

Social Communication
Informal Dynamic
Social Thinking®
Assessment Strategies



Michelle Garcia-Winner
SLP, MA-CCC
www.socialthinking.com

1

Related Diagnoses

- ASD levels 1-3 / Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism (HFA), PDD-NOS
- Social Communication Disordered
- Semantic Pragmatic Disorder
- Nonverbal Learning Disorder (NLD)
- Hyperlexia
- Tourettes Syndrome....Fragile X....
- ADHD + OCD = Asperger Syndrome?
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Where does Bipolar fit in?

2

Do all students receive information the same way?

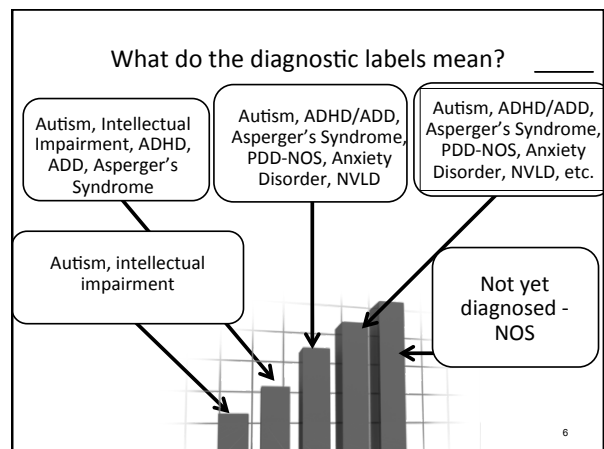
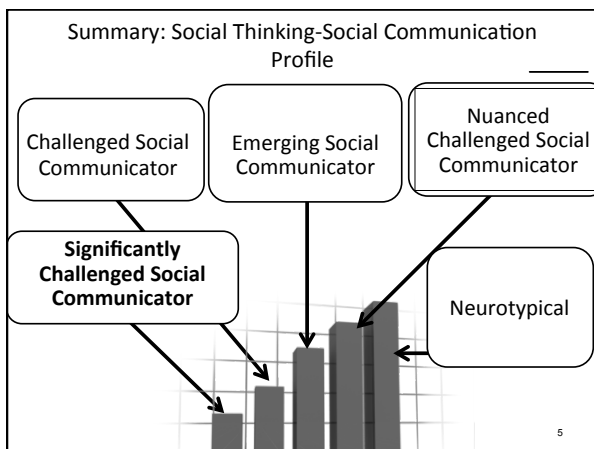
Introducing the concept of our Social Radar System which is part of our social attention

3

Social Radar- Social Attention System

- Exploring the spectrum of social attention or social radar strength
 - One’s perception of the hidden rules and social situations effects how they interpret and then respond to it.
 - The Social Radar intuitive abilities, impacts life long learning of social information and related social skills.

4



The ST-SCP and life

- We only prognosticate from 3rd grade and beyond.
- This is to help with planning learning needs to assist with transition into adulthood.
- If your student/child is solidly functioning in a specific profile level in 3rd grade, they will most likely stay at that level across their life. However, they will improve compared to themselves!

7

Use of the ST-SCP for all

- Where a student falls on the ST-SCP is based largely on neurology possibly with help from early intervention.
- As we determine a person’s social functioning level this helps us to figure out where to begin in treatment.

8

Continued ST-SCP information

- The goal is not to jump a student across the different social learning categories; we do not find this is realistic. Instead we teach at the level a student functions.
- The goal is to help a student improve compared to him or herself.
- We also can work with the family on setting realistic long term treatment goals as we can prognosticate general outcomes for students once they are about 9-10 years old.

9

What do the terms “mild” and “severe” social skill problems mean?

10

ST-SCP connection to the DSM 5:

11

12

Exploring the different levels through the **Cascade of Social Functioning**

- The purpose of the cascade is to demonstrate a synergistic relationship between many of the different core symptoms we observe in our students.
- It is based on our clinical observation.

13

Cascade of Social Functioning- Observe these aspects across tasks

1. Situational awareness
2. Social Attention to people in the situation.
3. Social self-awareness
4. **Interpreting** information (inferring/predicting vs literal) and related responses.
5. **Summarizing concepts** or over-focus on details and related responses
6. Do they have world-based/generalized anxiety or more social anxiety?

14

We observe trends in how weaknesses or strengths cluster:

1. The less aware of the situation
2. Less aware of the people within the situation
3. The less aware of how their behaviors are perceived by others.
4. The more literally they interpret information and respond to it in that manner
5. The more detailed the information they share without hooking it back to a concept
6. The more their anxiety is about what is happening around them or on their schedule.

15

Cascade of Social Functioning : Social and Situational Attention

- How efficiently do they recognize the situation or context?
- How efficiently do they account for what they know or don't know about the people in the situation?

16

Cascade of Social Functioning : Social Self-Awareness

- Do they compare themselves to others?
- Are they able to talk about their strengths and weaknesses?
- Can they understand what they need to do based on what others are doing?

17

Our ability to interpret meaning impacts our ability to:

To decipher meaning from any type of human interaction by seeking to:

- Stay flexible to others thoughts and plans
- Understand there are two codes of language-figurative and literal.
- Interpret what people mean by what they say.
- Interpret what people mean by what they do.
- Engage in reading comprehension of social literature.
- Read others intentions (tricks, desires, etc.)

18

Ability to summarize and respond to concepts vs stuck on details

Are they able to efficiently and effectively sort out the basic concepts from the details:

- when interpreting language based information?
- when interpreting visually based information?



19

Conceptual abilities allow us to:

- “See the forest for the trees”
- Guide us to derive meaning by observing objects and people in space and time. This information allows us to figure out the social expectations in specific contexts.
- Filter out attending to details that would distract our attention away from the context.

20

Continue – Conceptual thinking (gestalt) allows us to:

- Engage in activities that require conceptual thinking such as:
 - Summarizing events or information
 - Using main ideas to organize our written expression and support this information with related details.
 - Keep our conversational language connected to each others in a manner that makes sense to all.

21

All elements of the cascade lead to:

Perspective taking which fosters our ability to relate well to most others.

Perspective taking is a mixture of:

- Theory of Mind
- Central Coherence
- Executive functioning

22

Perspective taking skills allow for us to:

1. Share space together effectively
2. Play well with others
3. Engage reciprocally and mindfully in conversations
4. Empathize emotionally
5. Emotionally self-regulate
6. Produce narrative language - share our information in a manner that provides clarity to the listener.

23

How do they emotionally respond to their environment?

- Social Anxiety?
- World based anxiety?



24

World based anxiety appears as: _____

- Insistence on sameness
- Stress and lack of self-regulation when needing to deal with change in schedules, routines, food choices, people, etc.
- Monitoring the time closely to make sure the event stops exactly at the time it is supposed to stop.
- Struggling with concepts related to maturity (puberty, “becoming an adult”, etc.)

25

World Based Anxiety _____

- Emerging, Challenged and Significantly Challenged Social Communicators.
- Treatment needs to focus more teaching social learning systems to help them prepare for transitions and change (social stories, picture planning boards, etc)

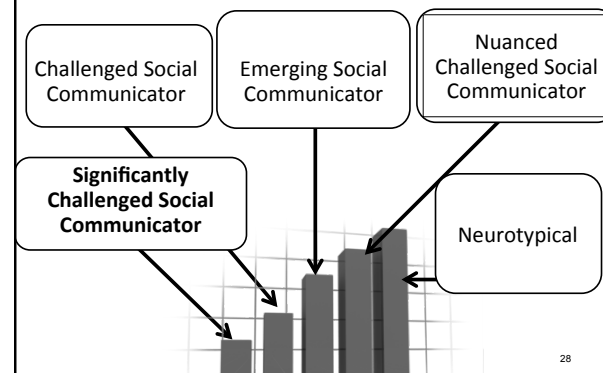
26

Social Anxiety appears as: _____

- A marked contrast in one’s ability to socially relate to others based on whether they feel comfortable or uncomfortable with that person or situation.
- Some people demonstrate overt social anxiety by actively withdrawing from situations which make them feel socially anxious.
- Other people look calm but avoid interacting making excuses for their lack of participation but they don’t appear to be highly anxious at the time.

27

Summary: Social Thinking-Social Communication Profile _____



28

How the Significantly Challenged Social Communicator (SCSC) may appear in school _____

- Language development is affected (make sure they do not have more pure apraxia)
- Not naturally attentive to others (but they like people).
- **EXTREMELY WEAK INTERPRETIVE SYSTEMS**
- **EXTREMELY WEAK EXPRESSIVE SYSTEM**

29

Continue SCSC _____

- Communication primarily for wants and needs or to discuss perseverations.
- Require very close assistance from adults (small class or 1:1 aide).
- Demonstrate talent in certain areas (puzzles, reading decoding).
- Make sure the child has augmentative communication assessment to assure he is not “locked in” before deciding they are SCSC.

30

The person who functions as a Significantly Challenged Social Communicator has a very significant cognitive and language based learning challenges. Social Thinking is not typically effective with this group.

These students DO continue to make progress with more concrete/functional lessons.

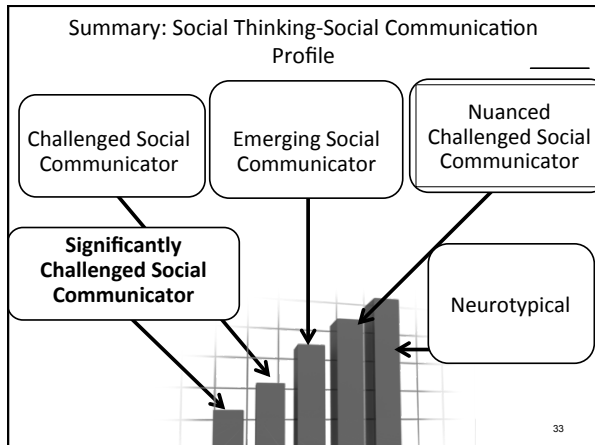
31

Prognosis of the SCSC

Will continue to make gains compared to themselves across their lives with continued support, however they will require close assistance across their lives.

They likely will not become “fully independent” in their life and job management skills.

32



33

Challenged Social Communicator (CSC)

- Emerging into language by elementary school
- Still may be echolalic with new learning.
- Can become sensory overwhelmed quickly.
- Really struggle to learn as part of a larger group – paraprofessionals usually help with focus on specific school work assignment.
- Difficulty attending to peers

34

Continued CSC

- Very poor awareness to what is going on around them if it is not something they are focused on naturally.
- Very poor self-awareness
- Very literal!
- Very focused on details on not concepts
- These weaknesses lead to poor narrative language.
- Can be very anxious about transitions – change.
- Usually struggle discriminating between real verses pretend.

35

CHALLENGED SOCIAL COMMUNICATORS CAN HAVE SOCIAL LIMITATIONS AND CAN HAVE MANY TALENTS

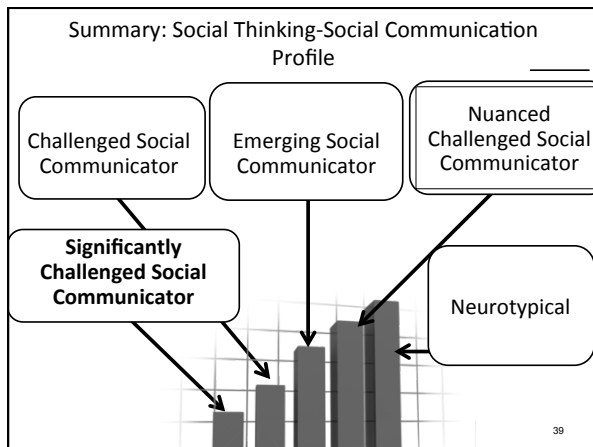
36



Prognosis of CSC

- Lack of critical thinking skills (over focus on details and very, very literal) will make it difficult for them to pursue academic coursework in higher education (junior college/university).
- Need adaptive functioning and vocational training focus!

38



39

How Emerging Social Communicators (ESC) may appear at school

- Usually moderate to mild language problems.
- Early language development showed pronoun confusion!
- Very limited emotional vocabulary.
- Aloof, poor self-awareness!
- Weak attention span in a group, but like to be in a structured, supportive group.

40

Continued ESC

- Anxiety about how the world works is more prevalent than social anxiety (how people think about me)
- Very slow to process the different thoughts
- Very limited stranger danger
- Very limited ability to process the motive/intentions of persons around them (e.g. Richard: will you marry me?)

41

Continued ESC

- Moderately to very literal; poor inferencing which impacts reading comprehension of literature.
- Poor narrative language: weak written expression.
- Poor learners of social expectations in their natural environments: parents have to teach literally every thing to them outside of technical information their brain learns easily.

42

Prognosis of the ESC

Will make significant progress with supports/continued teachings, and maturity will continue to be their friend. They will often live with “guided independence”, meaning they can do much for themselves but still require a person in the background to help with critical thinking.

43

Types of treatments for ESC-CSCs

Blended:

- ABA
- Relational Development
- Sensory
- Social Thinking gets added after basic joint attention is established and language has become more spontaneous.
 - Once students can learn from language rather focus on learning language.

44

Teaching for the CSC & ESC Social Thinking

- Lessons are basic introductions to social thinking:
 - Establish joint attention consistently
 - I have a thought
 - You have a thought
 - We manipulate each other’s thoughts
- Lessons taught slowly over time.

45



ESC USUALLY NEED US TO TEACH SOCIAL RULES AS A BASE FOR THEIR SOCIAL LEARNING

46

Exploring the difference between rules based social teaching and nuance based social teachings.

Social Rules:

1. Applied at all times in all relevant situations.
2. Lend them selves to a script.
3. Can be easily observed.
4. Can be easily measured.
5. Can be easily practiced.
6. Can be memorized.
 - Examples:
 - a. Give eye-contact
 - b. Say “hi”
 - c. Take turns

47

Button up or Button open?

Rule follower
Rigid thinking
Reading comprehension challenges?

48

People do not understand that bright folks with master’s degrees can have compelling life skills, social and job issues that they can’t just “fix” themselves.

49

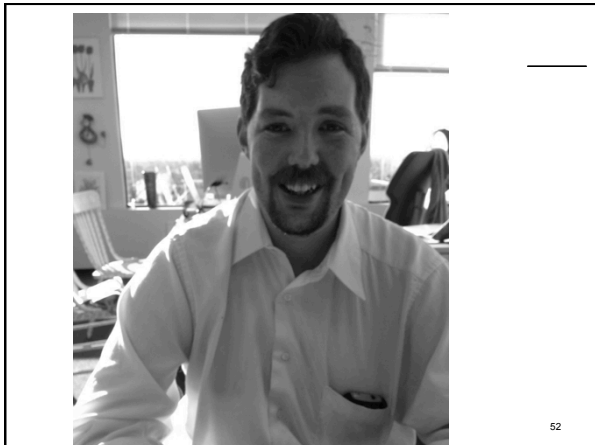
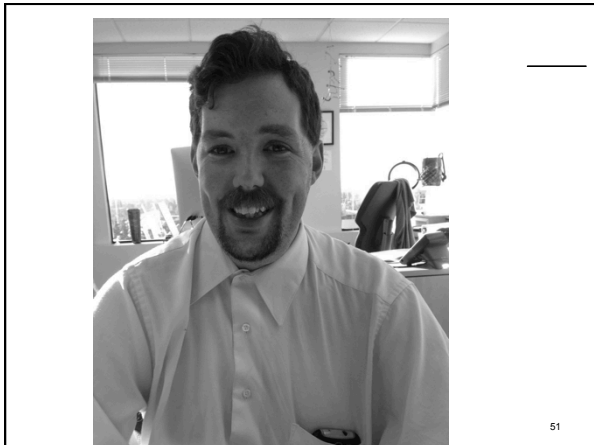
Lesson on two types of truth -

You want to make a different impressions based on the situation.

If you are advocating for services for yourself, you want them to see your challenges.

If you are interviewing for a job, you want them to see your strengths.

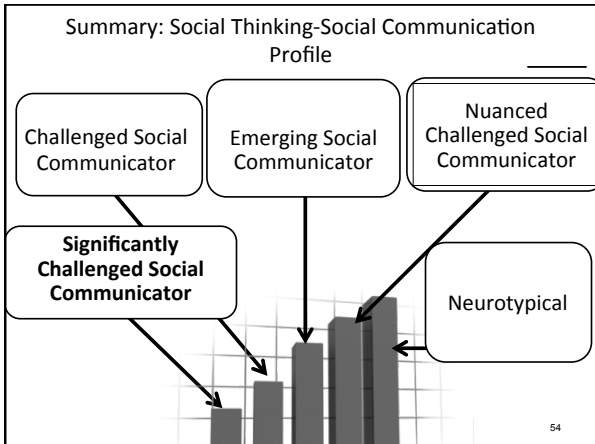
50



“I did wear my new shirt all buttoned up as per suggestion” (to help people understand his autism).

(...And for job interview, where he wants to blend in) “Thought I'd let you know, I'll have my shirt with the top button open”.

53



Social Nuance: Dynamic and Synergistic

Apply the basic principles that guide the social rules subtly by:

- a. Observing the situation.
- b. Observing the people in the situation and ascertain what you may know about the people.
- c. Interpret their motives for relating.
- d. Attend to the type of discourse and topics discussed.
- e. If you choose to join in to the situation, decide how you want people to interpret you to choose your social action plan. .

55

Socially nuanced skills are:

1. Transient / Adaptive:
2. Based on the context and not just the people in the situation and the
3. A result of social problem solving
4. Require keen observation to interpret meaning accurately.
5. The measurement of success related to the “skill production” has to consider the accuracy of ones’ social interpretation (thinking) and not just the social behavioral skills alone.

56

Young Nuance Challenged

- Can be over-focused on details
- Weak at playing cooperatively, often hate to lose want to go first most of the time.
- While they understand other’s have thoughts and feelings, they struggle to understand how that information applies to them! (“It’s not fair!”)
- Can be quite rigid and many are perfectionistic.

57

Nuance Challenged Social Communicator (NCSC)

- Solid technical language skills
- Students may have an awareness of others but not at the deeper intuitive analytical level.
- Students may be able to cognitively discuss how others feel when they are outside of a spontaneous interaction, but are not able to track and respond to another’s perspective while actively interacting.

58

Continued NCSC

- Perspective taking can be looked at as an executive function skill.
- Some have great academic thinking with poor academic output.
- Generally they have the “invisible disability”
- Likely to have social anxiety and related depressions.

59

A business man’s “ah ha”!

- As you recall, I was planning to get people’s attention by making a little noise. The first person I tried it on is deaf in one ear and has partial hearing in the other. Much to my surprise, as soon as I appeared in her doorway, she looked up. We had a brief conversation about the visit she just made to her son at college... It went well. The second person I tried it on has full hearing and immediately looked up when I stood in his doorway. Maybe the noise isn’t even necessary. Maybe all I need to do is appear at the edge of someone’s vision and if they’re available, they will see me. I will experiment more with it when I have the next opportunity, which will probably be tomorrow morning. Tomorrow I will try it without noise and see if that works.

60

On the next day...

- I've never thought about this at this level prior to working with you. The eye contact thing wouldn't have occurred to me if it had not been for you and Reah (girlfriend). Thank you. Lots of growth and lots of work these days.

61

Prognosis of NCSC

- Best chance to live fully independent lives.
- But given their invisible disability, they also have more chances of not making it and will have no support systems to call on. This group receives no state or federal funding for their disability.

62

Sub-group: Resistant Social Communicators

- We tend to think of them as opposition defiant disorder or simply as having behavior problems.
- Look deeper and you may well find social learning challenges.
- Learn more about them in our book:



63

Free Article

Free article: Social Thinking-
Social Communication Profile
Under "What's Social
Thinking?"
www.socialthinking.com

64

Exploring the Informal Dynamic Social Thinking Assessment

65

The concept of being social is a
judgment not a test score.

66

Standardized tests explore content but what we are trying to figure out is communicative competence.

Frith, U. (2012) Why We Need Cognitive Explanations of Autism The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology. DOI:10

67

Standardized tests do not do well assessing executive function skills related to a student's social self-awareness and self-regulation.

68

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Creating a plan while integrating the many resources and adapting one's social behaviors to carry out that plan in pursuit of specific social goals.

69

Some examples of social executive function skills in face-to-face interactions.

1. The ability to create social goals and implement plans to reach those goals.
2. Emotional self regulation
3. In context, we consider others' emotions and perspectives conveyed through language, body language, tone, gestures, etc. in contrast to our own emotions and perspectives in order to respond within milliseconds – 2 seconds.

70

What can you expect from traditional measures?

- Acceptable to excellent IQ
- Often verbal IQ is higher than performance
- Acceptable to excellent achievement scores
- Acceptable to excellent Basic Language Scores
- Often pragmatic test scores are in acceptable range for schools.

71

What is "assessment of social competencies"

1. Can be used to qualify a student for services and determine his or her progress in treatment over time.
2. Assessment tasks can also be done at any time by parents or professional to check in with how a student processes and responds to specific functional information to help avoid assuming a student understands a concept.

72

Why are these tasks called Dynamic?

- Every student will get through the task but we also want to explore:
 - What types of scaffolding do they need?
 - What type of verbal or non-verbal cues do they need?
 - How long does it take them?
 - What does this tell us about their more natural abilities?

73

Assessment often begins with the handshake...



74

Voice Prosody/Pitch

- While it may not be a treatment priority to work on self-regulation of voice issues – those who are pursuing treatment can benefit from apps:
 - Voice Meter
 - Voice-0-Meter

75

Social Scenario Picture



76

Social scenario picture example


From Emotion and Expression Cards
www.proedinc.com
 (speech and language materials)

77

Sequence Pictures

www.socialthinking.com
www.speechmark.com





Social Thinking.com

Explains the assessment tasks and basic treatment concepts

79

Peer-Driven Observational Assessment

- Must observe during unstructured play (recess/ lunch, football)
- Must observe interaction with peers in the classroom (group time vs. solitary work)
- Compare these observations with interactions you have with student 1:1

80

Report Writing

Add a sentence stating something to the effect:

“Given the dynamic nature of social communication, there are virtually no standardized tests available which provide qualitative information about the complexity of interpreting and responding to communicative interaction, verbal and non-verbal in the moment of communication.

81

...Therefore this examiner used Informal Social Thinking Dynamic Assessment techniques to better understand this student’s ability to integrate and demonstrate social concepts as they relate to social and social academic functioning.”

82

After This Big Dump of Information:

7 Messages

to Summarize Our Day...

83

1st Message Social Thinking and related social skills are not in addition to the standards, they are the infrastructure for the standards!

Without social knowledge, learning is trapped in rote based learning and responses.

84

2nd Message Professionals, paraprofessionals and parents need to work together to build a child's social thinking and related skills.

It is not just the job of the person running the "social group".

85

3rd Message Different persons on the treatment team have different roles in the treatment process.

86

4th Message We need to address Social Thinking for all kids every day.

Teach clear strategies to help the kids learn how to think more abstractly not only about the curriculum but about their relations with others.

87

5th Message Students are complicated.

Difficulties with social cognition co-exist with a number of other problems.

88

6th Message You will not be able to determine these students' problems from interpreting standardized test scores!

Sorry!

89

7th & FINAL Message YOU CAN HELP.

The Social Thinking Program may need to begin with just you, but it counts!

90



- Blogs, free articles, research
- Conferences
- Products
- Assessment & Therapy
- Mentor / Internship Training
- Newsletters



facebook.com/socialthinking

91