

Making Connections II

PEIMS Code: N1290333

Abbreviation: MAKECON2

Grade Level(s): 9-12

Award of Credit: 0.5

State Approved Innovative Course

- Districts must have local board approval to implement innovative courses.
- In accordance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §74.27, school districts must provide instruction in all essential knowledge and skills identified in this innovative course.
- Innovative courses may only satisfy elective credit toward graduation requirements.
- Please refer to TAC §74.13 for guidance on endorsements.

Course Description:

Making Connections II helps students with autism spectrum disorder or related conditions, such as social (pragmatic) communication disorder, develop a deeper understanding of friendships and social relationships. The course covers disability awareness, teaching students how autism impacts their ability to form and maintain relationships. It guides students through self-assessment of their social skills, encourages strategies for improving friendships, and helps differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate relationships. Students also learn to cope with negative attention, engage in conflict resolution, and apply these skills in various community and social settings. Additionally, the course includes future planning, where students create strategies for sustaining friendships beyond high school.

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

- (a) General requirements. Students shall be awarded one-half credit for successful completion of the course. Recommended prerequisite: Making Connections I.
- (b) Introduction.
 - (1) Making Connections II helps students with autism spectrum disorder or related conditions, such as social (pragmatic) communication disorder, develop a deeper understanding of friendships and social relationships. The course covers disability awareness, teaching students how autism impacts their ability to form and maintain relationships. It guides students through self-assessment of their social skills, encourages strategies for improving friendships, and helps differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate relationships. Students also learn to cope with negative attention, engage in conflict resolution, and apply these skills in various community and social settings. Additionally, the course includes future planning, where students create strategies for sustaining friendships beyond high school.
 - (2) The Making Connections course sequence serves students who have deficits in social skill acquisition typically due to identified disorders such as autism spectrum disorder or social

pragmatic communication disorder. The courses also assist students with developing and generalizing appropriate and beneficial social skills and in turn increases that student's post-secondary outcome. The course sequence entails a common thread throughout its essential knowledge of skills by emphasizing disability awareness, personal growth, and social skill development.

- (3) Statements containing the word "including" reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase "such as" are intended as possible illustrative examples.

(c) Knowledge and Skills.

- (1) Disability Awareness. The student examines the impact that autism and other related disorders can have on the ability to develop, maintain, and understand relationships. The student is expected to:

- (A) research and analyze autism and related disorders using various resources to identify their own disability impact;
- (B) explain through writing or presentation the specific manifestations of autism or related disorders and how they impact social progress;
- (C) analyze impacts related to autism, such as social communication or adaptive skill deficits, and how those impacts affect individuals with autism in various aspects of their lives, including school, family, and postsecondary settings;
- (D) quantify the number and evaluate the quality of personal interactions that occur during and after school; and
- (E) determine if increased efforts toward understanding, developing, and maintaining relationships would be beneficial to the student.

- (2) Social Awareness. The student demonstrates an understanding of friendship. The student is expected to:

- (A) operationally define the meaning of friendship and highlight the aspects that are most desired;
- (B) identify the student's interests or skills that may be of interest to peers;
- (C) identify activities in which the student is currently involved that may enable the student to develop friendships based on shared interests;
- (D) analyze aspects of the student's behavior that may solicit or prevent friendships;
- (E) identify behaviors that the student wants to change to allow the student to develop more appropriate friendships; and
- (F) identify, develop, and employ strategies to address the student's problem behaviors that prevent appropriate friendships.

- (3) Social Awareness. The student demonstrates an understanding of appropriate friendships versus inappropriate friendships. The student is expected to:

- (A) compare the qualities of appropriate and inappropriate friendships;
- (B) identify and discuss behaviors that make others appropriate friends to pursue;
- (C) identify and discuss behaviors that make others inappropriate friends;

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- (D) analyze the behaviors of peers through modeling, roleplay, and natural opportunities and describe those behaviors as demonstrating social acceptance or rejection; and
 - (E) roleplay and participate in natural opportunities of initiating conversation and sharing information with a peer regarding each other, and the student's individual experiences or interests.
- (4) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student demonstrates an understanding of negative attention from peers and identifies multiple ways in which to cope with that attention. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify various ways that students receive negative attention from peers such as teasing, physical bullying, cyber bullying, and rumors or gossip;
 - (B) differentiate between peer rejection and bullying;
 - (C) analyze roleplay situations involving negative attention between peers;
 - (D) compare possible action plans for the student to pursue when receiving negative attention, such as accessing available support systems, ignoring the peer, or attempting to have a conversation with the peer;
 - (E) characterize personality traits and behaviors that inspire confidence and trust in others and identify those traits and behaviors in current personal relationships; and
 - (F) roleplay scenarios of peer interaction and discuss actions or steps the student could take in the scenarios or in previous circumstances to practice preventative as well as coping strategies.
- (5) Social Success. The student engages in conflict resolution. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify strategies for remaining calm in stressful situations, such as deep breathing, counting backwards, or taking a break;
 - (B) discuss, observe, and roleplay the behaviors a person employs when engaging in effective conflict resolution, such as the appropriate use of prosody, tone, volume, and cadence;
 - (C) discuss, observe, and roleplay the appropriate use of body language, such as proximity, facial expressions, arms and hands movements, eye contact, and shoulder placement, during effective conflict resolution;
 - (D) discuss, observe, and roleplay the use of appropriate conflict resolution phrases to express frustration;
 - (E) discuss, observe, and roleplay the use of statements that express an interest in and empathic understanding of another person's point of view to resolve conflict;
 - (F) discuss, observe, and roleplay expressing an opinion in a respectful manner;
 - (G) discuss, observe, and roleplay listening respectfully to another person's opinion;
 - (H) discuss, observe, and roleplay developing a mutually agreed upon plan of action to resolve a conflict and to prevent further conflict; and
 - (I) discuss, observe, and roleplay coping skills to employ when a conflict does not end in a resolution.
- (6) Social Awareness in the community. The student develops strategies for initiating, maintaining, and understanding relationships. The student is expected to:

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- (A) describe the various settings in which the student has the opportunity to develop friendships;
 - (B) discuss strategies for developing friendships in various community settings; and
 - (C) employ strategies for developing friendships in various settings then examine the effectiveness of each strategy.
- (7) Future Planning. The student describes the importance of developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify current appropriate friendships; and
 - (B) develop a plan for developing and maintaining more appropriate friendships in multiple settings such as school and work.

Recommended Resources and Materials:

1. Autism Society of America. "About Autism." Autism Society of America: What Is Autism. Autism Society of America. Accessed September 1, 2024 <https://autismsociety.org/the-autism-experience/>
2. Buron, Kari Dunn. The Incredible 5-Point Scale: The Significantly Improved and Expanded Second Edition. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2012.
3. American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev.) <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
4. Gerhardt, Peter F., and Daniel Crimmins. Social Skills and Adaptive Behavior in Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 2013.
5. Gorenstein, Michael, and Melissa Shapiro. "Social Skills Intervention: A Key Piece of the Employment Puzzle." Seaver Autism Center for Research and Treatment at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. AHRC New York City. June 25, 2021.
6. Griffiths, Amanda J., Amy Hurley Hanson, Cristina M. Giannantonio, Sarika K. Mathur, Kristina Hyde, and Erik Linstead. "Developing Employment Environments Where Individuals with ASD Thrive: Using Machine Learning to Explore Employer Policies and Practices." Brain Sciences 10, no. 9 (2020): 632. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci10090632>.
7. Laugeson, Elizabeth A. The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013.
8. Laugeson, Elizabeth A. The PEERS Curriculum for School-Based Professionals: Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.
9. Laugeson, Elizabeth A., and Fred Frankel. Social Skills for Teenagers with Developmental and Autism Spectrum Disorders: The PEERS Treatment Manual. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.
10. Luiselli, James K. Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Recent Advances and Innovations in Assessment, Education, and Intervention. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.
11. O'Connor, Rachel A.G., Neeltje van den Bedem, Els M.A. Blijd-Hoogewys, Lex Stockmann, and Carolien Rieffe. "Friendship Quality among Autistic and Non-Autistic (Pre-) Adolescents: Protective or Risk Factor for Mental Health?" Autism 26, no. 8 (2022): 2041-2051. Published online January 22, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211073448>.
12. Value Student Interest Inventory." Michigan State University. Accessed May 22, 2024. https://edwp.educ.msu.edu/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/06/VALUE_StudentInterestInventory.pdf.

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Recommended Course Activities:

- Personal Interest Survey used to identify own interests as well as interests that may be preferred in a friend
- Reinforcement Survey
- Goal Setting
- Discuss community outings with family and friends
- Role-Play with critiques
- Behavior rehearsal exercises (e.g calling, texting, appropriate use of social media, asking someone to go to an activity with you)

Suggested methods for evaluating student outcomes:

The students participate in a class period that includes direct teaching of social skills instruction, and they are monitored throughout the day by the Making Connections teacher and paraprofessionals. Monitoring consists of the staff consistently observing the students' other classes and providing prompting, redirection, and coaching of the learned social skills. This allows for the students to employ the learned strategies in authentic circumstances and receive feedback from their trusted Making Connections staff. The combination of the Making Connections course and the monitoring serves to increase the students' social skills by moving them through all levels of learning (acquisition, fluency, maintenance, and generalization).

The students will be evaluated using various minor and major grades as well as their progress towards their individualized goals. The progress towards their goals will be evaluated using consistently obtained data. Rubrics should be utilized to grade goals set, role-plays, and behavioral rehearsal exercises. Summative assessments may involve administering the social skills assessment from the beginning of the semester again at the end of the semester to compare results and evaluate growth in social skills development. Students can be required to reflect on their growth through the semester and set future goals.

Formal Assessment

Beginning of Semester - Completion of interest survey with reflection as to what interests a desired friend may possess as well.

- Goal setting with action steps and consistent intermittent evaluation of progress on identifying possible friends, and initiating, building, and maintaining relationships.
- End of Semester - Reflections as to what steps have been made to identify, initiate, build, and maintain friendships. What success has occurred and what are next steps.

Informal Assessment

- Role-Play
- Behavioral rehearsals / social autopsies of real situations the student has experienced
- Reflections of observations
- Class discussions and activities centered around specific skills (e.g., safety on social media, asking a friend to join you at an activity)

Teacher qualifications:

An assignment for a *Making Connections II* course is allowed with one of the following certificates:

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- Emotionally Disturbed
- Generic Special Education
- High School—Generic Special Education
- Language and/or Learning Disabilities
- Secondary Generic Special Education (Grades 6 – 12) (Grades 6 – 12 only)
- Severely Emotionally Disturbed and Autistic
- Special Education: Early Childhood – Grade 12

Additional information:

This course is designed for students with identified social skills deficits. These deficits should be addressed within the student's individualized educational plan. That plan is helpful at encouraging the appropriate interventions be used by staff as well as by each student. Although the students can only work towards acquisition, fluency, and maintenance within the Making Connections classroom, the individualized educational plan should also detail the manner with which the student will achieve generalization of those skills across all educational settings.

Teachers should collaborate with professionals (e.g., LSSPs, behavior interventionists) and build skills in behavioral intervention especially in using operant conditioning/cognitive behavioral strategies.