

My Friend Ryan

Acceptance in the Classroom

We all know that classroom management is the single most important factor in any successful classroom. We would all love to have a class where children get along, where they are nice to each other. This is always important but much more so when we have a student with special needs, whether that special need be physical, academic, or emotional. The internet and books are full of suggestions for lesson plans to encourage students to 'be nice' to one another, one of the most common suggestions is to have every student write a positive note to every other student, resulting in each child getting a booklet of positive affirmations about themselves. Sounds good in theory, it is a nice exercise, makes each child think nice things about each other, everyone gets a positive message, but stop and think. Are these messages sincere? Did the student do this because they wanted to or because they had to? Did this do anything to promote long term bonds in your classroom? The answer to each of these questions is no. The aim of this activity purports to be to help build community in your classroom, but the reality is that it is just a soon forgotten writing assignment that leaves no lasting influence on the children.

The flaw in that lesson plan is that it suggests that a classroom community is created as a result of students being nice to each other. In reality the reverse is true; it is having a strong class community that leads to students being nice to one another! Our aim should be to create a class community where children have an internal motivation to do the right thing, where their actions are automatic, where their behavioral choices are self-regulated not teacher regulated, where being part of the class community is just who they are, who they want to be. When that has been accomplished, then you have a class community.

Creating a class community with strong bonds where everyone gets along is possible. If you are willing to put in a concerted effort the first few weeks of school, you and your students will reap the benefits for the rest of the year. I say the first few weeks of school only because that is the most obvious time when we want to establish our classroom and expectations for the year, that however does not mean that it cannot be implemented any time of year. There is no such thing as a bad time for a fresh start that will change things for the better in your classroom, both for you and your students.

So, if the old compliment book is not the way to create a community, what is?

Step 1 Build our Family

First, for younger students, I think it is more effective to talk of developing family rather than community, family is something that they all understand. You can introduce the idea that they all live at home with their family where everyone loves and cares for each other. Now that they are back in school, the class together forms their school family, where the same holds true in that everyone loves and cares for each other. You can discuss how there may be disagreements between them, just like they may not always agree with their siblings, but you expect them all to be respectful to each other and to stick together like family.

During the first week of community building, call family meetings on the rug. The aim of the meetings will be to

- Decide on a family name
- Develop family motto or mottos
- Decide on family song or poem – either adopt an existing or create your own
- Take suggestions for family rules, discuss and decide upon them
- Take suggestions for rewards and consequences, discuss and decide upon them
- Create a poster to display family rules

Example from Mrs. Beulow's classroom

Name

The Beulow's

Motto

Once a Beulow, always a Buelow

Smiles are contagious

Negatives are only for photographs

When something good happens to one of us, something good happens to all of us

Song

We are Family by Sister Sledge

Rules

1. We will respect each other and our teacher
2. We will raise our hand before giving an answer
3. We will listen respectfully when someone is talking
4. Privileges can be earned and privileges can be lost
5. We will work hard and have fun!

Rewards and Consequences

Sticker chart – children earn stickers for good work ethic, good behavior choices, and good community spirit, and vice versa lose them for poor choices. Child earns individual reward for completing individual sticker chart, class earns larger class reward when all students complete individual sticker chart. This method means there is motivation on two levels, both for personal behavior but also contributing to greater cause and work toward a common goal of greater class prize!

Step 1 Build our Community

For older students, I think it is more effective to talk of developing community. You can introduce the idea that within your classroom, you are all part of a community. Just like the community where they live, there may be people with different skin colors, different beliefs, different skills, and different styles, but we are all part of the same community and working towards the same goal. You can discuss how there may be disagreements between them; just like their parents may not always agree with their neighbors about football or politics. When disagreements occur, rational discussions are encouraged but mandate that respect is not optional.

During the first week of community building, call 'Town Hall' meetings. The aim of the meetings is to

- Decide on a community name
- Develop community motto
- Decide on or create a community song or rap
- Take suggestions for community rules, discuss and decide upon them
- Take suggestions for rewards and consequences, discuss and decide upon them
- Draw up a town ordinance depicting community rules
- Assign community jobs

Example from Mr. Beattie's Math classroom

Name

Beattievile or BTburg

Motto

No one BeaTs a BT
BT's are the BeST

Song

Best of You – Foo Fighters

Rules

1. We will respect each other and our teacher
2. We will raise our hand before giving an answer
3. We will listen respectfully when someone is talking
4. Privileges can be earned and privileges can be lost
5. We will work hard and have fun!

Rewards and Consequences

Marble jar – children earn marbles for good work ethic, good behavior choices, and good community spirit, and vice versa lose them for poor choices. Class decides if filled jar results in class snack, lesson outdoors, no homework for a night, teacher wearing rival sport team jersey, etc. If the children are involved in the decision about the reward, they will be more invested in attaining it, which leads to greater participation and collaboration to reach a common goal, and so greater community spirit. If you are willing to be silly, the more motivated the children will be (wouldn't you want to earn marbles to see your teacher in a wig singing the class song karaoke style). For students who need an individual behavior mod plan, have sticker chart for them and when they complete it they can earn marbles toward the class reward. If their behavior plan is linked to the class one, they will not only feel more part of the community but others are also more likely to help them if it increases chances of achieving the common goal.

Reinforce those family/community bonds constantly

1. No matter what the age of the children, community building is not a job for the first week of school and it is done for the year, it is an ongoing process. Be sure to refer to the class collectively by their chosen name frequently, it will help constantly reinforce community feel. For example, greet students at the door with a happy 'Good morning Beulow's' greeting, introduce former students as former residents of Beattieville, when picking up students from lunch ask all Beulows to line up, before specials remind students that BT's are the best no matter what classroom or setting they are in, etc.
2. Use the class motto's often, not only do they reinforce the positive message but also strengthens the community/family spirit, for example if a class member does something good you may say 'you did a great job, you proved once again that BT's are the best,'etc. If a student receives recognition for an accomplishment, encourage others to congratulate them, reminding them of the class motto that 'When something good happens to one of us, something good happens to all of us.' This can be further reinforced by awarding marbles for the marble jar, again showing individual accomplishments contribute toward the greater goal for all.
3. Use the class song frequently, just a line or two, to get across a message. When they are having indoor recess, singing a line or two of "We are family" is a subtle reminder about class expectations without lecturing, students about to take a math quiz may be motivated by a few bars of you singing about how you want the 'Best of You' from them. It may seem a little goofy but it is very effective and again helps to remind them that they are part of something bigger than themselves.
4. Be prepared to reconvene family/town hall meetings on a regular basis to allow students to discuss problems, share ideas, or make suggestions. The more children are invested in the process, the more successful it is likely to be. It also provides a good opportunity to model how a democratic society works and to model how to respectfully discuss differences of opinion and make compromises. The meetings will work in different ways depending on your style, the age of the children, and the dynamics of the class. You may need a system to ensure that only one child contributes to the discussion at a time (e.g. only speak if you are holding the rubber duck), you may want to allow pre-written contributions to the discussion for students who have difficulty speaking in front of a group (whether caused by nerves, speech impediment, slow processing speed, fear of being judged for their opinion, etc)
5. Constantly reinforce your class family/community values through your own actions, statements, catch phrases, and interactions with others. Don't lose sight of the fact that you are molding the citizens of tomorrow, what kind of world do you want to live in?

Step 2 Celebrate our differences

I have included several lessons below, providing you with an element of choice depending on your personal preference, age of your students, interests of students, etc. These are provided purely as suggestions to guide or spark ideas with you. Tweak these ideas and make them your own, make them work for you.

Lesson idea 1

Objectives: Students will be introduced to concept of self-exploration CCCS: 9.2

Time: 45 minutes

Materials:

Different Strokes sheet

Colored pencils

Procedure/Activities:

Any age group

Begin lesson by discussing how people are different – think about physical appearance, strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, etc. Introduce the idea that we are going to do a few lessons on self-exploration, as when we better understand ourselves it helps us to grow. Students will complete the “Different strokes for different folks” sheet, where they will use a key to color different activities different colors depending on how they feel about them. When complete have students each hold up paper and compare, discuss how although all have same sheet and used same colors all look different illustrating the fact that they all have different opinions. Once complete, have students do scavenger hunt, challenge to find someone who has the same opinion as them on playing a musical instrument, a different opinion to theirs on working in a small group, etc. Use as an opportunity to interact with others in the class and get to know them better. Wrap up the lesson by discussing how this lesson emphasizes how we are all different, we all have different likes and dislikes, how each one of us could justify why we feel a certain way about say science or reading, but that there is no right or wrong answers, it is simply a matter of opinion and each person has the right to their own and we respect that.

Older students

Extend the lesson by encouraging a debate about the differing opinions about a specific topic, eg math. Use this as an opportunity to model rational and respectful discussion, how to listen to another’s opinion and respectfully make a counter argument if you disagree. Discuss how boring it would be if we all liked the same thing, how by working together maybe we can learn to enjoy some of the things that our classmates enjoy, see things from another perspective. We are all different, all have different opinions, and that is ok!

Note Asperger's students often have difficulty in making decision when asked a question where the response is rather vague, such as usually or sometimes. They tend to be very black and white and this type of response is gray. I have included the different strokes paper purposefully as this is a skill that they need to develop. Simply encourage them to think about a specific subject, and ask do they enjoy most of the lessons in that subject (= color it green), not enjoy most of the lesson (= color it orange), and if they really can't decide then color it yellow)

Assessment:

Monitor coloring activity and scavenger hunt, at the end of the lesson collect papers and review.

Monitor discussions

Lesson idea 2

Objectives:

Students will discover the importance of adding descriptive details to their work.

Describing physical appearance, compare and contrast themselves to others

CCCS: 3.2 A - D

Students will develop and use interpersonal skills for communication, decision making, and character development

CCCS: 2.2A, B, C

CCCS: 9.2

Time: Dependent on grade level (older children about 1 hour, younger do as two 45 min lessons)

Materials:

Mirror – one per child

Writing paper

Camera

Procedure/Activities:

Any age group

Without any preparation, students will be asked to take five minutes to think about how their physical appearance and write a brief description of themselves – expect very basic with minimal detail, all very similar. Collect and read the descriptions aloud to the students who will try and guess who wrote each paper based on the description. Discuss any confusion in matching description to students; ask how we could have avoided the confusion? Lead into a discussion of the importance of including vivid details. Next, students will be given mirrors and time to study their faces. Students will use their observations to add details to their description and write a detailed paragraph describing their appearance (use lost in the store scenario, how someone would describe them so store security can find them). Students will self-evaluate after comparing their two descriptive writing attempts. Repeat previous activity re matching description to student to further illustrate the importance of descriptive details. Use the two writing samples to start a discussion of how we are very different from one another, when we take the time to think about it. Discuss how not only were first writing attempts lacking in detail but were also boring to listen to as every description was so similar. Review how varied the final descriptions were, how unique everyone in the class is, although all in same grade, no two are truly alike. Take the opportunity to celebrate the differences by taking a photograph of each student, and create a 'Who am I?' bulletin board where people must match up descriptive paragraphs to correct photograph.

Assessment:

Review written descriptions for descriptive details.

Note If want to incorporate into a math lesson, collect data and create graphs re how many in class with each eye color, hair color, etc. You can also be used in lesson about fractions, percentages, probability, etc. Can extend LA lesson by adding writing activity for older students where students write a positive, descriptive essay about themselves, focusing on the features that like the most, make them feel good about themselves (assure that the essays need not be shared with classmates unless they choose to, this is all about them) One topic can provide LA lesson, math lesson, in addition to playing a role in community building!

Lesson idea 3

Objectives: Students will reflect on their personal strengths

Students will develop and use interpersonal skills for communication, decision making, and character development. Students will demonstrate critical life skills in order to be functional members of society. Students will be able to create presentation using appropriate software

CCCS: 2.2A, B, C

CCCS: 9.1 & 9.2A

CCCS: 8.1A

Time: 1 hour

Materials:

Computer for each student

<http://www.wordle.net/>

Procedure/Activities:

Review how the previous lesson demonstrated how everyone is different in appearance. Invite students to think about themselves and what makes them special. Explain how we all have strengths and weaknesses, and your aim is to help them build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Say, "Today we will focus on strengths." Write a list of 10 positive things about you, things that you are good at, things that you are proud of, things where you feel you excel, etc. Model for students as you create a list of your personal strengths (you can choose to keep it to with things to do with being a teacher or include things from your personal life too, depending on your comfort level) Next, have students each create a list of their 10 strengths. Review for content & spelling. Next, using <http://www.wordle.net/>, enter the words to describe yourself into website to create a Wordle, a word cloud design. Show how if add name multiple times it will appear bigger in Wordle. Show how to alter colors and style. Students will then use the computers to create a Wordle about their strengths, print out for bulletin board. Discuss how this activity gives them a way to visualize their strengths, it helps them to recognize and acknowledge them, and they deserve to feel proud of them. Again, discuss how each person's Wordle is unique, not only in appearance but in the strengths it contains, just like them. Next, create a class Wordle where we add every class member's strengths into the one Wordle. Discuss how different this class Wordle looks, how many strengths we have when we all come together. Use this to reinforce message that this represents how our strengths can come together to create something bigger and better than we could accomplish alone. Emphasize what a wealth of talent you have in your class community/family Create a bulletin board displaying the class Wordle, surrounded by the students individual Wordles. Discuss how you can keep this bulletin board up all year and students may refer to it if they need someone to help with a specific skill. It is also a constant visual reminder that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and that together we can accomplish greater things than we can alone.

Assessment:

Prior to typing into Wordle, review list for content and spelling. Monitor discussion at end of the lesson, have students share examples of situations where working together can accomplish more than one individual.

Note This activity can be extended to include the creation of a class Yellow Pages. Students each choose 2 or 3 things from their list of 10 that they feel that they are most skilled at, and create an ad for Yellow Pages advertising their services for this skill. Bind pages together to create class Yellow Pages and encourage students to use it to find an 'expert' when they need help. This has the advantage of providing many experts in the room, so you are not the only 'go to' person, but also is a great community builder as students learn to look on one another for help and not just you.

Lesson idea 4

Objectives: Students will develop and use interpersonal skills for communication, decision making, and character development. Students will demonstrate critical life skills in order to be functional members of society.

Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour

CCCS: 2.2A, B, C

CCCS: 9.1 & 9.2 A & D

Materials:

I feel good about myself when other people . . . think about it activity or writing prompt

Procedure/Activities:

Begin by reviewing previous lessons where students thought about differences of opinion, differences in appearance, and differences in strengths. Continue the discussion by asking students to take some time to think about what makes them feel good about themselves, then extend to discuss specifically what other people do to make them feel good about themselves. Make a list on the board of different suggestions that students make. Expect responses to include when people are friendly, share toys/snack, pay a compliment, ask to join in group activity, respectful, etc. Continue taking and noting suggestions until students run out of ideas. Next, ask students to review the list and to decide which of the suggestions on the list would make them feel good. Read each idea from the list and have the students show hands as to whether this would make them feel good about themselves or not. Keep tally of responses. Results likely indicate that the majority of students feel good in response to same behaviors. Discuss how you find it interesting that although we have already proven that they all look different, have different opinions, and have different strengths, they are all very alike when it comes to behaviors that make them feel good about themselves. Discuss how since we all want to feel good every day, we should use our feel good list to help create/modify our class rules. Use the feel good list as a guideline to draw up a behavior guide for your class. Create a poster to display on the wall year round.

Assessment:

Monitor discussions and guide as necessary.

Note A behavior guide is especially helpful to Asperger's students who need to be explicitly taught appropriate social interactions. It may be helpful to provide a child with Asperger's with a personal copy of the behavior guide that both you and they can refer to in times of social difficulties. Don't forget that a child with Asperger's do not pick up on social cues for everyday interactions so you may have to explicitly teach them how to act according to the guidelines. Be prepared to act out different scenarios to illustrate examples of expected behaviors. It may also help to create social scripts to help them understand common issues (more about this later)

Additional suggestions include a

- **Writing prompt – What makes you different (include +ve and –ve)**
- **Debate – bias based on peoples differences – looks, skills, challenges, fears, personality, etc. Is it ever ok?**

Lesson idea 1

Objectives:

Students will demonstrate character traits that are important in day-to-day activities in the home, school, and community. Students will identify ethical behaviors.

Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour

CCCS: 9.1B & 9.2D

Materials:

Procedure/Activities:

Begin by posing the questions “What is a disability?” Take responses from students and make a list on the board including different types of disability. Students will generally provide answers such as when a part of the body doesn’t work properly, when someone is blind, deaf, or confined to a wheelchair. Divide class into discussion groups, assigning each group a different disability. Have groups brainstorm difficulties that a person with that disability may have in your classroom and what modifications may help them to be successful. Encourage students to imagine themselves in that role. If they have trouble with imagination, take it a step further and have students try and find a specific book in their desk while blindfolded, follow oral directions while wearing noise cancelling headphones, or maneuver around the classroom and reach a shelf while seated in a chair. Have each group come up with a list of difficulties and propose ways in which they could help a person with that disability be successful. After 10 minutes, come together as a class and have groups share their findings. Lead a class discussion about how frustrating it must be for someone with that disability and how everyday tasks that we take for granted must be a challenge to them. Ask students what they would do if a person with a disability didn’t have anyone to sit with at lunch? Or what if they wanted to partner with them for a project? Discuss how just because one part of them doesn’t work as it should, they are still children just like them who have many of the same wants, needs, likes and dislikes as they do. Next, introduce students to idea that some disabilities are not as obvious. With many disabilities, we have visual clues to help us, e.g. wheelchair, hearing aids, white stick, and when we see these clues, we tend to change the way we act, we change our expectations of what that person can and can’t do and we alter our behavior to be more helpful. What if the part of their body that doesn’t work properly is their brain? They looked normal; there are no visual clues so how would you know they have a disability? Discuss. Introduce idea that there is disability commonly seen in the classroom where the children look just like everyone else but their disability means that they don’t understand normal social cues so they may act a little differently. Discuss, should we change our expectations of what that person can and can’t do and alter our behavior to be more helpful to them? Hopefully, you will get a unanimous yes! Next, tell students that in order to do that, first they need to understand more about the disability. Show **My Friend Ryan**. Afterwards, have students each write down five things that they learned from the movie. Now meet and discuss as a class what learned. Return to previous discussion re disability and how once we know someone has a disability we change our behavior to be more helpful and we change our expectations to accommodate their disability. Discuss what changes we could make to help someone with Asperger's. Make a list on the board (keep for next lesson when use as the basis for a poster and/or single typed cheat sheet for each student to have as a reminder that Asperger's is a disability too and how to help them assimilate into the class)

Assessment:

Monitor discussions and guide as necessary. Review brainstorming notes from group activity. Collect student papers re 5 things learned and review, level of knowledge gained will guide next lesson.

Note If student with Asperger's is aware of their diagnosis and does not mind being identified as such, you can involve them in an advisory role in this lesson, especially when it comes to brainstorming ideas of how to help. They are your resident experts on the subject and this will be a good opportunity for them to explain first hand some of the difficulties that they face. Not all children will be comfortable going public in this way, if this is the case with your student, simply use the lesson to reinforce to the rest of the class that they may not know whether or not someone they meet has Asperger's so they need to be cognizant of how they interact with people. If in doubt, assume that they do and follow the behavior guidelines.

Lesson idea 2

Objectives:

Students will demonstrate character traits that are important in day-to-day activities in the home, school, and community. Students will identify ethical behaviors.

Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour

CCCS: 9.1B & 9.2D

Materials:

Phrase cards

All About Asperger's for Kids ppt

Procedure/Activities:

Begin lesson by explaining that today we are going to think more about Asperger's. Using All about Asperger's for Kids PowerPoint, go through slides to explain more explicitly what Asperger's is and the difficulties it causes. Stop after slide 7 and ask students if they can imagine what it must be like to have Asperger's? Explain that you are going to do an activity to give them an idea of just how confusing it is when you don't understand facial expressions, tones of voice, and sarcasm. Bring two students up to the front of the class and give each a notecard with the phrase "Oh, that's great!" The first will tell the student to use an angry tone of voice and frown while saying the phrase, then the second will say the same phrase while sounding happy and smiling. Ask the class what each meant by what they said, what emotions was each conveying? How would they react to student 1? To student 2? Now you repeat the phrase with no expression or tone of voice and ask student's what emotion you are showing, are you happy and excited or mad and disgruntled? Ask students how they would react to you? Discuss how unsettling it is not to know if you are mad or happy. Repeat using phrase "You're hilarious!" one student smiling and sounding friendly, then another sounding bemused and disgruntled. Discuss what would you do next if the response you got was reaction 1? Reaction 2? You say it without expression and now ask students to choose what to do next. Discuss how annoying it would be if the person was meaning reaction 2 but you took it to be they thought you were funny so you continued. Or how weird it would seem if they meant reaction 1 and you said sorry and walked away. Ask students to imagine what life must be like to live with that kind of confusion all the time. Have students divide into 3 groups and role play using the cards. Students will then brainstorm things that they could do to help avoid some of the confusion for a student with Asperger's, students will create a list. After 10 minutes, reconvene as a class and discuss the conclusions that they have reached. If necessary, add to their list to ensure includes suggestions such as avoid sarcasm, use words to explain emotions clearly rather than expressions and body language. To wrap up the lesson, ask students to take suggestions that could have avoid any confusion over the first phrase use, "Oh, that's great" Hopefully you will get suggestions such as adding more words to the phrase such as "Oh, that's great, I am so happy for you" or "Oh, that's great, now we are going to get in trouble" Tell students to be more aware of the hidden signals in their communication and to try and help a child with Asperger's understand it by communicating with words as well as actions. Add new knowledge to list of things can do to help a student with Asperger's

Assessment:

Monitor discussions and guide as necessary. Review brainstorming notes from group activity (create a list for future lessons)

Lesson idea 3

Objectives:

Students will demonstrate character traits that are important in day-to-day activities in the home, school, and community. Students will identify ethical behaviors.

Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour

CCCS: 9.1B & 9.2D

Materials:

All about Asperger's for Kids ppt

Procedure/Activities:

Begin lesson by sharing remainder of All about Asperger's for Kids ppt. Discuss additional knowledge learned re what you can do to help someone with Asperger's to succeed. Review and update previous list re what individual students can do to help. Students will decide on which points they believe to be the most important and these will form the basis of a poster and/or individual cheat sheet for each student to have as a reminder of Asperger's friendly behavior. The form that this takes will vary depending on the age of your students, anything from an Asperger's Bill of Rights for a class of older students to a series of drawings or people with thought bubbles with what to say or do for younger students. Wrap up the lesson by allowing students to share their posters.

Assessment:

Monitor discussions and guide as necessary. Monitor creation of posters for accuracy, appropriateness, and sensitivity of posters and guide as necessary. Review completed posters

If you are willing to invest time the first few weeks of school getting to know your students, getting them to know one another, building your community, and helping the children to develop empathy for others, you will reap the benefits for the rest of the year. You will get that time back many times over and save yourself a lot of stress and headaches too, it is well worth the time invested to create a classroom that runs like a well-oiled machine. That however does not mean once we flip the calendar to October, we can forget all about community building. Like any smooth running machine, it needs regular maintenance. The list below gives a few ideas for ongoing maintenance to ensure that your classroom continues to run smoothly and provide an Asperger friendly environment.

- Suggestion box

Providing a suggestion box in the classroom gives students an easy way to send messages to you about anything that is concerning them, whether it is to do with curriculum content, rules, a bullying situation, or a personal problem. While I would still encourage students to talk to you about a problem, some are not comfortable doing so, some don't want to be seen as a snitch on a bullying situation, or are just too embarrassed or shy, etc. A suggestions box allows anyone to share a concern, and allows them to remain anonymous if they choose.

- Partners

A common problem for students with Asperger's in the classroom is that no one wants to work with them on collaborative projects. If students pick partners, then students with Asperger's are usually always last to be chosen, often amid looks and eye rolls from whomever they end up being partnered with, or they end up working alone. Can you imagine this happening day after day, year after year? It decimates self-esteem! For some projects you may want to assign partners but for others develop a system for assigning partners.

For example, cell phone partners – give each child cell phone outline (see attachment) Students will have each team up with other students to 'exchange numbers' e.g. Suzy and James will put each other's names on speed dial 1, Suzy and Johnny will do so on speed dial 2, etc. When complete, you can then use cell phone paper for partner work, e.g. call your partner on speed dial 1 and get to work etc. Obviously, you may want to set a few speed dials yourself for each child to ensure appropriate mix of abilities. You will also have to set out some ground rules for exchanging numbers activity – can only have person's name one time in phone, not allowed to say no, roll eyes, make a face, etc. Be sure to keep a copy of each child's phone paper on file as children will lose them.

Alternative strategies for picking partners – have class set of popsicles sticks, student name on each one, choose sticks to create partners. Clock partners – similar to cell phone idea but based on clock. Pick a card – make a class set of notecards cards with matching stickers on every set of two cards, put cards face down on a desk and have children pick a card and then find the person with the matching sticker. Sometimes it is nice for children to be able to choose their own partner, if choose to do so, allow quiet children, Asperger's children, the outliers to choose partners first so that they are not left till last as usual.

- Caught You Being Good system

Caught You Being Good is a simple way to reward children for showing good behavior choices, including but not limited to being kind, helpful, respectful, sympathetic, supportive, etc. Any child caught making good behavior choices is awarded a Caught You Being Good ticket (see attached template). Any child being awarded a ticket has their photograph taken and displayed on the Caught You Being Good bulletin board for the month. In our school, this is run as a schoolwide program by the guidance counselor, but could equally be run at the classroom level. Children receiving awards may earn special privileges such as first choice of class job for the week, go green monitor in the lunch room, class buddy for new student or a student in need of support, or even a homework pass. It is a simple system that really encourages positive behavior; a homework pass can be a powerful motivator for even the toughest child.

- Circle of friends system

The philosophy behind the Circle of Friends System is that if exclusion from peers leads to increased behavioral problems, then an increase in that individual's inclusion within his peer group will likely improve their behavior. A circle of friends is a group of peers who volunteer to be part of a support group for an individual who is facing challenges. The group's initial meeting should be with the assistance of the teacher who will set the basic ground rules re their purpose, confidentiality, expectations, tact, etc. The group will discuss their aim, e.g. to help Suzy make and keep friends, and to stop her outbursts in class. The group will explain to Suzy why they volunteered and why they want to help her. As a group, students will discuss positive things about Suzy and things she needs help with, and then they will brainstorm strategies that may help. As a group, decide on which strategies will be tried, how each member of the group will help, and what their boundaries are. The circle of friends will meet on a weekly basis to revisit goals and progress. The circle of friends approach has many advantages, such as integrating the child with their peers allowing a greater feeling of inclusion and acceptance. The child is more likely to respond to suggestions of peers; their solutions are generally simpler and more geared towards the way they think than those of an adult. The peers learn about problem solving, empathy, good listening skills, and team work. It is also beneficial to have multiple sets of eyes being on the lookout for potential issues and helping to avert them rather than it all falling on the classroom teacher. The circle of friends provides a great opportunity for the child with difficulties to see appropriate behavior modeled by their peers. If you think about it, when teachers teach social skills, students learn to communicate with adults, but with peer mediation the children learn to communicate with other children! To learn more about the concept of the circle of friends, check the link below.
<http://www.inclusive-solutions.com/circlesoffriendsarticle.asp>

- Social coach

If you have a child with an Asperger's diagnosis in your class, then in addition to being the classroom teacher, you are also in part a social coach. In an ideal world, school districts would have a social coach to assist students with social difficulties. Good social skills = long term happiness, social skills = quality of life and yet school just don't see it as a priority. Studies of elementary school children show that positive social relations influence their intellectual, communicative, interpersonal, and emotional development. However, if districts are not addressing this need, then you have a choice, step up and help the child gain the skills they need to succeed, or sit back and allow the child to continue to struggle. Remember that children with Asperger's do not pick up social cues simply by observing others, they must be explicitly taught. In your

classroom, model good social interactions. Express to students your appreciation for appropriate behavior with an explicitly explanation as to what they did well, e.g. “I like how you waited for a break in the conversation before talking, thank you for being polite and not interrupting” or “I love how you are showing good listening skills by keeping quiet, paying attention to what Suzy is saying, and looking at her face as she speaks.” All children can benefit from a frequent reinforcement of the rules of appropriate social interactions, but Asperger’s students need it! If a child with Asperger’s is not acting appropriately, e.g. says something insensitive to another student, do not address this with the classic teacher response of ‘how do you think that made Suzy feel?’ Often, children with Asperger’s have difficulty recognizing different emotions within themselves, combine that with their lack of understanding of facial expressions and tones of voice, they really do not have any idea of how their actions make someone else feel. You need to clearly explain to them what they did wrong, why it is wrong, and give them a suggestion of an alternative way to handle that situation in the future (also see social scripts below) A classic example happened in my classroom just last week, a student got a math question wrong to which a child with Asperger’s responded, “No offense, but that answer was just dumb.” When confronted about this, the child did not see any problem with what he had said as in his mind it was not offensive since he prefaced it with the phrase no offense. The next few minutes were spent in quiet explanation with the child explaining that the phrase ‘no offense’ does not give you free rein to say anything you pleased! There are many great books available to help you learn more about how to help a child with Asperger’s develop social skills, two I can personally recommend are *Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome and Social-Communications Problems* by Jed Baker and *The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism* by Temple Grandin and Sean Barron. You can also check out the following link for additional ideas, although written for parents you can easily modify for the classroom. <http://voices.yahoo.com/parents-teaching-social-skills-child-aspergers-2227526.html?cat=25>

- Social stories

Social stories are used to teach social skills to children on the autism spectrum. They usually describe an everyday situation and can be used to prepare a child for a new situation, a change of routine, or how to handle a specific social situation. The premise is that the child will read through the social story multiple times so that when the real world situation arises, they are familiar with it and already have some strategies prepared to handle it. For more information, use the following link, <http://autism.healingthresholds.com/therapy/social-stories>. You can also check out the book *The Social Skills Picture Book: Teaching Play, Emotion, and Communication to Children with Autism* by Dr. Jed Baker

NJ CCCS

Standard 9.1 Career and Technical Education

ALL STUDENTS WILL DEVELOP CAREER AWARENESS AND PLANNING, EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ,AND FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE.

9.1 B. Employability Skills

1. Describe and demonstrate the importance of personal and interpersonal skills.
2. Identify positive work habits and attitudes necessary for home, community, and school.
3. Identify reasons for working as part of a team.

Standard 9.2 Consumer, Family, and Life Skills

ALL STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE CRITICAL LIFE SKILLS IN ORDER TO BE FUNCTIONAL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

9.2 A. Critical Thinking

1. Recognize and define a problem.
2. Plan and follow steps to make choices and decisions.
3. Identify and access print and non-print resources that can be used to help solve problems.
4. Demonstrate brainstorming skills.

9.2 B. Self-Management

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between personal behavior and self-image.
2. Recognize and build upon personal strengths.
3. Accept criticism and respond constructively.
4. Recognize personal likes and dislikes.
5. Demonstrate steps to deal with stress and conflict.

9.2 C. Interpersonal Communication

1. Develop positive social skills to interact with others.
2. Select and use language appropriate to the situation.
3. Develop skills for accepting self and others through awareness of different cultures, lifestyles, and attitudes.
4. Practice steps for effective conflict resolution.
5. Work cooperatively with others to accomplish a task.

9.4 D. Character Development and Ethics

1. Demonstrate character traits that are important in day-to-day activities in the home, school, and community such as trust, responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, and citizenship.
2. Conduct a cooperative activity or project that addresses a character trait.
3. Identify ethical behaviors in the home, school, and community.
4. Explain a person' s responsibility to obey the laws and rules.

Standard 2.2 Integrated Skills

ALL STUDENTS WILL USE HEALTH-ENHANCING PERSONAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND LIFE SKILLS TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY, ACTIVE LIFESTYLE.

2.2 A. Communication

4. Demonstrate effective communication and listening skills.

2.2 B. Decision Making

1. Explain the steps to making an effective decision.
2. Discuss how parents, peers, and the media influence decisions.

2.2 C. Planning and Goal Setting

1. Develop a wellness goal and explain why setting a goal is important.

2.2 D. Character Development

1. Explain that a person' s character and values are reflected in the way the person thinks, feels, and acts.

2.2 E. Leadership, Advocacy, and Service

1. Act as a leader and a follower.
2. Identify factors that lead to group success and help solve group problems.
3. Motivate group members to work together and provide constructive feedback.
4. Demonstrate respect for varying ideas and opinions.

Standard 3.2 Writing

ALL STUDENTS WILL WRITE IN CLEAR, CONCISE, ORGANIZED LANGUAGE THAT VARIES IN CONTENT AND FORM FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AND PURPOSES

- 3.2 A. Writing as a Process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, postwriting)**
- 3.2 B. Writing as a Product (resulting in a formal product or publication)**
- 3.2 C. Mechanics, Spelling, and Handwriting**
- 3.2 D. Writing Forms, Audiences, and Purposes (exploring a variety of forms)**

Standard 3.3 Speaking

ALL STUDENTS WILL SPEAK IN CLEAR, CONCISE, ORGANIZED LANGUAGE THAT VARIES IN CONTENT AND FORM FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AND PURPOSES

- 3.3 A. Discussion**
- 3.3 B. Questioning (Inquiry) and Contributing**
- 3.3 C. Word Choice**
- 3.3 D. Oral Presentation**

Standard 3.4 Listening

ALL STUDENTS WILL LISTEN ACTIVELY TO INFORMATION FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES IN A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS.

- 3.4 A. Active Listening**
- 3.4 B. Listening Comprehension**

Standard 8.1 Computer and Information Literacy

ALL STUDENTS WILL USE COMPUTER APPLICATIONS TO GATHER AND ORGANIZE INFORMATION AND TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

- 8.1.4 A. Basic Computer Skills and Tools**