



The Hidden Curriculum

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“The Hidden Curriculum” is a term, which describes a set of rules or guidelines that are often not directly taught, but are assumed to be known by the general population. This includes idioms (e.g., “*It’s raining cats and dogs*”, metaphors (“*the assignment was a breeze*”), and slang (“yo”). The Hidden Curriculum tends to be the social cues that most people “just pick up” or learn through observation or subtle cues, including body language for example: entering an elevator and turning around facing the door and floor numbers. The Hidden Curriculum differs across age, gender, who you are with and cultures.

Children and adolescence with Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) or High Functioning Autism (HFA) often violate social rules without being aware that they have done so. What most individuals “pick up” in the first couple of days of the school year is what should be taught to those who do not understand The Hidden Curriculum e.g., which teachers will tolerate lateness or tardiness? Which teachers give homework? Which teachers place value on final exams?

Benefits:

- Many children and adolescence with AS or HFA fail to integrate into settings because of a lack of Hidden Curriculum skills, not academic skills. In order to be successful in an integrated setting your child requires the ability to: listen, follow directions, stay on task, know how to ask for help, get started on a task and finish a task on time. These are Hidden Curriculum skills that can be taught in a home setting using the suggested strategies below.

Prerequisites:

- Determine The Hidden Curriculum pertaining to the environment your child will be participating in. (e.g., what are the hidden rules governing social functions). Information can be obtained from educational staff, community organizations and school publications (e.g., the yearbook or school newsletter)

Preparation:

- Once The Hidden Curriculum is identified, assess your child’s knowledge in key areas. There are many things which may need to be explicitly taught to your child that typically developing children learn instinctively (e.g., raising your hand and waiting for the teacher to call you instead of yelling out)
- In short, The Hidden Curriculum must first be identified and then your child’s level of understanding of it must be assessed, only then can information be provided to your child to fill in the gaps

How to Teach:

Suggested Strategies to Teach the Hidden Curriculum

1. Seek-Observe-Listen-Vocalize-Educate (SOLVE): An empowerment strategy for individuals with social-cognitive challenges



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2. **Social Narratives:** Provide support and instruction by describing social cues and appropriate responses to social behavior and teaching new social skills (most common social narrative is the Social Story™)
3. **Cartooning/Comic Strip Conversations:** Comic Strip Conversation (Gray, 1995)
4. **Power Cards:** A visual aid that uses a child's special interest to help him/her understand social situations, routines, the meaning of language, and The Hidden Curriculum (Gagnon, 2000)
5. **Social Autopsies:** Helps children with social problems and understanding their social mistakes (Bieber, 1994)
6. **Incredible 5-Point Scale:** Helps individuals with social-cognitive challenges learn to better understand their emotions and reactions to events in their lives and, eventually, independently modulate their responses. The scale is unique in that it can be used as an obsessional index, a stress scale, a meltdown monitor, and so on. Using the scale, individuals are taught to recognize the stages of their specific behavioural challenges and learn methods to self-calm at each level (Buron & Curtis, 2003)
7. **Video Modeling:** Observing a videotape of themselves or others engaging in a task or completing an activity

Common Difficulties:

- Each of the strategies (listed above) can be effective in teaching The Hidden Curriculum, however regardless of the technique used, it is important to understand that these essential rules and manners must be taught and become a part of the repertoire of the individual with social-cognitive challenges.

References

Smith-Myles, B. (2004). *The Hidden Curriculum*. Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Example:

Washroom Rules

1. Always wash your hands after you use the washroom.
2. Make sure that you flush the toilet after you use it.
3. Always close the door when using the washroom.
4. When using the toilet, go in the toilet, not on the toilet. If you go on the toilet by mistake, wipe the toilet seat off with unused toilet paper.
5. If it's a public washroom, pull up your pants before coming out of the stall.
6. Do not talk about what you did in the washroom.
7. For girls: Learn which toilets you can sit on and which toilets are better to squat over, or use a paper seat cover if available. It is generally a good idea to squat over or place a paper seat cover on toilets in public places or those that don't appear clean.
8. For boys: Don't talk to others around you when using the washroom.
9. For boys: When using the urinal, instead of pulling your pants down, just unzip them, pull out your penis, urinate and put your penis back in your pants and zip them up.
10. For girls: Do not talk to the person in the next stall, unless she is a friend of yours.
11. When entering the washroom, do not look through the separations between the stall doors to see if a stall is empty. Look under the stall door, towards the bottom of the toilet. If you see someone's feet, use a different stall.