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## Body in the group activities

During December, I like to keep things festive, but simple. And I like to use the same theme/book as many groups as I can. Gingerbread Man is a theme I use every year with my younger students. We can work on history retelling, vocabulary and perspective by taking skills. Check out these activities I did last year to work on improving the prospect of taking using gingerbread man cookies. I find that the holiday season opens up opportunities for teaching perspective making and thinking for others. Today, I wanted to share a body in the group class that I did with my 3-5th Special Day Class students using a gingerbread man hunt. What's a body in the group? The body in the Group is a vocabulary term used by the Social Thinking Curriculum to explain how people prove that they are part of a group conversation or social situation when they physically keep their body within walking distance of the group. When students work on group projects, or speak together in the playground, they show that they think about team members by placing their bodies nearby. By teaching our students the concept of having their bodies in the group, we build their social consciousness. They can better understand how to show others that they think about them only from where their body places. What's the brain in the group? You've never been to a place where your body sits physically in a group, but your mind is far, far away. Not sure why I only thought about my last department meeting? Hmmmmm ..... We can teach our students the importance of having both their bodies and their minds in the group in order to show others that they think of them. We show others that our minds are in the group, contributing relevant questions and comments on the subject to what the speaker is talking about. This concept affects our students in academic and social situations too! If our students don't have their minds on the team, they lose a lot of information in the conversation. Usually, when my student's mind isn't on the team, they make off-topic comments. They will also only talk about their interests. When our brain is out of the group, it makes people feel like we're not listening to them. Which translates as rude behavior. How can you work on the body team in a gingerbread man hunt has your school ever done a gingerbread man hunt during December? The teacher usually tells students that there is a gingerbread man on the loose around the school. Students should read the information left by the gingerbread to figure out where he went. It's a very fun activity that fits well with the book! I decided I wanted to do this activity with my K-2 and 3-5 SDC classrooms. Teachers and staff helped with the activity. I printed a FREE gingerbread man hunt and bought candy canes as the end of the hunting class Before we left, I looked at the hidden social norms that when we go somewhere as a group, we have to keep our bodies close, so we stay as a team. We play a role standing up and walking as a group (without lines with this activity). Body in the group lesson plan during the Gingerbread Man Hunt As we searched for clues and walked to the new locations to find the next item, students had to practice staying in the group. You'd be surprised how hard this was for some of my students. During the activity, I had to stop as we walked to remind students who had their bodies in the group and who didn't. We talked about how others could feel when people left the group. Some perspectives you could share with your students are: Teachers worry about leaving the group. When your body is out of the group, other students will be annoyed that the class needs to stop hunting until your body is back in the group. Teachers and students will think you are not interested in doing the hunting if your body leaves the group. Students walking in front of the group can make others feel like you're not thinking about them. You're only worried about getting to the next location and not waiting for friends. Students might be thinking, Where's he going? What other perspectives/skills can you teach your students during this activity? Working with older students and needing vacation therapy resources? I often know SLPs working with high school and high school students struggle with finding thematic resources that appeal to their students. The gingerbread man hunt, for example, is a great idea for the younger crowd. I was thinking you could try the same activity, but hunt for a snowball hideout. Not sure how your students would like it, but I know my middle school students in mod-serious classrooms will probably get into this kind of hunt. With my older students, I use YouTube videos from elf movie and Simon's cat vacation/winter videos. These video clips are great for working on vocabulary, summarizing, perspective downloading and prediction! And it's free, low preparation and funny (this is the SLP's dream). Check out those blog posts about how I use them and to find links to some of the videos. Planning activities for your life's skills classes? You can make sugar cookies with gingerbread cookie cutters to give to family or friends. Or, choose a gingerbread recipe and prepare the treatment for members of the school's staff. What holiday activities do you use to target social pragmatics and body in the group? I would love to know what activities and lessons you are planning using a winter theme or vacation to work on social pragmatic skills. Share comments or email me at feliceclark@thedabblingspeechie.com Sure, you can repeatedly tell your kids pay attention or look here to help them focus, but what what is that what he teaches them? Instead, I like to teach my students to keep their bodies in the group, and their minds on the team. These are popular phrases used in social thinking classes, as well as other fantastic social skills websites, because these phrases do more than get a child's attention. They teach our children how and why they should stay focused during group activities. But these phrases aren't just useful in class. Parents can use these phrases to help their children learn to stay together when they are out in the community together. Before food shopping, going on the subway, or playing in the park, parents can remind their children that they need to keep their minds and bodies with the team to stay safe. Parents can also help their children practice staying on the subject during dinner and daily routines. If your kiddo changes theme at the dinner table, or loses focus while getting ready for school, remind him to keep his mind on the team and gently guide him back to the subject or activity he should be focusing on. Here's a little more about how I teach the brain and body in the group: Body in group: This phrase literally teaches our children that their bodies need to turn to others around them during group activities. I explain that I know they focus on the activity - whatever it is - when their bodies are in the group. But when their bodies are away from the group, I know their brain is focused on something or someone else. During the cycle this means their faces, shoulders, and feet face the teacher, their mouth is quiet, their hands are still, and so on. When they play with a team, it means that their bodies are close enough to the team showing their friends playing with them, but not too close to make others feel uncomfortable. When we talk about another friend, it means that their shoulders and hips face their friend, and their eyes observe their friends and their surroundings. Brain in the group: This phrase is more abstract, and requires more teaching for most of our children of literal thinking. But by teaching them this phrase, they begin to learn that when we are in a group, our minds should be thinking about the same subject as others. Most young children will need help to understand how they can keep their minds in the group. Frequent reminders or 'brain controls' may also be needed, especially during the first I teach my students that their eyes show me what their brain thinks. If their eyes look at the teacher, it shows me that their brain is thinking of the teacher. If their eyes look out the window, it shows me that their brain thinks about the playground, the birds outside, etc. During the cycle, we practice focusing our eyes on the teacher, which means that their brains think about what the teacher says. When you play with one by one We practice looking at their friends and common games, and share the same game plan. When we talk to another friend, we practice looking at each other and the same interesting object, and focusing on 1 topic. A great tool to help teach this is common perspective thinking like the one from Dynamic Duo: Let's be real: advisory team can be really difficult. No matter how carefully you build team membership and plan courses and activities, sometimes things don't go as expected. Here are some ideas I've found to be more helpful: Think carefully about whether team members are really ready to be able to be in a group. Sometimes children need some pre-teaching about things like how to listen, in turn, or manage their personal space. They may need an opportunity to familiarize themselves with your team space and the elements in it, or learn that they will be safe there and with you before they have the added stressors of having other children around or an audience. You may need to start in a mini group just another kid – and maybe this kid needs to be a really strong, easy transition model! And in some cases, individual counseling, aimed at working towards being able to be in a group, is in the best interests of the child. Don't let the team experience become yet another failure! It can be heartbreaking when a group setting doesn't work for a child – these guys are often the last to get the message that they don't fit. If things haven't gone well for a particular student on the team, I generally talk to him or her about it after the group (but not always immediately after) to make a plan for the next session. Also check with him/her in the morning team to make sure he/she remembers the plan and it's all set to have a great team. Unfortunately, that's not always enough. If his or her behaviors negatively affect the team's experience and learning, and you know that you've tried your best to help him or her pull it together, then it's time to have the child leave the group and have access to your services in a different setting where they can feel more successful. Teach team skills. One of the ways that will help ensure team success is to really teach kids who may have difficulty being in a group how to be in a group. This teaching takes place during the first one or two sessions (with many revisions in later sessions) and on our trips to and from the group, this adds to the number of sessions that the actual group theme will receive, but I have found it so useful in the long run because the extra time spent inevitably leads to much better results. My motto: If possible, try not to let the wild rumpus begin! picture: DanMeth.com 1. Walking down the aisle. I take everyone in their ranks and when we're all focused, tell them we're going to play a walking game. Feet. rules is that I have to stick to a group line all next to each other (I'm in the middle) and that I'm going to try to trick them into not being able to stay next to me. If we get to my room still on a team line, they'll win. If we get there without us all being together, I win. Then I proceed to take a variety of steps – regular ones, quickly tiny shuffled, big steps, slow motion steps, one at a time, sudden stops, etc. . For some reason kids find this wild fun! Inevitably, it's not easy at first, and I really try to fool the guys (a little) with my sudden attitudes and changes of pace so that they can practice quickly correcting themselves and making sure they're part of the team. We play the same game when we go back to the classrooms. As everyone gets better at it, kids take their turn to be the leader. photo credit: ICanTEACHmyChild.com 2. Spy on the room. Sometimes the door will close and we'll open it a crack so we can peek in, sometimes I've been opening barricades with chairs (or throwing caution to the wind and just leave the door wide open and unattended) and we make binoculars with our hands to spy on. I turn their attention to the table and chairs and ask them to report what they are observing. How many chairs are there and why this number? What's on the table? What evidence do you see of what we should do next? A clue! The fence means we mustn't touch what's inside it! 3. Where would you like to sit? I model saying this somewhat dramatically/typically with a small bow and outswep arm, which seems to distract children from the terrible truth that they couldn't get to sit where they want. Giving them something to do in place of jostling for a chair works much better than just telling them not to push and push. Most of the time, the same character who would be more likely to make a grab for the seat of his choice wants to go first (meaning asking first, not choosing first), so I left him. Oh, what a difficult school counselor! The first child asked chooses his seat and sits, then asks another person, and so on until everyone sits down. I have fourth graders who still say that when they come to my room, even though they stopped needing years ago. A technique

of training social skills has evolved into simple old politeness. I can't beat this! 4. Brain and body in the group. This is a concept developed by Michelle Garcia Winner as part of her Social Thinking™ curriculum. (More on what soon!) To have your body in the group means that your head, shoulders, and hips face the group or the person talking, and your hands, hands, feet and feet remain within your own personal space and do not move in a way that distracts yourself or others. Having your mind on the team means that you are thinking what what otherwise the team thinks and stay on the subject. To teach this concept, we play mind and body in the team game, which I came up with out of desperation one day. This is another game like Walking Down the Hall Game that kids love and never seem to tire of. I'm not sure why, but who cares? Work! I also teach mind and body in team play in all my first class classes and pull it out of my bag of tricks as needed, wherever and whenever children need a reminder to pay attention and stay in the subject. Usually all children need is the brain and body cue in the group! and often provide it to each other before you even have to! Here is a video with some friends showing how to play the game. (They have been begging me for feedback from my readers on how you liked to learn how to play the game from them. they were quite in love with the idea that they were going to be teaching school counselors! if you have any comment about them, please share.)

5. Choice and chat time. When children learn about how to be in a group (and for groups that still need motivation) I schedule selection and chat time for the last activity of each session. As with all groups, once everyone sits down, we'll go over our team's plan for this session, using the iPad, team drawing sheet or a small table (usually whichever is quicker to grab, since I'm often Guerilla Design!) I've already filled out the Quick Results and Activity sections, but the guys have to decide together which option to make together. In the first group sessions they may only have a choice of two or three previously selected activities, but later they may be able to choose freely from art materials, games, or games. I've found that adding Chat to selection time meant that we could postpone (or avoid) the personal narrative/gripping that often took too long during our check-ins at the beginning of the group. With some groups I go ahead and teach how to check in briefly, but with some friends only learning this skill takes a long time, so I often leave the check-in skills for another session/group/year and use Option and Chat instead. 6. Peer recognition. At the end of each session, I ask each child to praise another team member (I choose whom) for using a teamwork: You did a good job keeping your mind on the team, you did a good job deciding to do legos with us, even if you initially wanted to draw, you did a good thing using your fidget distracting me, etc. Our school uses Otter Tickets to recognize caring, safe, and responsible behaviors. These are generally given by adults, so it's especially exciting for team members who get to give an Otter ticket with their compliment. Giving an Otter ticket is sometimes just as rewarding as getting one! I love running teams, but I love it much more so when they don't let me feel like I need an instant nap and a long vacation on a tropical island! Like everyone else, I've had my share of these team sessions (and still do sometimes), but using these strategies to help kids learn how to be successful team members helped me be a more successful team leader. I hope it will help you too! What do you do to help children be more successful in groups? You may also be interested: My Guerilla Design Absolutely, positively most favorite advisory game of all time throughout eternity (so far) Treasure Boxes, Precious Friends Introduce Conflict Resolution with The Zax Zax

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