



There's a Little Bit of Kramer in All  
of Us: Social Skills Training Using  
Sitcoms

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**[nrrio.com](http://nrrio.com)**

A vintage teal television set with a blank screen and control panel on the right side. The text "It's not just about watching TV..." is overlaid on the screen.

**It's not just about watching TV...**

# Project Goals

- Identify a different approach to social skills training
- Use a method to communicate information about behaviour which was non-confrontational
- Develop and support skills related to recognizing behaviours and emotions in self and others.

# Brain Injury and Social Skills

- Loss of social skills caused by cognitive and behavioural changes related to the brain injury
- Loss of mental flexibility and ability to self-modulate behaviour
- Impaired perception of social relationships
- Impaired problem solving

# Why is social competence needed?

- To access peer groups at work, friendships and family life
- To “read” other people and change our behaviour accordingly
- To interpret what is required by a person, people or situation and to self-regulate our responses



It takes rhythm... social rhythm that  
is...

- Cognitive effects of brain injury can cause problems in perception of others as well as self
- The individual can be “out of sync” with the social rhythm
- Humour in sitcoms is based on misperceptions and interactional problems

# What are the attributes of social competence

- Knowledge of rules, roles and routines which apply in different social situations
- Ability to interpret the behaviour and emotions of other people in an accurate manner
- To react to the emotional states of other people in an appropriate manner
- To be able to react in a flexible manner depending on the situation and the behaviour and emotions of other people

# Is Social Competence Just Behaviour

- Extends beyond communication, interpreting and responding
- Includes hygiene and dressing
- Knowing how to fit into the activities
- Maintaining impulse control/self-regulation
- Using cognitive skills and to analyze situations and formulate appropriate responses
- Understand the “social rhythm”



# Methods of Acquiring Social Competence via Skills Training

- Scripting: learning specific scripts for responding
- Context-Sensitive Practice: using rehearsal training with praise and recognition from the trainer
- Situational Coaching: using real-life situations with advance cues (presetting)
- Training in Social Perception: teaching the person how to read the behaviour and expectations of others
- Training in self-monitoring: learning to recognize “stress triggers”

# Social Competence is Complex

- Skills are acquired throughout childhood into adulthood
- Insight and information processing are required for competence to be applied
- Ability to discriminate what is required in social situations is critical to success
- Ability to change behaviour based on situational cues is critical

# Research Highlights

- Almost half of the group had limited or no social contacts 1-year post injury (Weddell, et al, 1980)
- 90% with social dislocation and isolation continuing as a pattern over time (Lezak, 1987)

## Research Highlights Cont'd

- 92% of family and person with TBI reported that person with brain injury had a change in friendships. 75% report problems making new friends (Bergland and Thomas, 1991)
- 71% reporting no social life, except as arranged by families (Earnes, et al, 1995)
- Over half reporting having lost friends and increased social isolation (Olver, et al, 1996)

## Research Highlights Cont'd

- 90% dissatisfied with social interaction, 47% not talking on the telephone, 27% never socialize at home, 20% never visit others (Dawson and Chipman, 1995)

# So, what do we do in rehab?

- Provide systemic feedback
- Meta-Cognitive techniques
- Use shaping, fading and cueing
- Teach self-monitoring
- Modeling
- Role Play
- Rehearsal training
- Social Reinforcement

# So, what do we do in rehab? cont'd

- Social knowledge
- Awareness Building
- “Brainstorming” alternatives
- Outloud self-direction
- In vivo coaching



How can we make it work better?



# Limits of Social Skills Training

- “That’s not my problem”, role of denial
- Lack of awareness of self and others
- Lack of mental flexibility, “getting stuck”
- Misperceiving social cues
- Seeing training experience as confrontational or too juvenile

# Why Sitcoms?

- Vignettes “fit” short attention span
- Behaviour of actors is exaggerated
- Character consistently replicates the behaviour
- Canned laughter provides cue that something is wrong/funny
- Safe, non-confrontational way to look at behaviour and feelings

# What about sitcom behaviour?

- Either “too much” or “too little”
- Misperceptions of others are common
- Behaviour of actors addresses common themes:
  - Assertiveness
  - Impulsivity
  - Awareness of others/boundaries
  - Self-control/anger management

# “The Technique”

- Analyze what happened in the vignette
- Inquire about a similar situation that was personal
- Ask about how other people reacted
- Ask about how you felt
- Ask about what you did
- Ask about what could have been done differently

A vintage teal television set is shown from a front-facing perspective. The television has a classic design with a large, rounded rectangular screen in the center. The screen is blank and white. The frame of the television is a vibrant teal color. On the right side of the frame, there is a control panel with two circular knobs, a small dial at the top, and a speaker grille below. The television is supported by two teal legs. The text "The Vignettes" is centered on the screen in a black, sans-serif font.

# The Vignettes

# Assertiveness - Office Space



Click below to watch this video:

[http://ia341302.us.archive.org/0/items/milton\\_618/Asserting-MiltonFinal.wmv](http://ia341302.us.archive.org/0/items/milton_618/Asserting-MiltonFinal.wmv)

# Example Questions

- Was this clip funny?
- What do you think of this man?
- Why doesn't he get listened to?

# Assertiveness – Elaine Benes



Click below to watch this video:

[http://ia341340.us.archive.org/1/items/asserting/Asserting-Dr\\_Reston.wmv](http://ia341340.us.archive.org/1/items/asserting/Asserting-Dr_Reston.wmv)



# Example Questions

- How is Elaine acting? Why?
- Have you ever felt inferior? How did that feel?
- What can you do to overcome this feeling?  
How can you get your **power** back?

# Anger Management – Meet the Parents



Click below to watch this video

<http://ia341343.us.archive.org/1/items/Luggage/Anger-LuggageIncident.wmv>

# Example Questions

- Was that funny? Why was it funny?
- Did this man act inappropriately?
- Have you ever acted like this before? What was the other person's reaction?
- How did you feel afterwards?

# Anger Management – Happy Gilmore



Click below to watch this video:

<http://ia341334.us.archive.org/1/items/AngerMini/Anger-MiniPutt.wmv>

# Example Questions

- Have you ever felt frustrated like this? What did you do?
- What was the reaction of others? How did this make you feel?
- Why do we feel regret?
- Are we responsible only for ourselves or for others as well?

# Boundaries - Kramer



Click below to watch this video:

<http://ia341315.us.archive.org/0/items/intrusive/Intrusive-TheKeys.wmv>

# Example Questions

- Why do we have boundaries?
- Who decides what each person's boundaries are?
- How do feel when someone does not respect your boundaries?

# Impulsivity – That Delicious Eclair!



Click below to watch this video:

<http://ia341340.us.archive.org/0/items/impluse/Implusive-GeorgeAndEclair.wmv>



# Example Questions

- Ever done something you **immediately regretted**?
- Ever purchased something you couldn't afford?
- How do you feel afterwards? How can we slow ourselves down?

# Social Awareness -



Click below to watch this video:

<http://ia341336.us.archive.org/0/items/SocialAwareness/SocialAwareness-CloseTalker.w>

# Example Questions

- Have you ever spoken to someone who did not respect your personal space?
- How did you feel? How did you react?
- How can we tell when we are making someone uncomfortable?
- Does it matter? Why or why not?

# Applying the Technique

- Use television watching to create “safe opportunities”
- View self by looking at behaviour of others
- Teach cues, scripts and the application of alternatives in the safety of the television watching experience
- Help remove the elements of interpersonal living which produce social withdrawal and isolation, such as failure and rejection

# Outside the House

- Pre-set responses
- Lay out cues
- Rehearse, role play
- Plan alternatives
- Analyze “what happened”
- Praise successes
- Learn from problem

## In the “real world”

- Taking rehab strategies into real life situations
- Rehearse, interact and analyze
- Know problem causing situations
- Practice alternatives

A vintage teal television set is shown from a front-facing perspective. The screen is blank and white. The word "Questions?" is written in a black, sans-serif font in the center of the screen. The television has a classic design with a control panel on the right side, featuring a volume knob, a channel selector knob, and a speaker grille. The TV is supported by two teal legs.

Questions?



# There's a Little Bit of Kramer in All of Us: Social Skills Training Using Sitcoms

- With our thanks to the actors, writers, producers and directors of our favourite sitcoms
- This presentation does not endorse using only these specific vignettes; many different movies and television shows can be used to the same effect.