

# SOCIAL AUTOPSIES

## CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal	<input type="checkbox"/> PK	<input type="checkbox"/> Classic	<input type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic
<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed	<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle/High	Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior
			<input type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech
			<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

## BRIEF INTRODUCTION

A social autopsy is a problem-solving strategy designed to support social skills. Students who have difficulties understanding social interactions can use a social autopsy as a way to analyze the social errors they made. Through the process, the student learns more effective interactions (Bieber, 1994).

## DESCRIPTION

Mainly developed for students with learning disabilities, the social autopsy can help students understand the often subtle procedures involved in social interactions by analyzing social errors that they committed and choosing alternative solutions to correct the errors in the future. Working with an adult, the student analyzes an inappropriate behavior and learns about successful interactions or behaviors in the situation. In order to implement the desired behavior or generalize the strategy, Lavoie (cited in Bieber, 1994) suggested that the procedure involve all relevant people, including parents, teachers, bus drivers, administrators, and cafeteria workers.

An instructor first identifies situations for teaching successful interactions and supporting a student in a social setting. The student examines the positive interactions or behaviors in the setting and practices them in an effort to increase her likelihood of implementing the behaviors in other settings.

Lavoie emphasized that the social autopsy provides practice, immediate feedback, and positive reinforcement. The social autopsy is usually conducted by a significant adult for the student in a one-to-one session.

Examples of where social autopsies may be used include:

- Ignoring others' greetings
- Asking a question in a class without raising hand
- Continuing to talk on the same topic
- Sneezing without covering own mouth

## STEPS

The student can analyze with an adult as follows:

1. *Identify the error.* The student describes to an instructor what happened and identifies what the error was. Identifying the correct emotions about the error can be difficult. The instructor helps the student understand the moment. In addition, the instructor teaches the unspoken rules that govern people's behavior in a given setting.
2. *Identify the persons who were hurt by the error.* Lack of theory of mind can be an obstruction in identifying others' feelings or thoughts about the error. Teaching theory of mind may become a central aspect for this step.
3. *Decide how to correct the error.* The student may need to observe the natural setting in which the desired behavior can happen. The instructor helps the student identify what other people do in the same situation and how the consequences can be different.
4. *Develop a plan that does not cause the error.* Based on the identified way to alter the error, the student makes a plan and writes down in the worksheet what to do for the next time.

Social Autopsy Worksheet
What happened?
What was the social error? Who was hurt by the social error?
What should be done to correct the error?
What should be done next time?

## BRIEF EXAMPLE

Kevin, who is in the fifth grade, is always talking about his favorite topic, spaceships. Whenever he had a chance to talk with peers, no matter what the current topic was, he started to talk about spaceships. Ms. Reed, a special education teacher, decided to conduct a social autopsy with Kevin during lunch time. Kevin was asked to observe peers in the cafeteria and to make notes about general topics of people's conversations. Ms. Reed helped him to understand what small talk means and the social function of such talks. Kevin analyzed the general conversation, including the length of time each person spoke, the taking of turns, changing of topics, etc.

Kevin became aware of many conventional ways people meet and greet each other. With a peer's assistance, Kevin was able to practice social interactions based on his findings from the social autopsy. He was excited to interact with his peers because he now understood why people say certain things or behave in certain ways in social situations.

## SUMMARY

A social autopsy can be used to analyze social errors and to find an appropriate way to correct them. An adult instructor helps the student understand social interactions and the desired behavior in a setting.

## RESEARCH TABLE

Number of Studies	Ages (year)	Sample Size	Area(s) Addressed	Outcome
0				

## REFERENCES

Bieber, J. (1994). *Learning disabilities and social skills with Richard LaVoie: Last one picked ... first one picked on* [DVD]. Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service.

Lavoie, R. D. (1994). *Learning disabilities and social skills with Richard Lavoie: Last one picked ... First one picked on* [Video and Teacher's Guide]. (Available from PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314-1698).

## RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Asperger Syndrome and Six Strategies for Success:  
[http://www.ccbd.net/documents/bb/BB\\_V14N1\\_Aspenger.pdf](http://www.ccbd.net/documents/bb/BB_V14N1_Aspenger.pdf)  
Social autopsies are defined on page 5 of this seven-page pdf. There are also other helpful strategies for use with students with Asperger Syndrome.