

Social Sam



Version 2

MANUAL

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The Social Sam Club

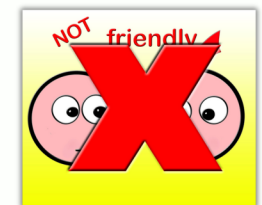
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**Sam thinks
it is not
friendly to
illegally share
copies of this
resource!!!**



Welcome to Social Sam - Version 2 !

This program is used with children (aged around 4 years - 7+ years) to explore and think about situations encountered by a character named Sam. Most of these are interactions with others while some feature only Sam himself.



Social Sam is NOT about:

- learning and rehearsing social scripts
- “Social training”
- expecting specific facial expressions, body language, or voice tone in certain situations
- rewarding compliance with social norms and expectations
- imposing behavior expectations that feel uncomfortable or don’t make sense to a particular child
- presenting “stories” in a one-size-fits-all manner for every child*
- teaching a child to mask their neurodivergence or culture by adopting neurotypical and/or mainstream social norms*



Social Sam IS about:

- depicting a range of scenarios so children can become more familiar with the routines involved
- exploring the concepts of others’ thoughts, knowledge, feelings and preferences and helping children understand that others may be different in these areas (developing perspective-taking)
- showing that social and emotional situations can be tricky sometimes and don’t always go as planned
- providing illustrations of facial expressions and body language to include in discussions about feelings and reactions
- observing helpful and non-helpful reactions
- observing variable consequences
- promoting discussion around the intent and impact of social acts
- exploring the communication (verbal and non-verbal) that are commonly associated with specific social scenarios
- describing some social norms and mainstream expectations that children may encounter
- exploring the reasons **why** some social acts can be useful
- exploring self-regulation options

The aim of this program is to promote **social understanding** and awareness that will in turn, foster authentic and successful relationships.



Say FAREWELL to Social Sam Version 1!

Social Sam V1 was created 15 years ago and we have learnt a lot since then. It is no longer best practice and should not be used in current work with young learners. We are pleased to announce that this version is significantly different.

Much of the content has changed, some sections have been removed and some have been added.

Users who registered their original purchase have been sent a link to download this current version free.



What is Social Understanding?

This resource was created to promote children's **social understanding**, a vital pre-cursor to them developing the social behaviours that will assist them in everyday situations.



What is Social Understanding?

Social understanding is not about *how* we should stand (e.g. distance), things we *should* say (the “script”) or *how* we should say the words (e.g. the voice tone). Instead, it is about **why** we might choose to do these things - and the **impact** it has when we do them (or don't do them). It is also about understanding the **intent** of others in what they might say and might do.

Sounds complicated right?

And it sort of is, particularly for certain children.

In other words, learning about social interactions is so much more than learning a script - and **that is not how to use this resource.**

(If it were, we would have called it Simple Sam!)

If we were to teach social skills like scripts - rehearsing with children how they should approach another child and how to recite a string of words, the other child's responses and reactions will never be completely predictable. *So there goes our script!*

Let's think about it further... I might teach a child to go up to another and say “Can I join in?”

Their response could be any of a hundred. Here are just a few:

- a) “Sure!”
- b) “No there's no room for you - sorry!”
- c) “Oh, I'm just finishing up.”
- d) They might ignore you.
- e) They might be cranky today and say “Go away!”

As a rule, children tend to be less predictable too so when we are dealing with social interactions with other children, it can be pretty tricky to navigate. This is definitely NOT **Simple Sam!**

What **Social Sam - Version 2** attempts to do, is provide a way of promoting thought and discussion about social situations by exploring different social scenarios, illustrating different facets of social communication and most importantly, showing again and again, the importance of considering the other person in the interaction. This might be noticing what they are doing, trying to guess what they might be thinking or feeling, listening to their words, and discussing what it all might mean. Many stories frequently demonstrate the consequences of different social communication attempts too. Some may be successful and others not so successful.



Social Sam - Version 2 consists of:

1. This manual
2. A social glossary
3. A pragmatics checklist and goal-setter
4. Cut-out figures
5. Certificates and a "calm plan"
6. 42 "stories" and explanations
7. Video clips for Becoming Calm
7. Access to bonus materials via the Social Sam Club

Each section contains a number of "stories" and explanations, focusing on social scenarios or self-help strategies. The sections and stories do not need to be completed in a specific order, nor do all need to be shared with every child. However, in some cases, the understanding of one story may require first exploring another story, or it may be useful to follow up with a related self-help story. The **Pragmatic Checklist and Goal-setter** will guide you in this. Finally, it's essential to adapt how each story is shared based on an individual's capacity, motivation, and experience.

SECTION 1 FOUNDATIONS

1. What is a friend?
2. Favourite things.
3. Different from me.
4. Guessing about feelings.
5. How would I feel?
6. Thinking and saying.
7. Being friendly.

SECTION 5 SOCIAL NORMS

1. Getting someone's attention.
2. Saying hello.
3. Interrupting.
4. Distance - too close and too far.
5. Voice - soft and loud.

Read pages 4-6 about how to adapt the material for individual needs.

SECTION 2 Parts 1 and 2* PLAY SKILLS

1. Asking to join play.
2. Taking turns.
3. Asking someone to play with me.
4. Being bossy.
5. *Losing.* *
6. *Sharing (toys).* *
7. *Silly play.* *

SECTION 6 SCHOOL ROUTINES

May not be relevant to all schools

1. Getting the teacher's attention.
2. Listening to the teacher.
3. Show 'n' Tell.

SECTION 3 RELATING TO OTHERS

1. Helping others.
2. When someone is upset.
3. When someone annoys me.
4. When I annoy someone.
5. Accidents happen.
6. Getting hurt (by accident).
7. I'm in charge of me.

SECTION 7 CONVERSATIONS

For more advanced learners
(not for preschoolers)

1. Conversations.
2. Talking and listening in conversations.
3. Saying what the topic is.
4. Including Important Information.
5. Changing the topic.
6. Talking about favourite things.
7. I'm not interested.
8. Finishing a conversation.

SECTION 4 SELF-HELP

1. Becoming calm.
2. Trying.
3. Asking for help.
4. When I don't understand.
5. Needing time-out.

BONUS:

1. When it's someone's birthday.

Want access to this story PLUS even more bonus materials and updates when they are released?
Join the

SOCIAL SAM CLUB!

Simply go to
pelicantalk.com/socialsamclub
and follow the instructions.



Using the program in whole-class learning

When using **Social Sam V2** in general programming, teachers will often begin with Section 1 - Story 1 and work through each section in order. Before sharing any story, the teacher should read the teaching tips at the front of each section and prepare the cue cards featured in the story by printing out the large cards.

Smaller cue cards can be used as supportive tools throughout the school day after they have been introduced in the context of the stories. For example, a set of cards may be kept on a lanyard to offer visual reminders of concepts such as **TIME OUT**, **WAIT**, **THINK**, or **FRIENDLY**. These can be used flexibly to support students in real-life situations, empowering them to navigate social interactions in ways that feel comfortable and authentic to them.

Teachers may also choose to further explore and discuss social concepts that appear in **red** within the stories. These concepts are explained in the *Social Glossary* and can be explored in a way that encourages reflection and self-awareness.

When text appears in **orange**, it signals a question or a discussion prompt for the class. These can be approached with curiosity, allowing students to share different perspectives. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions!

When sharing the stories, the teacher or therapist may need to read aloud the words that appear in thought bubbles or speech balloons, as these may not be included in the main text. Drawing attention to these elements can help students better understand the characters' thoughts, emotions, and communication styles.

General learning goals include:

- becoming familiar with the words and actions that are frequently used in a specific situation
- thinking about helpful and non-helpful reactions
- developing an understanding of the impact of actions and words on others
- problem-solving, hypothesizing (What might happen next? What could he do?)
- understanding personal boundaries (of self and others)
- thinking about what might be friendly (and not-so-friendly) acts
- understanding the difference between purposeful (intentional) and non-intentional acts (including accidents)
- using “clues” to guess the feelings and thoughts of the characters
- exploring where to find these “clues” (sometimes the words, but more often the facial expression, body language)
- perspective-taking
- understanding that certain acts are not easy or natural for an individual and that it is OK to act differently
- learning that different people might know, think, expect, and feel different things
- relating the learning to own experiences

Catering for diversity and individual needs.

As educators, caregivers, and therapists, our goal is to create a supportive space where children can observe and discuss the social environment surrounding Sam in a way that feels meaningful and accessible to them. Whenever possible, we should strive to avoid causing confusion, self-consciousness, discomfort, or pressure to conform. When supporting children's social learning, it is important to consider language abilities, neurodiversity, and home culture.



Language

Many children with verbal language difficulties will, in turn, present with difficulties in their social development. For this reason, it is vital when working with these children that the language used within the stories is made accessible to them. Some children may have language delay, others may be diagnosed with DLD (see right) while others may have English as an additional language.

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a common neurodevelopmental condition characterised by persistent language difficulties that have an impact on every-day life. Peer relations and friendships represent two of the most vulnerable areas of their functioning.¹

Supporting Language and Communication

- Some stories are quite text-heavy. Adapt the language to suit the young learner's abilities while preserving the key messages.
- Adapt language to suit each child's abilities. Break longer sentences into smaller, more manageable parts.
- Simplify sentence structures where needed, as complex sentences can be challenging for children with language difficulties.
- Use gestures and cue cards to reinforce key concepts.
- Point to elements of the illustrations that reinforce learning goals (e.g. to the face of a character).
- Support understanding of pronouns by pointing to the person or people being referenced.
- Use consistent terminology to reduce confusion.
- Incorporate key-word sign if it is relevant to the learner's communication style and or/needs.
- Check for understanding and allow extra processing time if needed.
- Involve families where possible, encouraging them to discuss key ideas in the child's home language.

Flexibility in Language Choices

- Some terms in this resource (e.g., kid, grown-up, or gendered pronouns) may not align with your preferences or the needs of your learners. Likewise, some references in the School Routines section (e.g., Show 'n' Tell) may not be applicable in all contexts. Feel free to adapt wording to make the learning experience more accessible and inclusive for your group.

1. Janik Blaskova, Lenka & Gibson, Jenny. (2021). Reviewing the link between language abilities and peer relations in children with developmental language disorder: The importance of children's own perspectives. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*. 6. 239694152110215. 10.1177/23969415211021515.

Supporting Non-Verbal Children and AAC Users

- Acknowledge and respect all communication styles—spoken language, signs, gestures, AAC devices, picture communication systems.
- Ensure AAC users have access to their communication tools throughout all **Social Sam** activities. Encourage them to use their devices or picture boards to participate in discussions.
- Model the use of AAC by pointing to symbols on a device or board while speaking. This helps children see that AAC is a valid and natural form of communication.
- Encourage multiple response options—children can answer by pointing, selecting an option on their AAC device, or using gestures.
- Adapt discussion questions by providing visual choices or yes/no options to support participation.
- Adapt stories to explore corresponding non-verbal ways of achieving social goals.

Home Culture

Australia is fortunate to have a rich and diverse cultural landscape.

Each child comes from a unique home culture that shapes the way they communicate, interact, and understand social norms. When using this resource, it's important to remember that social skills, behaviours, and language can vary across different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. A child's way of greeting others, expressing emotions, or taking turns in conversation may be influenced by their family's traditions and values.

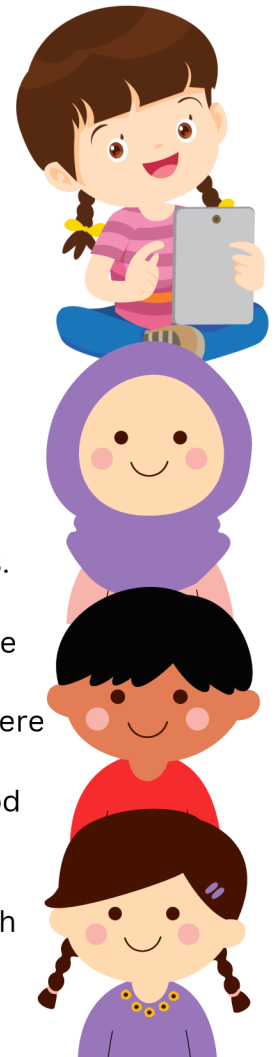
Encourage an inclusive approach by being open to these differences, rather than assuming one “correct” way to interact. Where possible, take the time to learn about a child's cultural background and consider how their experiences at home might shape their social interactions. This helps create a respectful, supportive environment where all children feel valued and understood as they interact with others.

A recommended resource to support educators and therapists in understanding different cultures is the **Cultural Atlas**, which provides valuable insights into cultural customs, communication styles, and social norms.

The **Cultural Atlas** can be found at <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au>. (Current: 2025)

Gender

In this resource, Social Sam is presented using the pronouns he/him and gendered pronouns are used throughout. However, we recognize and affirm that gender is diverse and that every child should feel seen and valued in their identity. Feel free to adapt language to suit the needs of your learners (e.g., using neutral terms like they/them if that feels more appropriate).





Social Sam is not a resource created purely for neurodivergent children; however, historically, it has been used by many therapists and teachers working with autistic children. When working with neurodivergent children, it is important to recognize that **neurodivergent children often process social and emotional information differently** from their neurotypical peers. These children are not “impaired” or in need of “fixing”. **Sharing Sam’s stories should never be done with the intent of making a child behave in a way that is unnatural or meaningless to them.** Training a child to **mask** (hide) their autism and to “act” neurotypical is now known to be very damaging to the wellbeing and mental health of autistic individuals. Although we have striven to make this new version as neuro-affirming as possible, the responsibility lies with the teacher or therapist to focus only on areas of social and emotional learning that lie within the capacity, comfort and/or motivation of each individual child and to adapt the learning goals accordingly.

Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent children, such as autistic children and those with ADHD, may have unique ways of communicating and interacting with others. When using this resource, it is essential to recognize that social norms are not one-size-fits-all, and expecting neurodivergent children to conform to neurotypical standards—such as maintaining eye contact, or responding immediately in conversations—may not be appropriate or necessary.

Take for example, eye contact. Eye contact may be perceived by a neurotypical person as the key signal that the attention of another has been obtained, but for many neurodivergent people, eye contact is not a comfortable response. Eye contact may, in fact, be avoided as a response to avoid overstimulation. Forcing a child who finds eye contact aversive or overwhelming can be harmful.

Instead of rigidly teaching scripted social behaviours, focus on supporting meaningful and authentic interactions that respect each child’s natural communication style. Encourage social engagement in ways that feel comfortable for them, such as offering alternative ways to show attentiveness (e.g., a movement to face the body in the direction of the speaker or nodding instead of making eye contact) or allowing extra processing time in conversations.

Flexibility and understanding are key to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. By adapting social skills instruction to suit each child’s needs, we empower them to develop connections in ways that are both effective and respectful of their neurodivergent identity.

Useful resources to learn more about neurodivergence may be found at:

Reframing Autism provides free online training in neuro-affirming practice. <https://reframingautism.org.au/service/autism-essentials-free>

Information on neuro-affirming social skills training found at the **Therapist Neurodiversity Collective**: <https://therapistndc.org/therapy/social-skills-training/>
(Current: 2025)

The Layout of the Stories

At the beginning of each section are teacher/therapist notes that relate to each story. It is important to read these first. Sometimes it informs the user that another story is a prerequisite and should be explored first. It also identifies cue cards used within each story. The pages of the stories follow the teacher/therapist notes.

TEACHER/THERAPIST NOTES

- 1. Asking to join play**
 - This story reinforces the idea that when we ask for something, we should wait for an answer. The cues for getting **ATTENTION** and **ASKING** have right use used in any story that involve making a request. The use of asking involves: 1) getting attention 2) asking. If the attention has already been gained, the use of asking involves 3) asking.
 - In the original Social Sam, the text stated that Sam asks in "a friendly voice." This reference has been removed in this version—after all, what is a friendly voice? Instead, you may choose to model this your voice sounds when asking. "Can I play?" and some young learners to try to themselves. However, it's important to remember that what is "friendly" comes from how you present your self and interest in something for another. This response is not about whether or not the other person is interested, but about whether or not the other person is interested in what you are asking.
 - Another key idea in this story is that sometimes, a child may be told "no" when asking to join in. This can happen for many reasons—there might not be enough space, not enough toys, or the game may not allow for more players. Depending on how things unfold, it can be done in a considerate and respectful way. This is a concept that may be worth discussing further. Sam initially feels a little sad when he is told no, but he demonstrates resilience by making his own game.
 - There is a story in Section 5, **Getting Someone's Attention** that may need to be explored prior to this story as it explores a foundational skill that supports successful asking.
- 2. Taking turns in play**
 - The message here is that it is likely to take time to play if another child wants a turn. The story also explores the perspective of the other child.
 - The words to be used when taking are discussed and might be modified and reworded.
 - It is acknowledged that waiting is not fun for the child.
 - A challenge for children is to understand what constitutes a "go" or the length of a turn. Often with young learners this may require the intervention of an adult to prompt the sequencing.
 - The cues for **WAIT**, **TURN** and **TAKING TURNS** are used during the story and can be used in real play situations to reinforce the concepts.
- 3. Asking a kid to play with me**
 - This story is very similar to **Asking to join play**—explore the asking, waiting for a response, the reasons why a child may respond negatively and what to do if this happens.
 - The difference with this story is that the child is initiating the play—and may have to think of what to play—and explain this.
 - The message that "not all kids may want to play in the same way as you" is a key message.
- 4. Being bossy**
 - Sometimes children become overly directive in play and this may be perceived as "being bossy." Usually this stems from issues with communication or perspective-taking. This story aims to highlight the difference between asking and telling, the perspective of other children and their right to choose what to play (**THEMSELVES**).
 - Sometimes a child may become bossy because they are right in their play routine and/or prefer predictability in play. Deviation from familiar play routines may result in anxiety for some children. Playing alone or with someone who also enjoys the same play is an option.
 - Sometimes children might not see in a way that seems bossy because of sensory issues (the play is too loud or too hot and the child who offers NCT to play that way.) This is NCT covered within this story. The story **When someone says no** (Section 5) and **Handling Strong Emotions** (Section 6) may be helpful to address this issue.

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Sam does something friendly... He asks if Tiff would like some help.

"Can I help?" he asks.

Asking if a friend needs help is a really friendly thing to do.

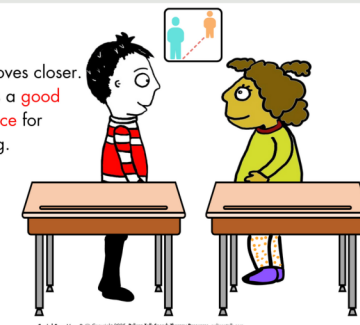


Some pages include purple text, which highlights key learning elements related to the social situation. These statements help reinforce important concepts and can be used as discussion points or visual prompts to support understanding.

Educators can adapt the way they present these elements based on the needs of their learners, ensuring that discussions are accessible and meaningful for all children.

Some pages include red text. This means there is a social term used that appears in the *Social Glossary* and may warrant further discussion. Be sure to understand how these terms are used by referring to the glossary. These terms usually correspond with a cue card too (see *Cue Cards*). Have these printed and use them to reinforce these key social elements.

He moves closer. This is a **good distance** for talking.



Some pages include orange text and this signals a discussion prompt or a question. These discussions can be approached with curiosity, allowing students to share different perspectives. There is usually no right or wrong answer!

How do you think Nid might be feeling?

Sam thinks Nid might be sad. He wonders why.



Continued



The Layout of the Stories (continued).

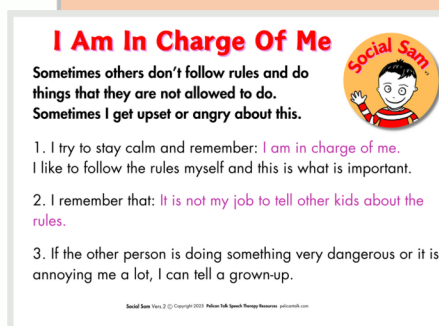
Sometimes, a page like this appears (*see right and below right*).

These pages function similarly to the purple text within the story but serve as a summary of a key social lesson.

They are written in first person to avoid sounding too directive.

These pages are important tools for reinforcing learning and should be reworded or adapted to suit each child's individual needs.

Take the time to check whether children have understood the key idea and offer additional support if needed.



Most stories end with a **Time to Think** page. These pages help children connect the learning to their own experiences and encourage self-reflection in a supportive way.

However, some of these prompts may be challenging for certain learners. Feel free to adapt or create your own Time to Think questions to better suit the needs, abilities, and comfort levels of your group. The goal is to make reflection accessible and meaningful for every child.



Continued 

What else is included?

Cue Cards

These are provided as small or large. Be sure to know what each one is representing by referring to the Social Glossary.

Some cards (e.g. the Social Sam star card) are not used within the stories, but for those students who love Sam, it can be used as a lovely reinforcer.

“Sam thinks you are a star!”



Calm Plans and Becoming Calm videos.

The way in which we become calm is very personal. The plan template on the right can be used to formulate a plan that is individualised for each child using the program.

Sam does some calm breathing to become calm.

There are two calming videos in this resource, both include calming music with expanding circles to help slow breathing. One features Sam and an expanding “calm circle” and one features the expanding “calm circle” only.



Certificates

In Social Sam Version 1, the certificates were awarded when learning goals were achieved. We have now made the certificates reflective of when a story has been *explored*. (A star can be coloured in when one story has been completed.)

One of the certificates also has a space for the child to state what they learnt from the story.



Cut-Outs

There are cut-outs of Sam, his friend Dino, thought bubbles and speech balloons and feelings pictures. These are simply extra tools to explore the concept of talking, thinking and feelings. They don't relate to any specific stories.

Print these out, cut out neatly, laminate and cut out again. Grab a fine whiteboard marker... Play around with the cut-outs, writing an utterance in the speech bubble of one boy and exploring what the other character might think or feel in response to these words. You will note that the characters have no pupils, no eyebrows and no mouths. You can draw these on with a marker to display feelings or direction of eyes. As you discuss each scenario, scribble, draw, label the emotions... rub out and start again!



Continued

What else is included?

The Pragmatics Checklist and Goal-Setter

This document includes seven pages and a checklist of 52 items designed to assess a child's strengths and challenges. The checklist helps guide users in setting individual goals for children and identifying which stories may be most beneficial to explore.

This resource is recommended for use in schools to support the development of individual learning plans and by clinicians to assist in setting therapy goals.

Full instructions for completion and use are provided within the document.

This resource may be shared freely.

PRAGMATICS CHECKLIST & GOAL-SETTING

CHILD'S NAME: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____

CHECKLIST COMPLETED BY: _____

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD: _____

DATE: _____

Has the child been diagnosed as neurodivergent?

Yes* ☐ No ☐ Diagnosis pending* ☐

*If yes, or pending, ensure you are familiar with neuro-affirming practices when setting goals for the child. See the manual for more details.

Completing the Checklist and Setting Goals

This document contains seven pages and a total of 52 items to complete. However, items 64-52 focus on advanced pragmatic language skills related to conversation. These are not relevant for children under six years old, so for younger children, only complete items 1-43.

Checklist Instructions

- Use three different colored pens (black, blue, and red) to mark responses.
- Write the corresponding letter in the assigned color according to the legend at the top of each page.

Who Should Complete the Checklist?

- Ideally, someone who knows the child well should fill out the checklist.
- For a more comprehensive view, it's best to have both a teacher/educator and a caregiver complete separate checklists to compare how the child functions in different settings.

Using the Results

- The right-hand column lists illustrated "stories" from the Social Sam V2 resource that may be most useful for children rated with a red letter on that particular item. (The letter S responds to Section).
- Titles in brackets indicate prerequisite stories that should be explored first.

After completing the checklist, enter the story references (eg. S2-4) into the table on page 6.

Page 7 provides a full list of stories in the Social Sam V2 resource. Teachers and therapists can tick off stories as they explore them with a child.

This pragmatic checklist is part of the Social Sam resource. Page 1 of 7
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*A - Always	*U - Usually	*S - Sometimes	*R - Rarely	*N - Never
16	Comforts friends or familiar people when they are upset	S3-5 When someone is upset (S3-4 Greeting about feelings)		
17	Copes when others are annoying them	S3-9 When someone annoys me (S3-8 Resolving Cops before volume is associated with dysregulation)		
18	Understands that the adult in charge (eg. teacher) is responsible for enforcing rules with peers	S3-7 In charge of me (S4-6 Resolving Cops)		
19	Notifies when they unintentionally hurt another child and demonstrates remorse	S3-5 Accidents happen (S3-4 Greeting about feelings)		
20	Personifies with difficult tasks	S4-2 Trying		
21	Asks for help when needed	S4-2 Asking for help		
22	Knows strategies for calming down	S4-3 Resolving calm		
23	Asks for clarification if they don't understand	S4-4 When I don't understand		
24	Can get someone's attention in a way that is effective but also respectful (not respectful - poking, yelling etc...)	S4-5 Getting someone's attention (S4-6 Getting the Teacher's Attention)		
25	Initiates greeting with a familiar person in any manner (greeting, word, smile)	S3-2 Saying hello		
26	Understands others have different preferences to themselves	S3-3 Favorite things (S3-3 Different to Me)		
27	Is aware of others' feelings	S3-4 Greeting about feelings		
28	Is aware of others' perspectives	S3-5 Different to me (S3-5 How would I feel?) (S3-4 Greeting about feelings)		
29	Is motivated to be friendly with others	S3-7 Being friendly (S3-6 What's a Friend?)		

This pragmatic checklist is part of the Social Sam resource. Page 2 of 7
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The Social Glossary

This glossary can be made into a booklet.

Print it out, cut each page in half and staple!

It is primarily for teachers and therapists to become familiar with the social terms used in the program. These terms appear in red text within the stories and many correspond with a cue card.



Rather than being in alphabetical order, the glossary is loosely grouped by related concepts within the context of the stories. Some terms include detailed explanations to help clarify complex social ideas. It's important to read these explanations and then adapt them as needed when discussing them, using language that is clear and accessible to each individual.

Flexibility in Definitions

- Some definitions simplify complex concepts to make them easier for young children to understand.
- You may not always agree with the wording—feel free to adjust definitions so they align with your child's understanding and experiences.
- Providing lots of real-life examples can often be the best way to help children grasp a concept in a meaningful way.

The goal is to make these social concepts accessible, relevant, and understandable for every child.



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