

# Social Communication Survey

Social communication requires a complex set of skills that work together so that people can engage in meaningful interactions. Generally, these skills develop over time with the assistance of family, friends, teachers, and others that model, advise, and teach the expectations of social engagement and social communication. However, youth with disabilities often require specialized support and instruction that focus on the elements of social communication.

The Social Communication Survey is an informal tool to help a team better understand the social communication needs of youth. A team that knows the youth can use the Social Communication Survey to discuss and identify areas of strength and challenge for youth. This information can be helpful to share with speech-language pathologists, counselors, and other professionals that assess and support the youth.

Gaining an understanding of the youth's current level of awareness and skill in social communication is an important first step to identifying needed support and instruction. Speech-language pathologists, teachers, and counselors may use a variety of formal tools for assessment. Teams that know the youth well can use the informal Social Communication Survey to gather information that can enhance the formal assessment process.

## Instructions

- 1. Review.** Read the description of each of the elements of social communication included in the survey. Clarify the meaning with all team members so that everyone understands the element and the connection to social communication and social interaction.
- 2. Consider.** Discuss the strengths and needs that the youth has for each of the elements. Share observations or experiences in different types of environments (home, school, community).
- 3. Summarize.** Describe the group discussion using the table included below. Provide examples if needed to help explain the strength or the need.
- 4. Prioritize.** Review the strengths and needs of each of the elements. Suggest a level of importance that should be placed on providing instruction, support, and intervention to address the identified needs of the element.
- 5. Share.** Share the information gathered by the survey with team members or other professionals that teach and develop social communication supports for the youth.

## Elements of Social Communication

Social communication requires being aware of each of the following elements, making decisions about how to use the element, as well as understanding what others are communicating using the element.

- **Style:** Being able to use different styles of communication. Deciding on the type of communication that is expected in the social situation. Various forms of formal, casual, or informal communication may be used based on the situation and relationship with the social partner. Consider the different styles expected for the following: family, teachers, classmate, doctors, friends, clerks, police officers, strangers, or neighbors.
- **Body Language:** Being aware of the messages that are being communicated when using arms, hands, posture, etc. Being aware of other people's body language cues and understanding what they mean and how to respond. This includes intentional actions and the unconscious actions that one uses.
- **Gestures:** Understanding gestures used to communicate such as waving "hi" and "bye". This also includes using and following gestures such as pointing or reaching.
- **Eye Contact:** Deciding how much eye contact may be expected in the social situation and how to use it. Being aware of what may be communicated by using too little or too much eye contact. When the expected eye contact is uncomfortable, can the person manage the interaction to avoid giving a wrong impression?
- **Facial Expressions:** Being aware that facial expressions communicate a great deal of information. Understanding how others may interpret facial expressions. Being able to read the facial expressions of others and correctly interpret the message that is being sent. Consider if the youth is aware of how their face looks when they are feeling various emotions. When a person's facial expression may communicate something different from what they feel, can the person manage the situation so as not to give the wrong impression?
- **Tone of Voice:** Awareness of one's own tone of voice. Being aware that the expected tone and volume of voice can change for different social situations. Understanding how to modulate the tone and volume of one's voice.
- **Begin/End Interaction:** Understanding how and when to enter a social interaction based on the type of situation. Understanding how to end or leave a social interaction and the impression it can leave on others.
- **Proximity:** Being aware that distance between people has meaning. Understanding what the expected comfortable distance between people is for the social situation and social relationship. Consider differences such as standing next to friends or standing in a line in the store or sitting next to family members or sitting next to a stranger.
- **Topic:** Awareness of what topics are comfortable and appropriate to discuss based on the social situation. Being able to communicate about sensitive topics in a way that is thoughtful. Consider topics that include personal hygiene, intimate relationships, or illness and who should be involved in these conversations and who should not.
- **Perspective Taking:** Being able to view a situation from another's viewpoint. Insight into how others may feel, and how this could differ from your own thoughts or feelings. Includes understanding how your actions or reactions may affect others.

Element	Strengths	Needs	Priority
Style			High Medium Low
Body Language			High Medium Low
Gestures			High Medium Low
Eye Contact			High Medium Low
Facial Expressions			High Medium Low
Tone Of Voice			High Medium Low
Begin/End Interaction			High Medium Low
Proximity			High Medium Low
Topic			High Medium Low
Perspective Taking			High Medium Low