



Making Connections I

PEIMS Code: N1290332

Abbreviation: MAKECON1

Grade Level(s): 9-12

Award of Credit: 0.5

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 I is an introduction to the Making Connections course sequence that assists students with autism spectrum disorder or other related disorders such as social pragmatic communication disorder, that may cause deficits in the individual's social skills in developing an understanding of autism and other disorders which may cause deficits in social skills. *Making Connections I* will assist students in analyzing their own strengths and social skill deficits through self-assessment and the creation of plans to address atypical behaviors that may hinder academic or social success. The course covers topics such as building positive relationships, understanding social expectations in school and community settings, and applying organizational strategies for academic success. Additionally, students will explore postsecondary options, helping them to identify strengths and areas for growth in preparation for life beyond high school.

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

- (a) General requirements. Students shall be awarded one-half credit for successful completion of the course. There are no prerequisites for this course.
- (b) Introduction.
 - (1) Making Connections I is an introduction to the Making Connections course sequence that assists students with autism spectrum disorder or other related disorders such as social (pragmatic) communication in developing understanding of autism and other disorders which may cause deficits in social skills. Making Connections I will assist students to analyze their own strengths and social skill deficits through self-assessment and to create plans to address atypical behaviors that may hinder academic or social success. The course covers topics such as building positive relationships, understanding social expectations in school and community settings, and applying organizational strategies for academic success. Additionally, students explore postsecondary options, helping them to identify strengths and areas for growth in preparation for life beyond high school.

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- (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 student' post-secondary outcome. The course sequence entails a common thread throughout its essential knowledge of skills by emphasizing disability awareness, personal growth, and social skills 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 develops an understanding of autism and other related disorders. The student is expected to:
 - (A) analyze various resources to gather information on autism and related disorders;
 - (B) identify and describe the typical deficits consistent with autism and related disabilities such as social (pragmatic) communication disorder; and
 - (C) identify and describe the atypical behaviors of autism and related disorders, such as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.
 - (2) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student analyzes how autism spectrum disorder or a related disorder has impacted the student. The student is expected to:
 - (A) analyze the results of the social skills inventory and personal observations/reflections of the student's behavior to identify specific strengths and deficits;
 - (B) summarize what impact the student's social deficits may be having on academic and social success;
 - (C) compare strategies and skills that will allow the student to mediate the disability;
 - (D) identify any environments or situations in which the student's atypical behaviors, such as stemming, are useful or socially acceptable; and
 - (E) evaluate various strategies to increase the student's prosocial behaviors and decrease problematic behaviors.
 - (3) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student develops a plan to eliminate or decrease the frequency and intensity of the atypical behaviors deemed inappropriate, nonfunctional, or detrimental to the student's academic and social success. The plan focuses in on building skills and replacement behaviors that will allow the student to be more successful across settings. The student is expected to:
 - (A) implement the formulated plan to eliminate or decrease the frequency and intensity of the atypical behaviors within the Making Connections classroom;
 - (B) implement the behavior plan and record data related to specific elements of the;
 - (C) analyze data such as frequency of implementation of plan, antecedent of inappropriate or appropriate responses and consequence of each inappropriate or appropriate response as observed during plan implementation;
 - (D) evaluate the success of the plan at decreasing the frequency and intensity of atypical behaviors; and

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- (E) make any adjustments to the plan and employ the new plan for a period of time while recording the data.
- (4) Social Awareness. The student demonstrates an understanding of academic and social expectations in the student's high school. The student is expected to:
 - (A) discuss, observe, and roleplay socially appropriate and expected behaviors in a variety of school settings;
 - (B) demonstrate socially appropriate and expected behaviors in prescribed situations across various educational settings, such as initiating a conversation, ending a conversation, joining a conversation, making a phone call to a peer, making a phone call to a teacher, sending an email to a peer, sending an email to a teacher, using humor appropriately, participating in a group activity, and participating in a competitive activity; and
 - (C) record and analyze data as to when the student demonstrated socially appropriate and expected behaviors and what the results of those behaviors were.
- (5) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student compares various organizational strategies and determines an organizational strategy that best works for the student. The student is expected to:
 - (A) apply organizational strategies successfully in order to meet assignment deadlines, locate needed supplies, and maintain an orderly work area;
 - (B) examine the outcomes of each employed organizational strategy by comparing previous strategies used and determining whether the current strategy was successful;
 - (C) document any missing assignments and zeros in grade books;
 - (D) determine the effectiveness of the organizational strategies by monitoring student success using the selected strategies; and
 - (E) make adjustments to each strategy in order to increase its effectiveness. Examples of adjustments may be decreasing the number of missing assignments and having all needed supplies.
- (6) Social Success. The student employs and demonstrates appropriate interactions with peers, teachers, and other school personnel. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify the steps to build positive relationships with peers, teachers, and other school personnel;
 - (B) document and analyze skills needed to initiate and maintain relationships with peers, teachers, and other school personnel;
 - (C) identify and describe various social organizations and clubs in the school;
 - (D) summarize the pros and cons of joining social organizations and the social expectations of those groups;
 - (E) increase the frequency of socially appropriate behaviors while reducing the frequency or intensity of socially inappropriate behaviors in various school settings during authentic situations; and
 - (F) compare the student's resulting social skills with the student's initial social skills by completing a second social skills inventory.

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- (7) Social Awareness in the Community. The student demonstrates an understanding of social expectations in various community settings. The student is expected to:
- (A) observe, discuss, and roleplay socially appropriate and expected behaviors in a variety of community settings;
 - (B) record and analyze data as to when the student demonstrated socially appropriate and expected behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors; and
 - (C) develop a plan to modify appropriate social skills during the next community experience to build and maintain relationships while successfully participating in social or professional networks.
- (8) Future Planning. The student investigates postsecondary options. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify postsecondary options in school, living arrangements, and community.
 - (B) describe the pros and cons of the various postsecondary options; and
 - (C) identify the student's individual areas of strength and needs for each of the various postsecondary options.

Recommended Resources and Materials:

1. Buron, Kari Dunn. *The Incredible 5-Point Scale: The Significantly Improved and Expanded Second Edition*. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2012.
2. American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
3. Gerhardt, Peter F., and Daniel Crimmins. *Social Skills and Adaptive Behavior in Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 2013.
4. 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. <https://autismspectrumnews.org/social-skills-intervention-key-piece-of-the-employment-puzzle/>
5. 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>.
6. Laugeson, Elizabeth A. *The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013.
7. Laugeson, Elizabeth A. *The PEERS Curriculum for School-Based Professionals: Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 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.

Recommended Course Activities:

- Orientation
- Reading and discussing multiple resources regarding autism (e.g., autism Society Webpage, DSM -5)
- Completing pre- and post- social skills inventory
- Discuss results of social skills inventory
- Goal setting

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- Observing, discussing, and labeling appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors in various school settings
- Observing, discussing, and labeling appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors in various community settings
- Discuss community outings with family and friends
- Role-play
- Behavior rehearsal exercises
- Reading and discussing excerpts from the school code of conduct

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.

Teacher qualifications:

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

- 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.

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