

Social Competence in Children

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This book is dedicated to my family. I learned my social skills and resiliency from my mother, Margaret Semrud, and father, Ray Semrud. I learned how to work with people, deal with conflict and love from my siblings: David Semrud, Karen Cameron, Kathy Peterson, Richard Semrud, Laurie Semrud, and Amy Steva. There is no way I can ever repay all of the love and support I have received from my family to pursue my dreams.

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About the Author

MARGARET SEMRUD-CLIKEMAN, Ph.D., received her doctorate from the University of Georgia in 1990. She completed an internship and postdoctoral fellowship at the Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical school and received a post-doctoral neuroscience fellowship at MGH from NIH to study neuropsychological and brain morphology in children with ADHD. Her dissertation was awarded the Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award from the Orton Dyslexia Society. She has authored four books and numerous articles and continues her research interests in the areas of ADHD and brain morphology using functional and structural MRI scans. She is currently working on research in ADHD, 18q-syndrome, and nonverbal learning disabilities. With Dr. Plizska at UTHSCSA, Margaret was awarded an NIH grant to study the effects of stimulant medication on neuropsychological functioning. Dr. Semrud-Clikeman and her students have developed a social competence intervention that has been successfully piloted at UT. Dr. Semrud-Clikeman was recently awarded the 1999 Early Career Contributions award from the National Academy of Neuropsychology. She has published more than 30 articles, 40 chapters and 3 books. Dr. Semrud-Clikeman is currently a professor at Michigan State University with a joint appointment in Psychology and Psychiatry.

Preface

This book is meant to provide information about social competence in children for clinical practitioners and school professionals. It is also meant to serve as a resource for parents who are searching for answers as to why their child may be experiencing social difficulties. In this vein, I have provided case illustrations to illustrate the struggles and successes that children with various disorders experience. These illustrations are combinations of cases drawn from my experience over the past 30 years with children with and without developmental challenges. I believe that these composites help the reader to put a real face on the difficulties that can be present when a child has difficulty making and keeping friends. It was surprising to me to find, in many cases, very little empirical evidence or information about social competence many of the disorders provided in this book.

This book is organized to provide a developmental framework for our understanding of social competence at various ages. It begins with a discussion of the theories of what social competence is and then proceeds to discuss how children who are typically developing progress through various stages as they grow and experience. These chapters are based in transactional theory in that the environment plays a role in the development of these skills as well as the biological contributions the child brings to his/her experiences. I believe it is crucial to understand how social competence develops in a typically developing child before attempting to appreciate how social competence is problematic in a child with a disorder. In addition, the familial and school contributions to social understanding are crucial aspects for development of social competence and are discussed in this book.

The second part of this book provides social competence information for various disorders ranging from the more commonly experienced childhood difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities to more rare disorders such as childhood cancer and genetic disorders. Some of the areas have been well researched (i.e., ADHD, LD, internalizing disorders) while others have very little information about social competence (genetic disorders, TBI, etc.). This book was designed to provide information that is empirically validated as well

as to provide clinical insight into the development of social competence that may be not as well studied in the field.

Interventions are also provided within the context of each chapter. In cases where there is empirical validation of these interventions, the text provides note of this validation. In other cases where the work appears clinically valid but has not been validated at this time, the book indicates this finding and provides cautions about the need for such corroboration. It is important not only to understand these disorders from a social and emotional standpoint, but also to recognize the need for development of appropriate interventions.

Schools are at the forefront for working with children with social competence disorders and yet teachers may not be fully prepared for assisting with such development. Clinicians, school psychologists, and school counselors are at a crucial juncture to provide assistance to parents, teacher, and children. This book was intended to provide a blueprint for these clinicians in understanding the areas of concern as well as providing an overview of possible interventions.

Families are also very important in the socialization process and much of the literature indicates that the child learns social interactions from his/her parents. It is important to provide families with support for learning how to work with children experiencing this difficulty. It is also very important to recognize that parents may also have social understanding deficits and may need not only support but ongoing teaching of skills for themselves. For children with some disorders, the heritability index is quite substantial and parents may have a similar disorder as their child. In this case, providing instruction that does not take these problems into account may backfire and actually cause the parent to be reluctant to pursue assistance for their child and themselves.

In closing, writing of this book helped me to understand the areas of research that are still open for further empirical study. It also brought home to me how important social understanding is for normal child development and the resulting success in life for emotional and social fulfillment. Having worked with children with these difficulties and seen the toll that it takes on them and their parents really brings home the importance of developing interventions that can help these children adjust. While this book has taught me a great deal, it has also been difficult as I have needed to pull together literature from various sources and consolidate this information into, hopefully, a coherent whole. I would like to acknowledge the help that I have obtained from my editor, Judy Jones, throughout this project. I would also like to acknowledge all of the children with whom I have worked who have enriched my life as well as provided me the privilege of knowing them. I would further like to acknowledge my graduate students who have assisted me in the development of our intervention program and have allowed me to teach them and learn from them in this area. The list is long but I would like to acknowledge Jenifer Walkowiak, Laura Guli, Kimberly Glass, Mary Kay Corlett, and Allison Wilkinson and their tireless efforts to work with children with special needs.