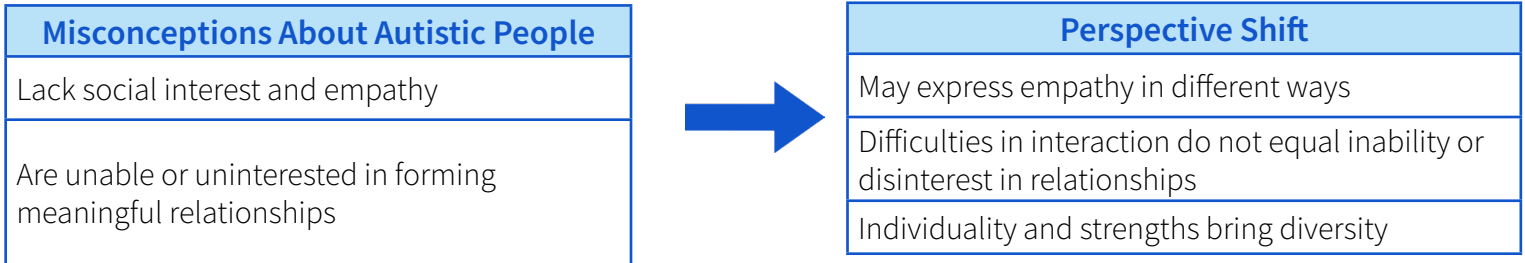


### Why Support Social Skills?

Developing and maintaining connections can be challenging for individuals with autism. Some autistic people may want help building relationships with others. However, there are many misconceptions about the social skills of autistic people.



### Evidence-Based Practices for Supporting Social Skills

The DNEA Social Skills training outlines many effective practices to support autistic youth who want to engage more with their peers:

Practice	Description
Visual Supports	Concrete cues that are paired with, or used in place of, a verbal cue to provide the individual with information about a routine, activity, behavioral expectation, or social skill; can include pictures, written words, objects, arrangement of the environment, visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts.
Task Analysis	A process to break down and teach complex or chained social skills to increase independence. For example, greeting a peer, taking turns in a game, or selecting a place to sit with peers at lunch.
Social Narratives	A short story or explanation, written from the perspective of the individual. Used to teach a specific social skill or explain a social situation.
Video Modeling	The use of technology to provide a visual model of a targeted social skill or social situation; can include peer, self, and point of view modeling.
Structured Play Groups	Small, predetermined group of children including children with and without disabilities who routinely meet to engage in structured routines and defined play activities. Facilitated by adults who use other evidence-based practices to support the use of skills and behavior during playtime.
Peer-Mediated Interventions	Process by which peers are trained in how to engage autistic individuals, ages pre-K to high school, in positive and meaningful social interactions that promote social and other skills.

Additional resource guides at: <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>

Suggested citation: Garrity, N., Fletcher, A., Mallory, S., Oosterhous, K. & CDS DNEA Team (2022). *DNEA resource guides for professionals. Supporting social skills*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism.

### Before Instruction

- **Obtain** permission from the autistic individual and/or caregivers.
- **Meet** with the autistic individual and/or caregivers to learn more about their personal goals.
- **Consider** sensory differences and other personal/environmental variables as it may be necessary to address them as well.
- **Complete** an ecological inventory by:
  - Learning about the environment that the individual wants to access.
  - Identifying the sub-environments associated with that environment.
  - Determining the activities required to participate in each sub-environment.
- **Plan** your approach for supporting the autistic individuals' goals by using the strategies on page one.

### An Important Note on Masking

People socialize in a variety of ways. When autistic individuals are taught that there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to use social skills during social interactions, they also may experience significant emotional distress because they feel they are pretending to be someone they are not. This is often referred to as masking or camouflaging.

### During Instruction

- **Collaborate** with the autistic individual and/or caregivers to identify personal goals. Include other team members and the family, if appropriate.
- **Plan** for generalization across multiple settings, situations, and people, including at home.
- **Collect** data on target skill(s) and conduct regular check-ins with the autistic individual and/or caregivers to assess progress in meeting their goal.
- **Modify** the approach as needed, based on data and feedback from the autistic individual and/or caregivers.

### The Autistic Perspective

When working on social skills with an autistic person it is essential to consider the autistic perspective. Social skill preferences and needs are personal and can vary from what society expects. Those in the "helping fields" should consider the unique characteristics and personality of the person they are supporting; it is not appropriate to use a one-size-fits-all approach. Professionals should not force social skills norms and should strive to provide a person-centered environment making self-advocacy the focus. It's essential to consider individual needs and preferences; people are social in different ways and can use a variety of avenues to engage in social relationships. For example, some people prefer time alone and don't want to be around many people, while others enjoy being the center of attention. Some people enjoy virtual interactions, while some people are more comfortable in person. These preferences can also change from day to day. Take the time you need to understand the specific concerns of the person you are working with – listen and be thoughtful and responsive.

Additional resource guides at: <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>

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