

# Play2Practice: A Therapeutic Role-Playing Game as a Portal to Social Growth

Anna Vagin, PhD  
CSHA Convergence 2022  
3/26/22: 1:30-3: MS059

# Disclosure time!

I am a speech pathologist in private practice in Larkspur, California, working with children & young adults who have social learning challenges.

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I am the author of *Movie Time Social Learning* (2013) and *YouCue Feelings: Using Online Videos for Social Learning* (2015). I receive royalties from those books.

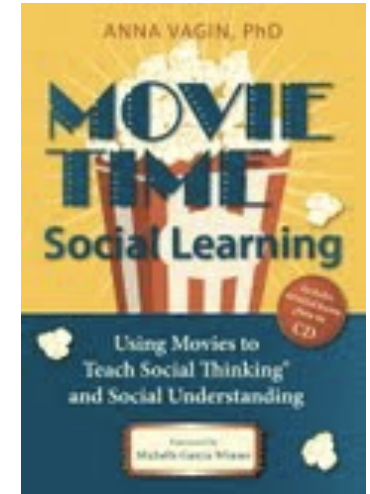
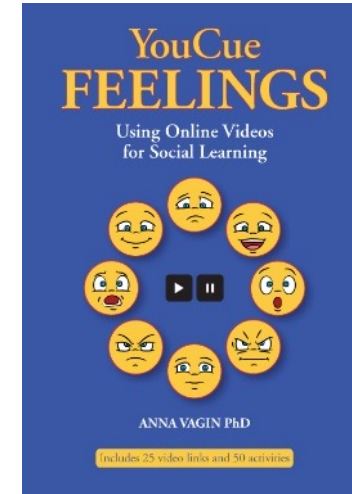
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I am the creator of the *Conversation Paths Pack Expanded Version* (2021) and *Just the Paths* (2022), both available for purchase on my website. I receive royalties from those sales.

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I have no non-financial disclosures.

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# Strengths many of our kids demonstrate

- Enthusiasm
- Sense of humor
- Breadth & depth of knowledge
- Desire to understand the mysteries of social
- Kindness
- Curiosity
- Perseverance



# Challenges many of our kids face

- Staying focused & engaged
- Staying regulated
- Controlling impulsivity
- Understanding & doing what's expected
- Reading non-verbal cues & indirect language
- Demonstrating flexibility
- Managing competitiveness
- Being resilient



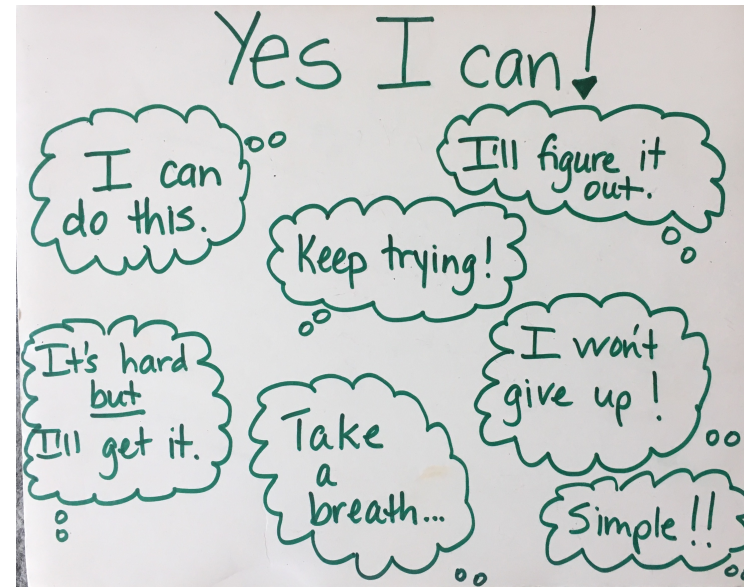
# What makes a game a game?



From J McGonigal, *Reality is Broken. Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (2011).



Castle Panic,  
fireside games



“Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.” Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. 2014.



# Therapeutically applied role playing games (TA-RPG)

- RPGs are a collaborative storytelling experience with structured rules and a randomizing agent. The best known one is Dungeons and Dragons (DnD.)
- TA-RPG have a clearly therapeutic framework.
- RPGs and TA-RPGs are **NOT** video games.
- Game to Grow has created Critical Core
- I have been a beta-tester for Critical Core and am certified in their methodology ([gametogrow.org](http://gametogrow.org).)
- Critical Core is now available.

# Critical Core – using a DIR®/Floortime framework

- Developmental, Individual-difference, Relationship-based (DIR)
- Relationship-based therapy developed by Stanley Greenspan
- Works via emotionally meaningful relationships
- Recognition of individual differences
- Establishing and expanding circles of interaction

# Encounters throughout the campaign

- Exploration - learning about the world and problem solving via a character and their specific attributes
- Combat - turn taking combat challenge against the enemy
- Role play - revealing information or resolving challenges through social interaction with characters and NPCs
  - Open-ended challenges
  - Quantum Quandries: the scenario shifts according to players' attempts and interests
- Either upbeat or tense tone
- Focus on one or more of the core capacities

# Adding therapeutic structure

- The role of the Game Master
- The “No” & “Please” lists
- Visual supports as needed
- Regulation support as needed
- Check-in and check-out questions



HAPPY😊

5

4

3

2

1

OK

MAD😡

5

4

3

2

1

OK

SAD😞

5

4

3

2

1

OK

WORRIED😟

5

4

3

2

1

OK

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MENTAL STATE VERBS

• know

• think

• learn

• understand

• guess

• notice

• recognize

• realize

• miss

• want

• wish

• hope

• decide

• feel

• remember

• forget

• imagine

• believe

• consider

• dream

• wonder

• plan

• imagine

• analyze

• envision

• look

• agree

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I will get through this

I'm alright

I can handle this

Take a breath

I can manage this feeling

Everything will be ok

Feeling Fixers  
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# Check-in: moving from self to character

- Answer for yourself and your character
  - What is the strangest thing you have ever eaten?
  - What is the most precious gift you have ever received?
  - What is your favorite article of clothing and why?
  - What is something you have done of which you are proud?
  - What has been your best trip ever?
  - If you could change one thing in your family or community, what would that be?

# Check-out: transitioning from character to self

- What is a spotlight you would like to shine on someone else for enhancing your session?
- What was something you found challenging about today's session or something you learned?
- What is something you predict will happen, or something you are looking forward to in the next game session?

# Check-out: approaching the end of the campaign

- What advice would you give your character?
- What is a lesson you can learn from your character?



What advice would you give your character?	How would taking that advice improve their life?	What is a lesson you can learn from your character?	How would learning that lesson improve your life?
Be little bit more aggressive when fighting	Diplomacy only gets you so far. save time and prevent some injuries	Be more diplomatic when dealing with my sisters	Sisters would be less annoying to me
Listen to others, be patient	If I listen to others and not butt in we get more things done	Listen and not butt in immediately – wait for other people	Listen to what other people say and more patient
Do this again	Ember would be happier if she could do something like this again	Sometimes you need to shut up	I wouldn't say things I would regret
Try almost anything you can	Be able to figure out impossible puzzles	How to work together	Help me work a lot easier
Head back home	Tell some stories about it	How to think more on the fly.	Make the right decision in short amount of time, sometimes you have a short time to react or make choice

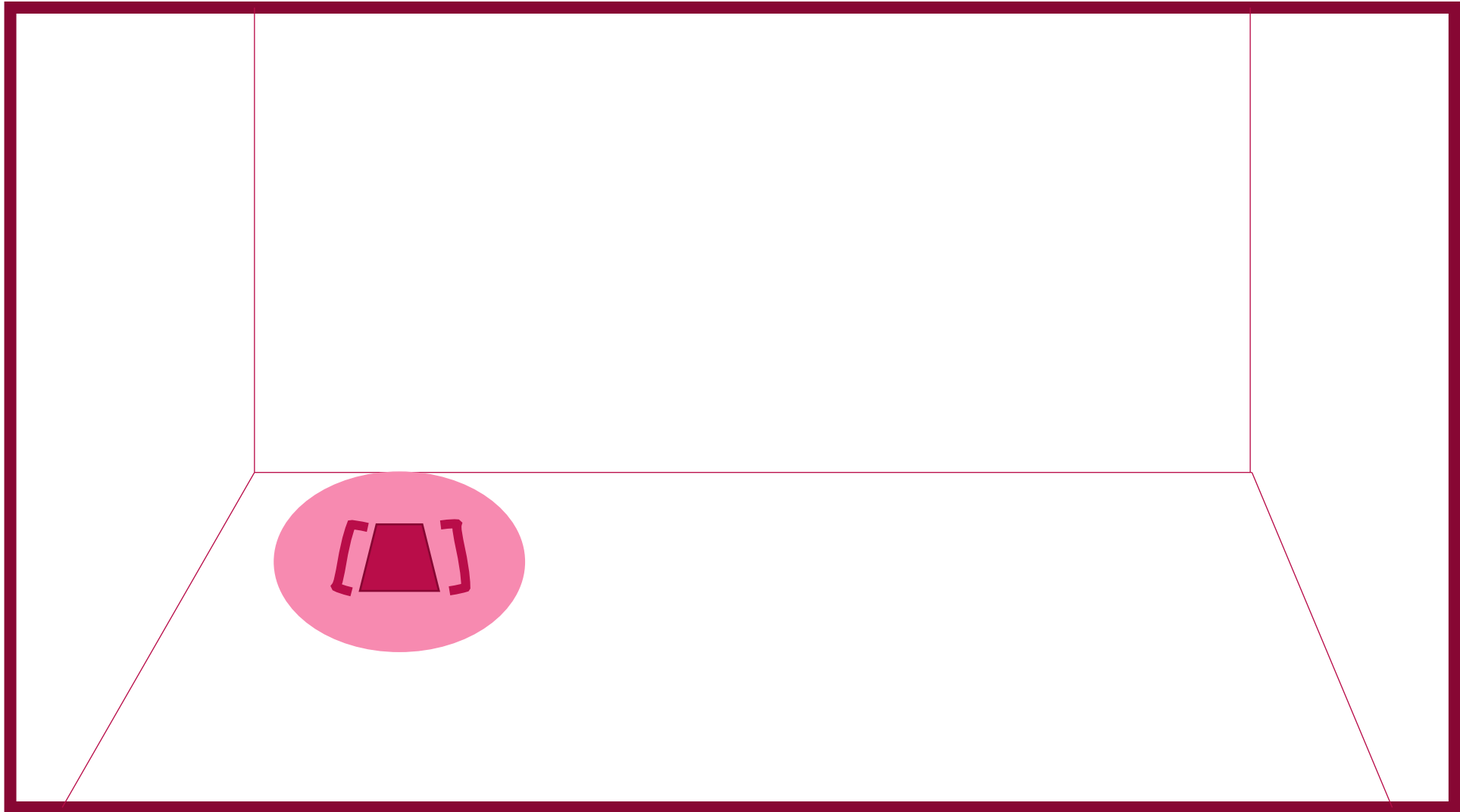
## The Enthusiasm Doctrine

*You can bend or break whatever rules you want because your true goal as a game master is to encourage vivacious whole-brained engagement in authentic relational play!*

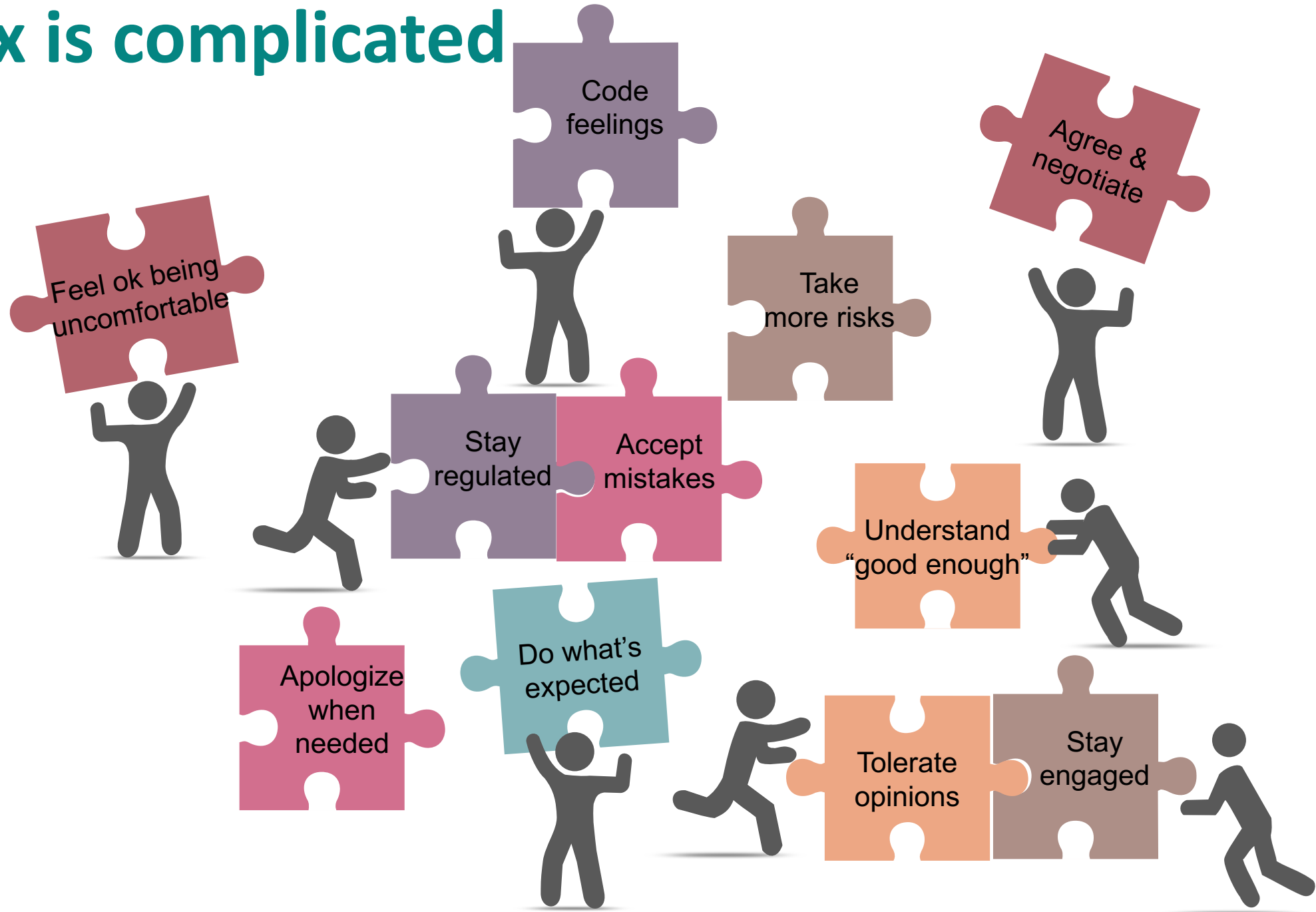


Thanks to Game to Grow for allowing me to use their slides!

role play &  
perspective  
taking with  
the Gnome  
Ghost -  
upbeat &  
fun tone



# Flex is complicated



# Flexibility rubric

1	2	3	4
<p><b>Able to identify sad, mad, and worried feelings of characters and formulate positive thought bubbles to support characters in YouTube videos.</b></p>	<p><b>Needs high support to tolerate their own or others' uncomfortable feelings, display flexibility in thought &amp; problem solving and tolerate unexpected behaviors of others in 10 min structured activity with 2-3 other students. Struggling with flexibility, regulation, and/or resilience.</b></p>	<p><b>With moderate support (visuals, intermittent check-ins, etc.) able to tolerate their own or others' uncomfortable feelings, display flexibility in thought &amp; problem solving and tolerate unexpected behaviors of others during moderately structured 10 min activity with 3-4 other students.</b></p>	<p><b>Able to tolerate their own or others' uncomfortable feelings, display flexibility in thought &amp; problem solving and tolerate unexpected behaviors of others during 10-12 min unstructured activity with 3-4 other students. May be able to help others.</b></p>

# Student with ADHD

- Impulsive
- Doesn't attend to what others say
- Talks over others
- Repeats questions to others multiple times
- "What was your idea?"
- "Wait - what did you guys say?"
- With visual supports
- "So you think we should..."
- Less charging into scene to attack
- Observed taking calming breaths



*after 7 weeks*



PERFORMANCE SCORE	PERFORMANCE RATING	GOAL 1
2	Much more than expected (far exceeds annual goal)	During a 5 minute conversation with a familiar peer across 3 observations, balances conversation appropriate to topic and context. Occasionally catches self and turns conversation back to other (e.g. "whoops, I'm talking too much.")
1	Somewhat more than expected (exceeds annual goal)	During a 3 minute conversation with a familiar peer across 3 observations, allows conversational partner balanced talking time. Stays regulated and engaged.
0	Expected level of outcome (meets annual goal)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions. During a 2 minute conversation with a familiar peer across 3 observations, needs low visual and verbal support (<5) to allow conversational partner balanced talking time.
-1	Somewhat less than expected (benchmark)	Responds to visual or verbal cues to check on listeners' thoughts and ending his talking turn when appropriate in 3 out of 5 occurrences over 3 observations.
-2	Much less than expected (present level of performance)	Consistently monopolizes casual conversation with overly-detailed descriptions of his interests & experiences without picking up on listener's nonverbal signals of lack of interest. Interrupts others and turns topic back to self and own ideas.

Goal 1
Sep -2
Dec -1
Mar 0
Jun 0

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# Student with Social Pragmatic Disorder

- Impulsive
- Certain of success
- Easily dis-regulated
- Focused on own ideas
- Weapons are #1!!
- Argues, insisting on his approach
- Doesn't take perspectives of others
- Becomes very annoyed when his approach does not succeed
- With visual supports
- "I can listen to others"
- "That's a good idea too"
- "OK, I'll shut up..."



After 7 weeks

Conversation Paths Practice Activities	Date & Score				Rubric				
	Sept	Dec	Mar	Jun		1	2	3	4
remembers	1	1	2	3		needs multiple visual supports & verbal prompts (>5x/5min) to remember & use information provided by someone else	needs very little support (<1x/10min) to remember & use information contributed by someone else	needs low (<3x/5min) support to remember & use information contributed by someone else	independently demonstrates recall & use of information contributed by others consistent with peer group
DEFINITIONS									
remembers	Remembers are things we remember about what others have said or information we learn about them (whether we like them, don't like them, or don't know them very well.) Remembers are important in conversations and social interactions. Our conversational partners don't like to be asked the same questions over and over. And letting others know, based on what we say, that we remember what we have learned about them (their likes as well as their dislikes) makes other feel good. Remembers show that we listened AND we remembered. Remembers are important when we are collaborating with others.								

NAME: Alex F.

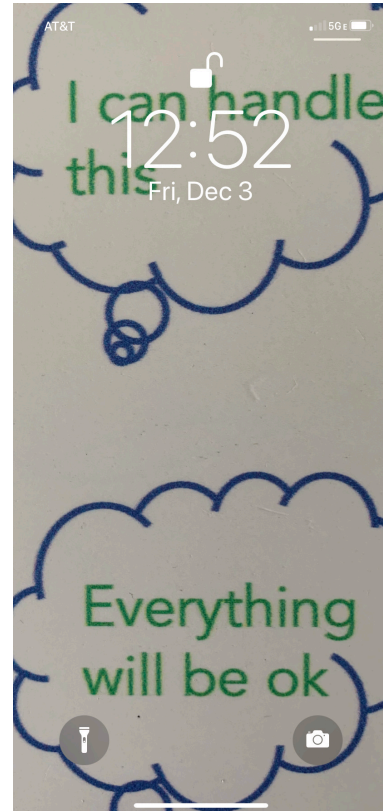
DATE: 09/05/19

GOAL #1: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.C

Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others. BASELINE: During group projects, Alex struggles to remember what others say or plan to do relative to the project. He asks repetitive questions but doesn't seem to pay attention to what other students say. GOAL: By May 2020, Alex will attend to and remember student input in classroom-based group projects with a rating of 3 on the attached rubric as measured over 2 consecutive opportunities. **GOAL MET**

# Student with Anxiety

- Often anxious, sad & frustrated
- Listens
- Expects failure
- Agrees with group even when doesn't like idea
- "I think we are going to fail"
- "This won't work"
- "Don't know"



After 7 weeks

- With visual supports:
- "Ok, let's try it"
- "Maybe we should..."
- "It was ok last time, maybe it will be ok this time."

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R			
1	Date & Score										Rubric										
2	TARGET/CONCEPT											NAME: Oscar G.  DATE: 09/07/19  GOAL #1: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. BASELINE: When engaged in a classroom discussion with more than one other student, Oscar listens and agrees but does not share his ideas. He answers questions directed at thim with a head movement or one word answer. GOAL: By May 2020, Oscar will participate in 3 minute conversations during his speech therapy group with 2-3 peers maintaining balance during the conversation, with a rating of 3 on the attached rubric as measured over 3 consecutive sessions. <b>GOAL PARTIALLY MET</b>									
3		Sept	Dec	Mar	Jun		1	2	3	4											
4																					
	balances conversation	1	1	2	2		expresses anxiety and rarely participates in group conversation	with feelings monitoring & visual supports contributes several ideas and answers questions directed toward them with short answers	needs low support & prompts (<3x/5mins) to stay verbally engaged and balance conversation - expresses satisfaction with efforts & level of anxiety	needs very low support & prompts (<3x/8mins) to stay verbally engaged and balance conversation - expresses high satisfaction & low anxiety											
5																					
6	DEFINITIONS																				
7																					
8	balances conversation	It's good for conversations to be balanced, so everyone feels included and has a chance to contribute. Of course, at any point in a conversation one person may be talking more because they are giving more information to the listener - conversations aren't perfectly even at all times. Think more in terms of an overall balance. That being said, in any group there may be some who are more active and others who are more passive - more on the peripheral of the action, so conversational balance also depends on the relationship between the participants. And that's ok. Not everyone is "chatty" to the same degree, but we do want those who may tend toward anxiety to develop a skill set that allows them to participate at a level that is comfortable for them.																			
9																					
10	©2021 Anna Vagin, PhD																				





**You are a Game Master!**





## CONTACT INFORMATION

*Email: [annavagin@gmail.com](mailto:annavagin@gmail.com)*

*Web: [www.socialtime.org](http://www.socialtime.org)*

*YouTube: Anna Vagin PhD*

*Twitter: [@anna\\_vagin](https://twitter.com/anna_vagin)*

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