FREE PLAN FOR DAY PROGRAMS AND DSP SUPERVISORS

Social skills group plan for adults with developmental disabilities

A free 12-session plan for a weekly social skills group run by a day program or a residential provider: how to set up the group, one skill each week laid out the same way (goal, model, practice and role-play, real-world practice and a note for the DSP), a practice card and a progress sheet. Adults choose to join and choose their own goals. This is for teaching and recording by staff; it is not a clinical assessment or treatment, and anything clinical goes to the person's behavior support professional or clinician.

Group details

Group name	
Day, time and place	
Start date (with the year)	
Facilitator	
DSP support partners	
Behavior support professional or clinician to ask	
Adults in the group	

Group agreements

Read these aloud in week 1 and ask the group to change them. Write the group's own on the lines.

1. We choose to be here. Anyone may pass on any activity, and anyone may leave.
2. One person talks at a time, and we listen.
3. What is said in the group stays in the group, unless someone is not safe.
4. We ask before we give feedback, and we say what went well first.
5. There is more than one good way to say hello, make a friend or end a chat.

How to set up the group

Who comes, and how they join	Adults who want to join, and only those. Say what the group is, ask in plain words, and let each person say yes, no or "not now." Joining is a choice, and so is leaving. (CMS HCBS settings rule, 42 CFR 441.301; NADSP Code of Ethics)
Size	Four to eight adults is our suggestion. Add one support person for each four group members, so every pair has someone close by who can help only if asked. (ours)
Length and rhythm	One hour a week for twelve weeks, the same day and time and, where you can, a room in the community such as a library meeting room. If you must cancel a week, tell people why and when you will meet next. (ours)
Roles	A facilitator who leads the hour; DSP support partners who model, role-play and help only if asked; the adults, who decide what to work on; and the person's behavior support professional or clinician, named for anything clinical. (NADSP Competency Areas)
Each person's own goals	Before week 1, sit with each person and write one to three goals in their words, from what they have said they want in their person-centered plan: a job, a friend, a trip, ordering their own lunch. The plan's required content includes the person's strengths and preferences. (CMS HCBS settings rule, 42 CFR 441.301; NADSP Competency Areas)
Consent and choice	Read the group agreements aloud in week 1 and ask the group to change them. Anyone may pass on any activity. Notes follow what you saw and heard and are shared as the person agrees and your organization's policy and the law allow. (CMS HCBS settings rule, 42 CFR 441.301; NADSP Code of Ethics)
How you will teach	Explain why the skill matters, show it, let each person practice it, and give feedback that names what went well. Those four steps are the ones described for teaching performance skills to staff, and we use the same order with adults. (Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012); AFIRM modules (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute))
What the research says, honestly	Reviews find fairly consistent evidence for group formats with autistic adults, with the most robust evidence reported for one manualized program (PEERS for Young Adults), and less evidence for adults who also have an intellectual disability. Treat this plan as a way to organize teaching and practice, and watch what works for each person. (Atkinson-Jones and Hewitt, critical review (2018); Dubreucq and colleagues, meta-analysis (2022))

Who does what

The adults in the group	Choose to join, name their own goals, decide which practice to try in the community and what to share, and may pass or leave at any time. (CMS HCBS settings rule, 42 CFR 441.301; NADSP Competency Areas)
The facilitator	Plans the hour, explains and models the skill, keeps time, makes sure everyone gets a turn, and gives specific feedback. (Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012))
DSP support partners	Role-play, practice alongside, and help in the community only as each person asks. Write down what they saw and heard, in the person's words. (NADSP Competency Areas; NADSP Code of Ethics)
The behavior support professional or clinician	Named for anything clinical: a behavior support plan, a health or sexuality question, a safety concern. This plan does not assess or treat anyone.

One 60-minute session

0 to 5 min	**Welcome.** Greet, one word or one sentence about how the week went, read the group agreements. Anyone may pass.
5 to 10 min	**Look back.** Volunteers tell what they tried last week and what happened. Acknowledge the trying.
10 to 20 min	**Why and how, then a model.** Say why the skill is useful, give three steps, and show it: the facilitator and a DSP role-play it once well, and once with a different choice. (Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012); AFIRM modules (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute))
20 to 40 min	**Practice.** Pairs and threes role-play with cards the adults chose. Everyone practices; the facilitator and DSP partners move around. (Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012))
40 to 50 min	**Feedback.** Ask first if the person wants feedback. Start with what went well, in specific words, then one thing they could try. They decide. (Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012))
50 to 57 min	**Real-world practice.** Each person picks one thing to try this week, where, and with whom, and writes or says it on the practice card.
57 to 60 min	**Close.** One thing I will try. Thank everyone. Staff write the progress sheet afterward.

My goals, in my words

One page for each adult, filled in with them before week 1 from what they say they want, and from their person-centered plan if they wish to share it. Staff write only what the person says.

Name or initials	
I choose to join this group	
Why I want to come	
What I want to be able to do	
Sessions I most want	
People I want to tell what I learn	
Something I do not want to practice	

From goals to sessions: an example

Invented. Dana R. is an invented adult.

In the person's words	Sessions that fit	In staff notes
"I want to talk with people at my job."	Sessions 2, 3 and 7	Dana wants to chat with coworkers at lunch.
"I want to order my own food."	Sessions 5 and 8	Dana wants to order at a counter on his own.
"I want a friend to see movies with."	Sessions 6 and 11	Dana wants to invite someone to a movie.
"I get messages from people I don't know."	Session 10	Dana wants to know what to do about them.

Session 1: Hello, and our group agreements

Goal	Choose a way of greeting people that you like, and agree how this group will work.
Model	The facilitator and a DSP greet each other four ways: a wave and “Hi,” “Good morning, Sam,” a handshake or fist bump, and “I’d rather not shake hands, but hello.” Then show how a greeting changes for a coworker, a neighbor and a friend.
Practice and role-play	In pairs, try each greeting and keep the one you like. Practice it on someone you do not know well. As a group, write the agreements: we listen, anyone can pass, what is said here stays here, we ask before giving feedback.
Real-world practice	Greet one person this week, at work, at the program or in a shop, the way you chose. Tell the group next week how it went.
A note for the DSP	Offer the choices, and never require eye contact or touch. A greeting is a choice.

Session 2: Starting a conversation

Goal	Start a short conversation about something you are interested in.
Model	Show three openers: a comment on what is around you (“The bus is late today”), a question (“What are you working on?”), and something you noticed (“I like your jacket”). Show noticing whether the other person turns toward you.
Practice and role-play	Role-play in pairs using topic cards the group made. Each person picks an opener. The partner sometimes answers warmly and sometimes says “I’m busy right now,” so both are practiced.
Real-world practice	Start one conversation with someone you chose, for example a coworker at break. Write who, where and what you said on the practice card.
A note for the DSP	Let the person choose the topic and the listener. Name what you saw: “You asked a question.”

Session 3: Keeping a conversation going

Goal	Ask a follow-up question and share one thing about yourself, so a conversation has turns.
Model	Show two chats about the same topic. In one, one person talks the whole time. In the other, they ask, share, ask: “What did you do this weekend?” “I went fishing. What about you?”
Practice and role-play	Two-minute chats in pairs on topics people picked (food, music, sports, a show). A turn card passes back and forth. Afterward, ask what felt good and what did not.
Real-world practice	Have a conversation with one person that has two turns each, ask, share, ask. Note who it was and where.
A note for the DSP	Some people prefer short chats or messages, and that is a valid style. Notice interests that carry a conversation.

Session 4: Ending a conversation, and leaving one

Goal	End a conversation kindly, and leave one you want to leave.
Model	Show lines for ending: “I need to get back to work. It was nice talking to you.” “I’m going to go now. See you tomorrow.” Show noticing that the other person is ready to go. Then show leaving when you want to: “I’ve got to go. Bye.”
Practice and role-play	Role-play a whole conversation, start to end, in three turns. Then practice a polite exit with a coworker, a neighbor and a person who keeps talking.
Real-world practice	Use a goodbye line at the end of one conversation this week. If you want to leave a conversation, try the exit.
A note for the DSP	Make sure the person has a way to leave any conversation, including one with you. Leaving is a skill and a right.

Session 5: Asking for help, and saying what you need

Goal	Ask for help clearly, say “no thanks” to help you do not want, and say when you did not understand.
Model	Show three steps: get the person’s attention, say what you need, say thank you. Lines: “Excuse me, can you show me where the batteries are?” “I didn’t catch that. Can you say it again?” “No thanks, I’d like to try it myself.”
Practice and role-play	Situation cards (can’t find an aisle, a machine is not working, an instruction is unclear). Pairs role-play, and the helper sometimes says “One moment.”
Real-world practice	Ask one question for help in a store, at work or on the bus. Write down what you said.
A note for the DSP	Wait before stepping in. Help with words only if the person asks. This is self-advocacy in practice.

Session 6: Making plans and inviting someone

Goal	Invite someone to do something, and answer an invitation with yes, no or maybe.
Model	Show inviting (“Want to get coffee Saturday at 2?”), accepting, declining kindly (“Thanks for asking, I can’t Saturday”), and suggesting another time (“How about Sunday?”). Say what, where and when, and how you will confirm, by text or call.
Practice and role-play	Role-play invitations to activities the group picked: a movie, a game, a walk. Practice saying no to an invitation and hearing no from someone.
Real-world practice	Invite one person to do one small thing, or plan an outing together as a group. The group chooses the place.
A note for the DSP	Help with rides, money and times only if asked. Hearing “no” is part of friendship.

Session 7: Working with others at work or volunteering

Goal	Handle common exchanges at a job or volunteer role: asking about a task, taking feedback, breaks and small talk.
Model	Show asking a supervisor to repeat directions, “Is this how you want it done?”, answering feedback with “Thanks, I’ll do it that way,” and a short chat at a break.
Practice and role-play	Role-play scenes from the group’s own jobs and volunteer roles. For anyone not yet working, use a role they would like to try. Someone plays the supervisor.
Real-world practice	Use one of the skills at work, at a volunteer role or at the program, and tell the group how it went.
A note for the DSP	Connect it to the person’s job goals in their plan. Ask the person, and the employer or job coach, before practicing at the workplace.

Session 8: Out in the community: stores, buses, restaurants, appointments

Goal	Do the small exchanges of a community errand: ordering, asking staff, paying, checking in.
Model	Show ordering at a counter, asking a store employee a question, answering “Do you want a bag?” and “Anything else?”, and checking in at a front desk.
Practice and role-play	Set up the room as a café and a front desk. Take turns as customers and staff. Practice answers to questions you did not expect.
Real-world practice	A group outing, or an errand each person picks. Each person does one thing on their own list and reports back.
A note for the DSP	Let the person lead and stand back. Time in real places is part of community life under the HCBS settings rule.

Session 9: Handling disagreement

Goal	Say you see it differently, listen, look for a middle, or step away and ask a trusted person.
Model	Show “I see it differently,” “Can we find something that works for both of us?” and “I need a break. Can we talk later?” Show telling a trusted person when someone pressures you or you feel unsafe.
Practice and role-play	Role-play small disagreements the group picks: which movie, who sits where, a shared kitchen, a schedule. Practice taking a break and asking a trusted person.
Real-world practice	Notice one small disagreement this week and try one skill. Or tell the group about one you would like to practice.
A note for the DSP	If anyone is hurt or threatened, follow your organization’s safety policy; that is never practice. Anything about a person’s behavior support plan goes to their behavior support professional.

Session 10: Phones, messages and online safety

Goal	Use messages and social media the way you choose, and keep yourself and your money safe.
Model	Show a friendly message to a friend. Show what to keep private: passwords, your address, bank details, photos you would not want shared. Show a message that asks for money, and the line “I’ll check with someone I trust.”
Practice and role-play	Sort invented messages into “reply,” “ask someone first” and “block and report.” Write a message and a reply. Practice saying no to a request for money.
Real-world practice	Check one privacy setting with someone you trust, and send a message to a friend.
A note for the DSP	Support the person’s privacy and choices, and read nothing unless asked. Follow the person’s own plan and your organization’s policy.

Session 11: Friendship, dating and boundaries

Goal	Know how friendships and relationships grow, what consent and boundaries mean, and how to end something that does not feel right. This session is for those who choose it.
Model	Show how both people show interest, asking “Do you want to?”, accepting a “no,” saying “I’m not comfortable with that,” and ending a friendship or relationship kindly. Use plain words and the group’s agreements.
Practice and role-play	Scenario cards: a friend who asks for too much of your time, someone you would like to know better, someone who says no. Role-play asking, hearing no and setting a limit. Anyone may pass.
Real-world practice	No assignment. Anyone who wants to may bring a question to a person they trust, or look into a community group.
A note for the DSP	Opt-in only, and private. Follow your organization’s policy and the person’s plan. Send health and sexuality questions to the person’s clinician or health provider, and keep your own beliefs out of it.

Session 12: Looking back, and what is next

Goal	Look back at what you tried, choose the skills to keep, and write your next goals in your own words.
Model	The facilitator shares a short invented look-back and fills in a blank “My goals, in my words” page, out loud.
Practice and role-play	Each person tells one thing they did that worked. The group gives specific compliments. Each person writes or says one to three next goals. The group decides whether to meet again and what to change.
Real-world practice	Pick one practice for next month and add it to the next person-centered plan meeting, if the person wants.
A note for the DSP	Finish the progress sheet. Bring the person’s own words to their next plan meeting only if they want to.

Practice card

Each person fills in a card at the end of each session, with help if they ask for it. Print as many as you need.

Practice card 1

Skill I will try	
Where	
With whom	
When	
I will say or do	
How it went (my words)	

Practice card 2

Skill I will try	
Where	
With whom	
When	
I will say or do	
How it went (my words)	

Progress sheet

One sheet for each adult. The person's own goal goes first, in their words. Staff write what they saw and heard, with the day and time, and keep the sheet where the organization's policy says.

Name or initials	
Group and start date	

Session and date	My goal for this skill (my words)	What I tried, where, with whom	What staff saw and heard	My next step

A progress sheet, three sessions filled in

Made up, for teaching. Dana R. is an invented adult in an invented group that meets Tuesdays at 10:00 AM from March 2, 2027. The staff notes show what was seen and heard.

Session and date	My goal for this skill (my words)	What I tried, where, with whom	What staff saw and heard	My next step
2. Tue March 9, 2027	"Talk to people at lunch."	Asked Lee at the break room table, "What are you working on?"	Dana used an opener from the cards at 12:10 PM. Lee answered and asked him back. Dana said, "That went okay."	Ask Lee a follow-up question on Thursday.
5. Tue March 30, 2027	"Order my own food."	Asked the café worker for a straw, then napkins.	Dana asked for the straw after a card in his pocket and for the napkins with no card. He said "No thanks" when offered help carrying the tray.	Order a drink and a sandwich on Friday.
6. Tue April 6, 2027	"A friend to see movies with."	Invited Mo to a Saturday 2:00 PM movie. Mo said, "Can't this week."	Dana said, "How about next Saturday?" Mo said yes. Dana wrote the time on his phone.	Text Mo the theater name by Thursday.

Write what you saw and heard, not a label

Made up for teaching; the names are invented.

Part	Instead of	Write
Goal	*"Needs social skills."*	Dana said he wants to chat with coworkers at lunch.
A pass	*"Refused to participate."*	At 10:20 AM Dana said, "I'll pass on this one," and watched from his chair. He joined the next role-play.
A skill	*"Poor eye contact."*	Dana greeted his partner with a wave and "Hi, Lee," the greeting he chose in session 1, and Lee said hi back.
Help	*"Needs prompting for everything."*	Dana asked the café worker for a straw after a reminder card, and asked for napkins with no card.
A choice	*"Refused the outing."*	Dana said, "Not today, Thursday?" and the group agreed on Thursday at 1:00 PM.
Words	*"Inappropriate comments."*	Dana said, "Nice jacket," to Lee, and Lee said thanks. Next time he will ask Lee a question too.

Before you start: a ten-point check

☐ Everyone in the group chose to join, and was told they can leave.
☐ Each person has one to three goals in their own words.
☐ The group agreements are written, read aloud and open to change.
☐ There is a facilitator, and one support partner for every four adults.
☐ The room is accessible and the time works with people's jobs and rides.
☐ Practice cards use adult topics the group picked.
☐ A behavior support professional or clinician is named for anything clinical.
☐ Staff know to write what they saw and heard, in the person's words.
☐ You know where records are kept and who may read them.
☐ Session 11 is offered as a choice, and anyone may pass.

For training leads: set up the group in six steps

1. **Talk with the adults.** Ask who wants to join and what they want from it. Write one to three goals in their words, and check them against the person-centered plan.
2. **Choose the room, the day and the people.** Pick a weekly one-hour slot, four to eight adults, a facilitator and one support partner for every four. Name the clinician or behavior support professional to ask.
3. **Read the plan and the practice cards.** Read all twelve sessions. Make the topic cards with the group, using what they care about.
4. **Run week 1.** Greetings and the group agreements. Pass out the practice card. Staff set up each person's progress sheet folder.
5. **Run weeks 2 to 12.** Use the same hour each time. After each session, staff fill in one row of each person's progress sheet from what they saw and heard.
6. **Look back in week 12.** Each person chooses what to keep and writes their next goals. Bring their words to the next plan meeting if they want.

Where each part comes from

Read November 15, 2026. The sessions, the layout, the examples and the worked sheet are Special Learning's; the quoted lines are as published. None of these organizations has reviewed or endorsed this plan. PEERS for Young Adults (UCLA) is a manualized program named as an option to look at; none of its content is used here.

1. **CMS HCBS settings rule, 42 CFR 441.301.** Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Title 42, section 441.301(c): the person-centered service plan and the qualities of home and community-based settings (c)(4)(i) through (v). https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-IV/subchapter-C/part-441/subpart-G/section-441.301
2. **NADSP Code of Ethics.** National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), The NADSP Code of Ethics (revised 2026), tenets Person-Centered Supports and Relationships and Social Roles, as published on nadsp.org. https://nadsp.org/resources/the-nadsp-code-of-ethics/
3. **NADSP Competency Areas.** National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), The NADSP Competency Areas, including Area 1 Participant Empowerment and Area 13 Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships, as published on nadsp.org. https://nadsp.org/resources/competency-areas/
4. **Atkinson-Jones and Hewitt, critical review (2018).** K. Atkinson-Jones and O. Hewitt, "Do group interventions help people with autism spectrum disorder to develop better relationships with others? A critical review of the literature," British Journal of Learning Disabilities 47(2), 77-90 (abstract, University of Oxford Research Archive). https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3646a22b-70e1-4e93-828f-3f76d7450213
5. **Dubreucq and colleagues, meta-analysis (2022).** J. Dubreucq, F. Haesebaert, J. Plasse, M. Dubreucq and N. Franck, "A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Social Skills Training for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder," Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 52(4), 1598-1609 (abstract, PubMed). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33963965/
6. **AFIRM modules (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute).** AFIRM (Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules), Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: 28 evidence-based practice modules, including Modeling, Video Modeling, Social Narratives and Social Skills Training, written for learners from birth to 22 years. https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/modules/
7. **Parsons, Rollyson and Reid, behavioral skills training (2012).** M. B. Parsons, J. H. Rollyson and D. H. Reid, "Evidence-Based Staff Training: A Guide for Practitioners," Behavior Analysis in Practice 5(2), 2-11 (2012), on the instructions, modeling, rehearsal and feedback steps of behavioral skills training for staff. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3592486
8. **UCLA PEERS Clinic.** UCLA PEERS Clinic, Semel Institute: a manualized, evidence-based social skills program (PEERS for Young Adults and others); named here as an option to look at, and nothing of its content is used in this plan. https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers
9. **Federal Trade Commission, romance scams.** Federal Trade Commission, "What To Know About Romance Scams," consumer.ftc.gov. https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/romance-scams

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One next step: if your staff support autistic people, the Level 1 ABA Online Training Course for groups introduces autism and behavior-support foundations. $99 per learner · One-time purchase · Each learner has 12 weeks of access from the day they activate their code · Free 7-day trial of the first 2 sessions.

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