Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Rating Scales - Reviews

Pearl Barnes MA, BSc(Hons), PGCE, PGCertEEd, Training and Assessment Consultant

Background Information

In recent years there has been a plethora of literature relating the importance of social skills development for successful academic achievement.

Schools and other educational settings are social environments where children and young people have to navigate complex relationships with peers and adults.

The ability to communicate successfully with a range of personalities, to cooperate with others and not over-dominate, to maintain responsibility for one’s own behaviour whilst self-regulating it and to empathise, are all seen as essential skills for successful social interaction. A dip or weakness in one or more areas may impact significantly the individual’s academic performance. Although children and young people who experience social skills difficulties may do so for a number of reasons and difficulties may persist over time, social skills can be substantially be improved through personalised intervention, provided the support targets student’s areas of need.

The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) is designed as a multi-dimensional assessment and intervention scheme which includes a detailed fully-standardised assessment alongside an intervention program of support for developing social skills in children and young people from 3-19 years.

The SSIS consists of the SSIS Rating Scales for assessing Social Skills competency, the SSIS Intervention Guide for promoting and developing social competency through use of pro-social behaviours with targeted groups for teachers and other professionals to develop the top ten social skills that are deemed as critical for all students to function successfully within the classroom.

The tool was designed by two experienced scientist-practitioners Stephen Elliott, PHD and Frank Gresham, PHD, and addresses the need for an evidence-based assessment that provides a fully accessible intervention program to meet the identified needs of the individual.

The SSIS multi-rater assessment looks at student social behaviours which affect teacher-student and parent-child relationships, peer acceptance and academic performance.

The norms-referenced, standardised scales can be used for universal screening, screening of students who may be at risk, to set specific targets and to evaluate and provide a quantitative and qualitative measure of progress after the intervention programme has been implemented.

The SSIS Intervention Guide provides a useful package of support which was designed specifically for students where their social behaviour interferes with their academic progress and overall performance, and where other, classwide, programmes may not have addressed the specific needs of the individual.

The intervention programme uses the principles of social learning theory and applied behaviour analysis, which draw upon skills of modeling, coaching, rehearsal, performance feedback and differential reinforcement techniques.
SSIS Rating Scales

Administration:

The SSIS rating Scales is a set of three forms designed to be administered easily by any professional with experience and understanding of the principles of psychometric assessment. It takes about 15-20 minutes to administer and complete the rating scales which consist of: Student Rating Scales (8-12, 13-18), Teacher Rating Scales and Parent Rating Scales. The forms are self-carbonated for ease of transferring information and scoring.

Rating Scales Assessment Domains:

Each of the Rating Scales measures seven domains of Social Skills functioning and five Problem behaviours which are multi-dimensional. For instance, the Parent and Teacher Rating Scales assess both the frequency (Never, Seldom, Often, Almost Always) and level of importance (Not Important, Important, Critical), whereas the Student Rating Scales assess how true the student feels each Social Skill and Problem Behaviour item is for them (Not True, A Lot True, Very True) alongside the importance of each Social Skill item in older students.

The social skills assessment forms include common social skills behaviours such as:

- Communication: assesses non-verbal communication such as; turn-taking, making eye contact during conversation, tone of voice, politeness
- Cooperation: assesses ability to help others and share, along with compliancy
- Assertion: involves initiating behaviours such as asking for help, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others
- Responsibility: assesses the individual’s ability to show regard for property or work and being able to communicate effectively with adults
- Empathy: assesses the ability to show concern and respect for the views and feelings of others
- Engagement: assesses initiating conversations, joining in activities and inviting others to join in, making friends and interacting with others
- Self-Control: assesses the way an individual responds to conflicts and disagreements as well as non-confrontational situations

The Problem Behaviours are considered to interfere with either the acquisition or performance of social skills and are assessed in five domains on the Parent and Teacher forms:

- Externalising: how verbally or physically aggressive is the individual? Ability to control temper
- Bullying: Does the student hurt people either physically or emotionally? How well do they let others join in with activities?
- Hyperactivity/Inattention: Does the student have excessive movement and impulsive reactions? How easily are they distracted?
- Internalising: Does the student feel anxious or sad, lonely or exhibit low self-esteem?
- Autism Spectrum: does the student show signs of becoming upset when there are changes to routine or have non-functional routines? How well does the student make eye-contact?

There is an additional measure for the Teacher of Academic Performance of the student when compared with their peers, which places the social skills of the child within an academic context.
Recording, Scoring and interpretation

Although on initial contact the Rating Scale Forms look lengthy and quite daunting, the recording is, in reality, quick and straightforward, as each question can be recorded from the individuals’ knowledge of the student.

Scoring can be either by hand or computer, although the computer scoring has not been reviewed. The manual sets out clearly how to grade and mark responses.

The Parent form can either be completed within the school setting or sent to parents to complete in their own home. It is recommended that students are supervised when the Student Form is completed to ensure adequate completion and a true reflection of self perception. There is a little complication if not all the items are rated, as an adjustment needs to be made which is limited by the number of missing responses.

As behaviour and gender are often inter-related, the standardisation process has very usefully sub-divided norms data for male, female and combined.

The administrator therefore, has a choice over which data to use when scoring the responses. Using sex-specific data neutralises any gender differences and therefore sets the bar for extreme behaviours. Hence, if a high raw score is obtained for a behaviour which is common in male but less common in females, by choosing the sex-specific norms, it neutralises the effects of gender differences and makes for a fairer comparison.

Additional Information

All Normative data is included in the administration manual along with validity and reliability data.

The SSIS Rating Scales could prove useful for a number of assessment opportunities including screening, identifying whether an individual is experiencing problem behaviours more substantially when compared with their peer group, identifying an individual’s strengths as well as weaknesses, pinpointing where to precisely target intervention, tracking progress over time and providing evidence to external providers of the level of difficulty when compared with others.

Intervention Programme

An interesting part of the SSIS is the intervention programme, which is designed to be used as an outcome of the assessment. Whereas most standardised assessments leave the administrator to determine the intervention necessary to address any weaknesses and identified difficulties, this assessment goes a step further and provides the intervention package too.

The SSIS Intervention Guide is designed to be used with a small group of 4-6 students led by an experienced group leader such as a psychologist, councillor or social worker. Although there is a useful introduction, which outlines the differences in approaches to remediation to some of the presenting behaviours, this Guide is not a training manual; hence a level of expertise and knowledge is necessary to administer the intervention.

The intervention and assessment behaviours are the same, however, the intervention breaks them down into 20 sub-categories or skills units, each of which form the focus of an intervention session. All sessions are structured in the same way into six phases providing the opportunity for reflection and evaluation of
the session, in addition to the opportunity to begin to generalise the skills used.

There are two useful DCD-Roms in addition to the Intervention Guide, providing additional resources and video excerpts to be used during the training sessions. Additional resources include letters for parents, progress forms and reports templates, cue cards and certificates of completion.

The Intervention package addresses the issue of tailoring the sessions to the age and development of the students, by providing age-specific vocabulary, resources and activities.

The instructor merely has to determine which would most suit the age and development of the students within the group. The video clips are a little disappointing. The excerpts are filmed in the US and the same actors are used throughout. Although both positive and negative models are provided they are not necessarily reflective of real-life scenarios. In addition, some of the excerpts would be too young for Secondary pupils and therefore inappropriate for the age group which is most likely to be the target of intervention.

Summary

The SSIS is an innovative and practical package of assessment and intervention which addresses a need for a standardised assessment of social skills development. The Rating Scales are not only easy to administer, but the corresponding intervention programme is self-explanatory and practical.

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