

Social Skills Training for Students with Disabilities: Does It Work?

At-a-Glance:

Research shows that a lack of appropriate social skills training for people with disabilities contributes significantly to this population's high unemployment rate. This study reviewed 920 research articles about social skills training methods for youth with disabilities and learned that providing social skills training with fidelity and consistency is key to success for students.

Key Findings

- Social skills touch almost every part of getting and keeping a job, including interviewing, productivity expectations, learning how to do tasks, and interacting with co-workers.
- Randomized treatment and control groups studies were more effective at identifying the best social skills training methods than other types of research.
- Social skills training was most helpful for young people who had autism, emotional and behavior disorders, and intellectual disabilities.
- Method and setting matter. Youth who received direct instruction within the secondary school setting were more successful in their job seeking and retention efforts.
- Social skills training for youth with disabilities can help increase peer acceptance and help youth feel connected to their communities.

Putting It into Practice

- Provide social skills training with fidelity and consistency in each student setting.
- Target training on specific social skills to be more effective at helping youth find and keep jobs.
- Tailor job-related social skills training to specific groups' needs. One size does not fit all.
- Focus on social skills training that will help youth interact more easily with their general education peers.

- Provide consistent and continuous social skills training for secondary students.
- Help teachers adapt their social skills training to students with different disability types.
- Consider in-person training; computer-based social skills instruction was found to be the least effective method.

More About this Research

This meta-analysis considered only those research studies that included a social skills training modality, youth populations with disabilities, a randomized controlled study, information on job-related performance, and that were published in peer-reviewed journals. They analyzed information by category, including: disability type, job outcomes, training delivery methods, training settings, and types of instruction.

Learn More

Park, E., Kim, J., & Kim, S. (2016). Meta-analysis of the effect of job-related social skill training for secondary students with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 44(1), 123-133. doi:10.3233/jvr-150785

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