

COOPERATIVE PUZZLE ACTIVITY

Station 1

1 leader for each group of 8 to 12 students

20 minutes

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| <p>PURPOSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help students understand the social-communication challenges that people with Autism often experience• To help students understand that working in a group setting can sometimes make social interaction and collaboration challenging and complicated. |
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- MATERIALS:**
- Large piece borderless puzzle approximately 35 pieces
 - Two-minute timers or other way to keep time
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- SETUP:**
- The children sit in small groups at a table or around a surface to hold a puzzle.
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- PROCEDURE:**
- The leader asks students to sit in a group around the puzzle play space.
 - The leader distributes an approximately equal number of puzzle pieces to each student.
 - The leader explains the rules.
 - The activity repeats 3 times, but the rules change each time.
 - Lead the discussion.
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COOPERATIVE PUZZLE ACTIVITY

Round 1: Low Social Interaction -- No verbal or nonverbal communication at all

The leader distributes an approximately equal number of puzzle pieces to each student and explains the rules. It works best to begin the puzzle with a middle piece and hide the picture on the box to ensure there is enough challenge

Leader: Our goal is to put as many puzzle pieces together as possible following these rules:

- Each of you will have about the same number of pieces for the puzzle.
- I will start with this piece.
- If you think you have a piece that fits from your pile, give the piece to me to place on the puzzle.
- **In this round, you may not communicate in any way. You may not speak or gesture. You may not indicate where the piece goes.**
- You have two minutes to do the puzzle.
- Go!

After two minutes, tell the group "time is up." Count or note the pieces completed, but expect the students to have limited success with the puzzle. The leader must remind the students not to communicate or try to connect with each other or with the leader in any way.

Round 2: Medium Social Interaction -- Only non-verbal communication (i.e. gestures) allowed

The leader mixes up the pieces and distributes an approximately equal number of puzzle pieces to each student and explains the new rules.

Leader: Our goal is to put as many puzzle pieces together as possible again, but some of the rules have changed:

- Each of you will have about the same number of pieces for the puzzle.
- I will start with this piece.
- If you think you have a piece that fits from your pile, give the piece to me to place on the puzzle.
- **In this round, if you think your classmate has a piece, you can point to the piece, but your classmate must hand the piece to me.** You may not hand another person's piece to me.
- **You may gesture, but you may not speak.**
- You have two minutes to do the puzzle.
- Go!

After two minutes, tell the group "time is up" and count or note the pieces completed.

Round 3: High Social Interaction – Verbal and non-verbal communication AND collaboration allowed

The leader mixes up the pieces, distributes an approximately equal number of puzzle pieces to each student and explains the new rules.

Leader: Our goal is to put this puzzle together once again, but some of the rules have changed again:

- Each of you will have about the same number of pieces for the puzzle.
- I will start with this piece.
- **In this round, you may gesture, speak or communicate in any way AND you can collaborate. For example, you can work together to discuss strategies to complete the puzzle such as color or shape.**
- If you think you have a piece that fits from your pile, give the piece to me to place on the puzzle.
- **You may tell your classmate if they have a piece that fits, but your classmate must hand the piece to me.** You may not hand another person's piece to me.
- You have two minutes to do the puzzle.
- Go!

After two minutes, tell the group "time is up" and count or note the pieces completed. Then, in order to avoid frustration and demonstrate perseverance and completion, allow the kids to finish the puzzle. Then immediately put the pieces back in the box and put the box away to proceed with discussion.

Discussion:

1. How does the amount of communication affect the group's success? What did you notice? Were there any surprises or did things go as you expected?
2. In the first round, how did it feel to have to work with a group of your peers without being able to communicate with gestures or words? We call this a low level of social interaction. How did you feel when you saw a piece in your classmate's pile **that** would fit but could not tell him/her?
(difficult, frustrating, lonely; I actually prefer to work independently; wanted to talk, point or grab the piece)
3. In the second round, using a medium level of interaction, how did it feel to be able to use gestures?
4. Once allowed to talk, point and discuss strategies for putting the puzzle together, did you feel different than you did in the first and second round? (yes) How did this higher level of interaction feel?
5. In which round did the group work most successfully? Why?
(If second/medium interaction round: because the group is focused without talking to distract us, social interaction without talking allowed us to focus on the task at hand, and no one took over;
If third/high social interaction round: because sometimes collaboration goes well; working as a group made it easier to complete more of the puzzle when we could communicate in any way; we could collaborate/help each other with strategies; some members of the group are really good at puzzles and we could use their leadership to accomplish the group's goal.)

6. Sometimes the third round is **more** difficult than the second. Why do you think that might be?
(sometimes it is hard to cooperate, especially if everyone talks at once or people don't listen to each other).
7. What could you do to make group work more inclusive? How would you rewrite the rules of this game to include your classmates?
(there could be different roles within the group, i.e. timekeeper, puzzle counter, etc.; take turns)
8. We didn't have time, but what if you did another round with **talking** but no gestures? If you had to do this in another way – over the phone or the computer, how might that be different?

It can be challenging for everyone, sometimes, to work in a group. If a person has communication and social interaction challenges, it can be even more difficult. Many children with autism want to play and work together with a partner or with groups, but they have difficulty telling someone they want to join in. As a friend or classmate, you can invite them to join your group. When they join your group, continue to encourage them to participate or think about adapting the rules to be more inclusive.