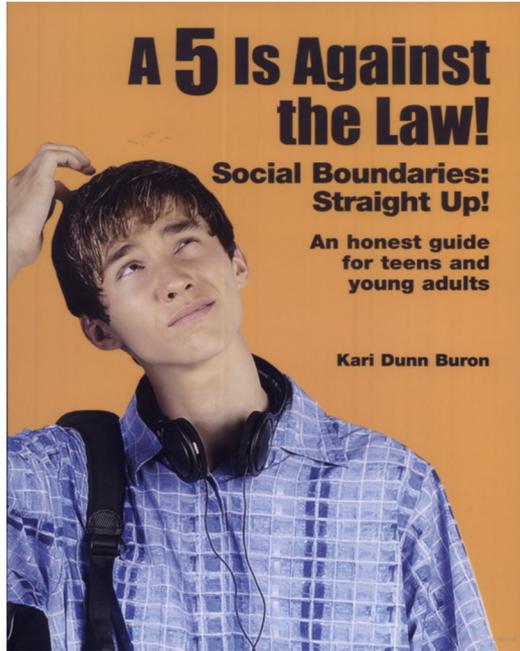


5	
4	
3	
2	
1	

5 Point Scale for Teaching Expected Behaviors and Self-Regulation

5	 <p>Screaming Emergency Voice Someone is hurt or you are in danger</p>	
4	 <p>Outside Voice Recess voice, Cheering at a game, or calling the dogs outside</p>	
3	 <p>Classroom Voice Talking voice</p>	
2	 <p>Whisper Soft voice / Library voice</p>	
1	 <p>No Talking It's time to listen</p>	

5	 <p>Angry I've lost control. I'm not listening anymore. I could hit, kick or bite. I need a quiet place to calm down.</p>	
4	 <p>Overwhelmed Everything is too hard. I'm losing control and need to leave the environment I'm in. Give me space</p>	
3	 <p>Frustrated I'm not getting it, I'm showing signs of stress. I should take a break now.</p>	
2	 <p>Anxious Trying to stay focused, but having a hard time staying on task. Use calming strategies now</p>	
1	 <p>Happy Ready and willing to Work</p>	



Levels of Sharing for Romantic Topics

5	<p>Other Feel Very Uncomfortable or Concerned About Safety: School has to Notify Parents Immediately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sharing that you have touched others sexually without consent or have been or are being touched by others inappropriately -Saying something negative about a student or staff's sexual orientation that makes them uncomfortable over and over again -Sending a video or chat or email that has rated PG-13 or above material (more than kissing, overt sexual content)
4	<p>Others Might Feel Somewhat Uncomfortable, Worried, or Concerned About Safety: Staff has to Notify Other Staff and Probably Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discussing explicit sexual material (details of an encounter or book, movie, or website) that includes more than kissing with a staff -Saying something negative about a student or staff's sexual orientation that makes them uncomfortable
3	<p>Starts Making Others Feel Uncomfortable/Not Really Appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Looking/staring at a person for a long time -Calling or texting or messaging a person repeatedly when they do not respond -Asking personal questions about staff's romantic history or interests -Talking to people you don't know well about romantic interests or sexual orientation - Grabbing or touching another person without permission -Talking about a romantic/sexual scene from a TV show or movie that is rated R or is mature with a staff member
2	<p>Probably Won't Make Others Uncomfortable, but Might make Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing sexual orientation in a conversation once in awhile Hugging a very close friend for a few seconds when saying hello or goodbye Bringing up a crush over and over Referring to a romance from a TV show or movie that is PG or PG 13 once in awhile
1	<p>School Appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joining a discussion talking about romance from a school-related book or movie Having a crush and telling someone one time Sharing preferred pronouns with people you trust Sharing sexual orientation with people you trust

Strategy #2: Use Modeling and Role Play

- **Choose skills** that are relevant to what the individual is interested in achieving (a longer conversation with a friend, asking someone to hang out, etc.)
- **Highlight appropriate relationship and dating behaviors** (e.g., body language, initiating a conversation, flirting) during a video or through a role play
- **Practice and analyze social errors.** Choose alternative solutions to correct the errors in the future.

PEERS

PEERS® for Adolescents

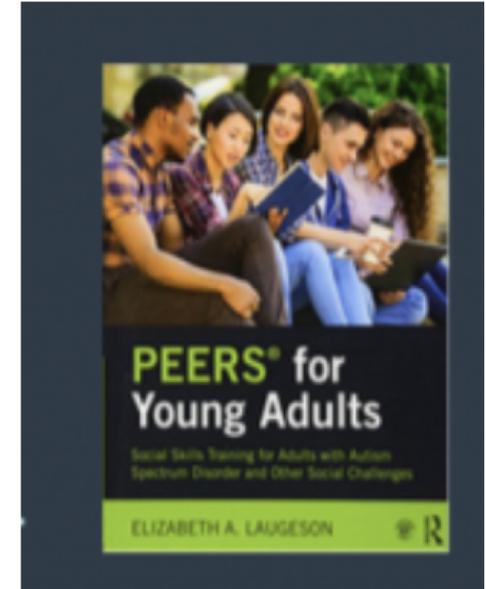
Overview

Teens will learn about:

- Developing and maintaining friendships
 - Conversational skills
- Entering & exiting conversations
- Electronic communication
- Using humor appropriately
- Organizing get-togethers
 - Being a good sport
- Handling disagreements
- Changing a bad reputation
- Handling teasing and bullying



PEERS® Social Skills Group for Adolescents



<https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/course/peers%C2%AE-adolescents-telehealth>

Video Modeling and Role Play

<https://relationshipsdecoded.com/>



Circles App and Curriculum (Video Models) and Role Play

The graphic features a woman in a purple top standing in front of a large, colorful gear-like background. The gear is divided into concentric rings, each representing a different level of intimacy. From the center outwards, the rings are labeled: PRIVATE SPACE (purple), BIG HUG CIRCLE (blue), FAR AWAY HUG CIRCLE (green), HANDSHAKE CIRCLE (yellow), WAVE CIRCLE (orange), and STRANGER SPACE (red). A large gold-bordered blue circle on the right contains the text 'NEW EDITION' with stars. The top left of the graphic displays the 'Circles' logo and the text 'Intimacy Relationships'. A white box on the left contains the text 'LEVEL 1'. Various small images, including 'I.D.' (Identify) cards and video thumbnails, are scattered across the gear's teeth.

Circles[®]
Intimacy Relationships

LEVEL 1

NEW EDITION

PRIVATE SPACE
BIG HUG CIRCLE
FAR AWAY HUG CIRCLE
HANDSHAKE CIRCLE
WAVE CIRCLE
STRANGER SPACE

I.D. I.D. I.D. I.D.

Strategy #3: Use Social Narratives

Narratives emphasize the important social cues in the targeted social situation, and provides examples of an appropriate social responses.

Narratives be used to emphasize the idea of the “hidden curriculum” to emphasize important dating rules that everyone knows but no one is taught, including assumed rules and social expectations.

When you ask someone on a date and they SAY that they are busy, they often MEAN that they do not want to go out on a date with you, not that you should pick a different time to ask them again. If someone tells you that they are busy, you should not ask them on a date again.

Discuss Unexpected vs. Expected Behaviors

Opens the door to discuss behaviors in a non-judgemental way

Using social behavior mapping can help develop perspective taking as well as problem solving and greater self-awareness

Model language and problem solving!

“When you sent 35 texts in a row to your sister, that was unexpected. She thought you were mad at her and was upset because there were pictures of cats with their head blowing up. From now on, the rules are: Only one text at a time, and wait before you send anything back” or “take 3 breaths and look at the image to make sure it is appropriate before you hit send.”

Expected Vs. Unexpected Behaviors: Social Thinking

①
START
HERE

Social Behavior Mapping

Situation: _____

People: _____

Continue to #2 (Unexpected map)

Expected

Behavior(s) that are expected given the situation and people ③	How others might feel about the behavior(s) ④	How others act or react based on how they feel about the behavior(s) ⑤	How one might think or feel based on how they are treated by others ⑥
			

*** TIP** Consider these when thinking how to list expected/unexpected behaviors:

- What people say
- What people do with their eyes or face
- People's actions
- What people do with their body (hands/feet)

Unexpected

Behavior(s) that are unexpected given the situation and people ②	How others might feel about the behavior(s) ⑦	How others act or react based on how they feel about the behavior(s) ⑧	How one might think or feel based on how they are treated by others ⑨
			

⑩ **SUM IT UP**

- Circle the chain reaction
- Talk through it

Social Thinking



Social Behavior Mapping

Situation: **Listening to the teacher talk**

Expected

My behavior that is expected in the situation	Others' feelings about my behavior(s)	How others treat me based on how they feel about my behavior(s)	How I feel based on how I am treated in the situation
Quiet voice Eyes focused and thinking about the teacher Looking like I am thinking about what the teacher is saying Hands touching only the materials on my desk	Calm Pleased Happy	Calm face Calm voice Relaxed body	Calm Relaxed 

Unexpected

My behavior that is unexpected in the situation	Others' feelings about my behavior(s)	How others treat me based on how they feel about my behavior(s)	How I feel based on how I am treated in the situation
Telling the teacher about what I did last night Reading a book I brought from home Kicking the chair in front of me Looking at objects or people around the room or staring out the window	Stressed Frustrated	Unhappy face Her eyes look right at me Unhappy sounding voice She tells me what I am doing that is unexpected and she asks me to stop in a loud voice	Stressed Frustrated Angry 

Reminders for Caregivers

1) Prioritize- first things first.

2) Take care of yourself and your other family members.

3) Gather and use a support team.

- Special education teacher, speech therapist, occupational therapist, psychologists/counselor, behaviorist
- Your Local/State Regional Center, Office of Developmental Disabilities, Parent Help Center, Autism Society

Reminders for Caregivers

4) Don't forget to reinforce correct behaviors! Make a point of catching teens doing something well. Specific feedback will help teens remember skills you are working on.

“I noticed that you listened to Kayla when she talked about her weekend and her asked her what her favorite part of the movie was. You showed her that you were interested in what she had to say.”

5) Check in regularly with your teen. Use active listening and understand that developing relationships is complex and takes time! Errors can be opportunities to learn new skills!

Resources for Helping Teach Social Boundaries for Parents, Caregivers and Professionals

Autism at A Glance Series: <https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources/autism-at-a-glance>, <https://fpg.unc.edu/publications/autism-glance-supporting-success-and-safety-relationships>

Circles Curriculum and App: <https://www.circlesapp.com/>, <https://stanfield.com/product/circles-curriculum-bundle-w1004-38/>, Free Circles Training in Northern CA: <https://www.php.com/social-boundaries-program/>

Comic Book Conversations: <https://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/asi/ComicStripConversations.pdf>

5-is Against the Law: <https://www.socialthinking.com/Products/5-is-against-law>, <https://www.5pointscale.com/>

The Incredible 5-Point Scale, by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis <https://www.autismempowerment.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Incredible-5-Point-Scale-Fact-Sheet-rev.pdf>

PEERS Social Skills groups: <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/course/peers%C2%AE-adolescents-telehealth>

Relationships Decoded (free resources): <https://relationshipsdecoded.com/>

Social Thinking Free Stuff <https://www.socialthinking.com/free-stuff> (webinars, articles, worksheets, video read-alouds), <https://www.socialthinking.com/free-stuff/books-thinksheets>

When My Worries Get Too Big, by Kari Dunn Buron (free read aloud at <https://www.5pointscale.com/good-ideas.html>)

Feel free to contact me with any further questions:

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www.pathwaystolearning.services