

Welcome to module five of Start Communicating Today. We are going to be talking all about group skills. I love working with students in a group. So this will be really great ideas if you're a parent or a professional about how to facilitate peer-to-peer interaction. Our learning objectives are that you'll be able to define three group teaching formats. How do we provide group instruction? What does it look like? We'll be able to talk about three modified leisure activities that you can be using during your lesson. So, whether you're trying to facilitate play dates with your own child, or you're doing speech therapy groups, there's going to be some really nice modified leisure activities. Sometimes students have a hard time engaging in the activity the way that it is played typically. And so we're going to talk about, how can we insert some little prompts to help out with that so that it's fun for everyone.

Here are our three teaching formats. Number one, speech therapist runs a group in the classroom. Okay? Pretty standard. I do a lot of this. I love group therapy. Group therapy is my jam. I have always loved it since I very first started being a speech therapist. So I'm excited to share some highlights from the years I've been doing it. Another group teaching format is the speech therapist and teacher co teach in the classroom. So you really have to have planning time for this, and you have to have a fellow professional who is on board with this as well, but it can be a wonderful model for our kids. And then the last one is speech therapist consults and coaches the teacher. So this might be a time that we can go into the classroom, give feedback on communication, and can be really important time.

This is what I look like at work. This is me at my job. The speech therapist runs a group in the classroom. So I really, really love group therapy. Ever since I started in the field, I have really loved working on that peer-to-peer interaction. I love that with my students, because my idea is that I always want to try to phase myself out so that it's just my students spending time with each other and interacting with each other. And so that's always my goal. I love to go into the classroom. I love to plan thematic groups for a variety of students and it's something that I really love. And what I'm going to share with you today are very specific examples, and you're going to get these resources so that you can absolutely do this as well with your own child or with your own caseload.

So, some things to think about. Who will be in the group? When will the group take place? How will you incorporate student goals? What is the general framework for the group? I have a general framework that I've been using for a while, I'm going to share with you, that's been helpful. Who will be there to support and prompt as needed? We need to have helpers and they make a world of difference to have some support. How will you take data? Always important. Can you co-treat? Can you co-treat with the occupational therapist? Can you co-treat with the teacher? I've done all of these things together.

I remember when I first started doing group, I'll never forget my student-teaching supervisor, I guess that's what we called it when I was in graduate school, came out to see me and I was working with three students. I think one had autism, the other two had complex communication needs, and they were very young. They were probably kindergarten age. And I remember that first session I had my whole Boardmaker book, it was an adapted book and there were clip art pictures and I had little Velcro icons and trying to engage the students. And it was really hard for me to keep everybody on task, engaged. And I remember then she came out to observe me towards the end of my student teaching experience and she was very impressed with my growth. I had an amazing teacher that was my mentor, speech therapist rather, and I really learned a lot in that time during graduate school about how to get my kids excited about communication and how to increase their engagement and how to work on communication.

And so, it was just the doing it. It was the planning. It was the practicing. And I think what's challenging for group is that sometimes the group dynamics change, sometimes a student can't come at that same time. Sometimes you have a great group and then somebody moves out or moves in and it changes the whole dynamics of the group. But another thing

that we need to think about with group is that we need to remain flexible. Okay? This is one of my running themes that I'll just be talking about throughout the course, but when we are working with anybody really, and helping to support them, we must remain flexible. Group is my favorite though.

Okay. So this is my general framework that I like to use. Now, what I do for the group and how I work on student goals is going to be nuanced and it's going to be different for every single group that I run, for every single group of students that I work with, because it's going to be dependent upon the student's goals. But this is the general framework that I use.

First, we're going to start with greetings or a conversation starter based on your students' language level. Then we're going to segue into a literacy-based activity. We've been talking about literacy a lot. You're going to get some really cool adapted books as printables for this module that I use in therapy and created to use with my own students. So start with greetings or a conversation starter, do a literacy-based activity, do an extension activity. Okay? And I'm going to give you examples of that. So the literacy-based activity for really little kids could be, like we're talking about today, could be a board book. If you're working with students who are in preschool, you might have access to a Smart Board. So maybe you do an adapted activity there. Smart Boards can be interactive, they're very, very cool. But if you don't have access to that, that's okay. Use a book. There's an extension activity. So that's like a vocabulary activity, something where we're getting the students engaged and moving about, and then a play or leisure time. This is the general framework that I use.

Okay. So, my specific example would be, let's say we're planning a group together. I want to give you some very specific ideas so that when you implement this with your own child or your own caseload, that you're able to do these exact things. And then when you have a little hiccup or something happens along the way, you can ask me for support in the Facebook group. So the first one is, we start with greetings, and then we do an adapted weather book, which I have a video of this adapted weather book. You're going to get this adapted weather book. We would do that activity together.

Then we would do paper plate ice skating. Paper plate ice skating is one of these gem activities that I actually learned about when my own kids went to a music class and it was a whole snow theme, in the summer mind you, and the teacher did paper plate ice skating. You literally just put paper plates on your feet and you go around. And I've done this with so many of my students. Easier when you have carpet, but a very fun activity and my kids really love it. We have done follow the leader with paper plate ice skating, and it's just fun. It's really fun. And then playing modified Simon Says. Okay? So this would be a general framework for doing a group.

So let's get into this. This is an adapted book that you are going to receive as a member of the course. I'm super excited to share it. It's called All About The Weather. So I really love to make my own adapted books and I have a lot of them for sale, but being part of the course, I'm going to give some of them to you. And I want to show you how I use them too, because I think that's what's so important, is that you can use them with your students, with your children, and they're such a nice way to work on communication in such a language-enriched way.

So what I like to do, it depends. Sometimes I just upload these onto my iPad or my computer, and then for other students, I print them. It really just depends on the student. And they're really amazing to use too if you're working in a group setting, if you're seeing a group of students, I'm lucky enough to have a Smart Board in my classroom, in the classroom that I work in, I don't have my own classroom and it's really, really cool. So I just bring them up on the Smart Board, which is a very, very large projection-type device.

And so I like to use real-life pictures because I think for our autistic students, it's just easier because it helps us generalize to real life. And so this is, it can be rainy. It's a very simple picture, very simple text. We can read these to the student. We can talk about what's going on in the picture. It can be sunny. Oh, I see the sun. It can be cloudy. Ooh, that's a dark day. It can be snowy. Wow, when it's cold out and snowy, I say, "Brr." You could do a little motion for the students. You could have the students do a little motion after you. If you live in an area where there isn't a lot of snow, that's kind of fun too to talk about if you've ever seen snow. It can be windy. We can practice the sign for tree. We could talk about tree and windy. We could do motions to pretend like we're blowing like the wind, all those different skills.

We could work on imitation with gross motor imitation in a group, super fun. We might see a tornado. Wow, pretty scary. We might see a hurricane. And we just go through the book. We can work on imitation skills, we can work on labeling if your students are labeling. We might see a blizzard. And it's a really nice way to work on simplistic group skills where we're having a adapted book that's going to be the theme, we're embedding literacy, we can do motions for the different pages in the book, whatever your students are working on. We might see lightning. We might see a rainbow. The word bow is an easier word to say if you have some students who are verbally imitating, and if you have students or your own children using an AAC device, you can definitely use the device as well. This is a great time to be able to participate together. I love seeing a rainbow. What do you like to see?

Some students may be able to think back what some of these different words are if you go back to the picture. Oh yeah, I like to see snow. We build a snowman. And so it's a really nice way to kick off a thematic group with your students. I'm so excited. You're going to get to use this as part of the course.

All right. So that is an adapted book that I created to use with my caseload, and you are going to get access to it, so a really awesome resource. I love that. So no matter where you live, it's fun to talk about weather that your kids are familiar with, and then talking about new weather too. Another activity that's part of this group that we're discussing now is paper plate ice skating. That is my daughter, Collette, she is being a nice little model here. I talked about paper plate ice skating, I think, in a blog post previously. And I just love it because it's very inexpensive and it's something that we usually have just laying around the house. My kids really loved it. I did it in a group. I have done it in individual therapy when I go to somebody's home and kids really enjoy it. It's just super fun. It gets kids up. It gets kids active. And they like that.

This group would then end with Simon Says. So I love modifying leisure and play skills that might be difficult for our autistic students. Some of our students may just need some embedded prompts so they can enjoy these activities too. I love to play Simon Says in a modified version. So the way that we modify Simon Says is always Simon Says. Simon Says touch your head. Students do it after me. Simon says touch your nose. Students do it after me. Simon Says do a twist. Students do it after me. It's always Simon Says. I've had some really cool breakthroughs by playing Simon Says.

I had a parent, when I was working in a non-public program, I would write a note after each speech session and I would just say a little blurb about what we worked on specifically. And I kept writing to this parent and saying, "Hey, we worked on modified Simon Says. This is how we work on it." And she said, "Oh my gosh, we went to the airport, we were visiting family, and we had some downtime. So we played modified Simon Says." She actually had two children with autism and she said, "You know what? It really helped to pass the time and the kids felt comfortable playing it." And I thought, "Oh my goodness, how cool is that? I love that."

Another gem I have from Simon Says is I had a student who I was seeing in a small group. These students were preschool age and I would do modified Simon Says. That was one of the leisure activities that we worked on, they really loved it.

They were all in, they loved playing it, and the one student wanted to be the leader, which was really cool because this student was verbalizing, but the student was not big on initiating conversation or anything like that. But the student loved to take a turn and be a leader. And it's just really funny. He would say, "Simon says do windmill arms. Simon says do the twist. Simon says fake cry." And he wanted everybody to cry. It was very sweet and he loved it and he took a leadership role. I just love that so much.

So that would be one way to thematically plan, and you don't have to thematically plan your groups. They don't have to be that way. That's just how I try to do some of my groups, especially with little ones that we're talking about in this course, but it can be fun. So we start with greetings. We do adapted weather book. We do paper plate ice skating. We maybe do Follow The Leader with the paper plate ice skating. And then we ended off with Simon Says, modified. Super, super fun. Love that group.

Okay. Segueing into our next group is all about the farm. Love a farm theme. So for this group, we're going to start with greetings. We're going to do an adapted farm book, which is another resource that you're going to get as part of this module, and the next video is going to be going over that book. We're going to do a farm and farm animals activity. We love the farm. Remember that from the materials module. And then we're going to end this group by playing modified musical chairs. I mean musical chairs is a really mean-spirited game, so we're going to modify it. Now let's...

This is the adapted farm book. I love the adapted farm book, Our Trip to the Farm. I don't know about you, but this farm looks like a place I would like to visit. So I use this with my students just in a similar way as other books that are adapted. I love to make my own books because I love to use real life pictures. I think for our autistic kids, sometimes that can be a little bit easier to generalize to what's happening in the natural environment. And so with this book, we have some really cool pictures about things you may see on a farm, and this one has some fill in the blanks.

So we saw a cow. He said, moo. You could work on verbal limitation. There's a picture of a goat. We see a duck. We could practice saying duck. We could practice saying quack quack, whatever is functional for your students. Oh, how cute are they? We saw the pigs. They said [inaudible 00:16:58] or oink, oink. Kids seem to like to make those noises, or even if your child is not yet verbalizing, they think it's funny when we make those types of noises. Keeping it fun. On the farm, there was a sunflower. So that might be a new word. We could practice the sign for sunflower. We could talk about that. We could practice smelling.

The farmer used a tractor. How cool? Oh my goodness. Look at all these real life pictures. We can talk about these different words. Fill in the blank, practice imitating them. We love the farm. And then this goes really great with our thematic farm event, and it's a really nice way to embed literacy. And when I'm running my groups, no matter the age group, I always embed literacy. I have just found it easier to make my own adapted books. I have a Teachers Pay Teachers store to where I have them for sale. This one you get free as part of the course, but I just love them because I love the real life pictures. These are all materials that I've used with my own kids because I'm a practicing clinician, and so I really love to see how the kids react to these and I love to embed work on all the skills that we're doing. Those foundational skills within a group setting. It's very, very fun to see the kids interacting in a group and to plan for that group time. So I hope you enjoy using this book.

All right. All about the farm. I can't wait for you to share all about how you like using that book. Super, super fun. And some students in preschool, and maybe when they transition to kindergarten, I know for my daughter, one of the field trips, one of the community-based outings was going to a farm. So super, super fun, very applicable, and very aligned with what they discuss when students are in that age group.

A way that I love to incorporate play into this group is modified musical chairs. I love this. I've always thought musical chairs was kind of a mean-spirited game where we just take a chair away, and so if you haven't played musical chairs, what happens is there's music on and you walk around and then everybody sits down. But what happens is we keep taking the chairs away, as you can see in this photo, and so then there's just one chair left and there's one winner. And then usually there's a lot of kids crying and a lot of people really upset. Okay? Which I don't obviously like, so what we do for modified musical chairs is we have the kids, I say, "Okay, when Ms. Rose turns on the music," I usually sign music, "You're going to walk." That's a sign for walk. "And when the music stops, you sit down." So those are the rules, when the music's on, they walk around, and then when the music stops, they sit down.

So you're working on cooperative group skills, you're working on following directions. It's super cute. It's a fun game. I have played this a lot when I was working at a particular non-public school. My clients there loved this game so much. And what was so cool is that I would have staff that would stay to help with the kids, and they would tell me, "Oh my gosh, Rose, we played musical chairs," on a day that I wasn't there for speech, "and the kids did so great. It was awesome to see." That was a really nice by-product of group is having people there so I can model the instruction. And musical chairs is so cool, and I usually just use my phone. Okay? To play the music. And what's nice about that is you can really change it up with if there's a popular Disney movie and people like it, if it's Moana or whatever it is at the time, you can change it up. And so it goes with the time. And the kids are working on following directions and some of those foundational skills that we've been discussing.

More modified leisure. Let's watch this one.

(silence).

All right. So, modified UNO, Modified Memory. I love playing Modified Memory. So Memory is a very popular matching game. And what's so cool about Memory is that you can get Disney Memory, SpongeBob Memory, traditional Memory, and Memory is usually for sale at Walmart, at Target, all of those places usually carry this game. It's a very widely distributed game. And what we do to modify it, and honestly I do this for my own kids in my own house, because if you played Memory the way that you were supposed to, it would take you 45 minutes. Okay? And most families do not have 45 minutes.

So, the way that we modified Memory is we just take a subset of the cards. So let's say there's 40 matches. We only take maybe 20 of the matches, and then we have a pile. We know which ones go with which, and then we turn some of them face up. So all the students have to do is pick a card from the pile and then the other card that it matches is already face up so they can see the picture. So they pick from the pile, they see the card, as you could see on the video, that was a Strawberry Shortcake Memory, they see the picture and they match it because that picture's already face up on the table. That's the way that we modify that game.

And my kids love it. I just brought that to one of my client's homes and we were working on beginning matching, beginning play, turn-taking, and the student really, really loved it and was actually saying labels of some of the different items that were there. So that's a really fun way to also modify a game that you're most likely going to find in your house already or that you're already going to have in your therapy room.

[inaudible 00:24:40] Connect Four. Pick a color. Take turns putting game pieces in. Practice turn taking. No winner or loser.

Another fun one is Connect Four. I just bought this for my own kids this past Christmas, and it was 9.99 on Amazon. And it's a classic game, readily available, and how I have played it with some of my little ones who are working on leisure skills and group skills is the goal is that you get four in a row, you choose a color, you're either red or you're yellow. So what I would do is I would let my student pick which color they wanted to be, and then we would not strategize getting four in a row, because that was complicated. We were working on more of the joint attention piece where we were doing this shared activity together.

Okay, you want to be yellow? Great. I'm going to go first, I'm going to put the red in, and then you're going to put the yellow in. We're working on turn-taking, we're working on imitation, right? Pincher grasp. That's a great OT thing. Right? I pick it up. I put it in. I do it first, they do it after me. It's a very, very fun cooperative game. And I actually played this game with a student that I was seeing in a clinic setting for outpatient therapy. And I shared with his mom, "Hey, we're working on Connect Four, this is what it looks like. It's modified, but he's enjoying it. We're having a good time with it."

And we had a couple weeks off because of holiday, this family celebrated Christmas, and when they came back after the break, the mom said, "Oh my gosh, I bought so-and-so Connect Four and they were able to play this game with their sister and they've never really done that before. It was so cool." And I thought, "Oh my goodness, this is so exciting." I love that so much. This was a shared activity that we worked in therapy, but it was having a ripple effect into the home and into family relationships and I just love that so much. I love those stories when people share that with me. It's the best.

All right. So those are some ideas about group therapy. So if you are planning group therapy, I hope those will be groups that you can just start doing. And the thing with group therapy too is, I don't mix it up, every week is not something brand new. I keep some of those things tried and true for a couple of weeks so the students get into a rhythm with engaging and participating and the concepts and things of that nature. And so they really learn how to do those skills.

All right. Now we're going to talk about SLP and teacher co-treating, teamwork. Let's do it together. This model is defined as the SLP and classroom teacher plan together and carry out a lesson together. I had a fellow speech therapist from New York, Lauren Dibiosi, on one of my courses that I did. And we were talking all about this really cool system that they have in her region in New York. And it was a district-wide initiative and it's really this kind of model where they have these big overarching goals for their students in their classrooms, and they have embedded time for the speech therapist to meet with the teacher and goal set and plan, and not everybody has that, most people don't.

So this might be hard if it's not something that's embedded in your day, but like in my district, we have professional development time once a week. And so that could definitely be a time where you're meeting as a team, if this is an initiative and important for you and your students. So it can be a really, really effective way to help your students. You just have to think about what skills are going to be addressed? When will the group take place? Very important, scheduling. How to incorporate the student goals. Always going back to that. What's the general framework? I've given you my ideas for general framework. What role will each professional play? That's really important. Who's going to get the materials? Who's going to plan? How will you take data? Are other staff involved too, like paraprofessionals? How are they going to help?

So this is another idea. So if we're co-treating and planning together, this is with *The Mitten*, which is this really cool book. We're going to start with greetings, we're going to read *The Mitten*, which is a storybook, I'm going to show it to you. We're going to do an SLP station, so I've done this before where I'll have the speech therapy session and I'll show

you, we did Mitten Adventure, where we hid little labels for the students, and then the teacher did Matching the Mitten. Okay? So we're working on labeling at my station and working on matching at the teacher's station. Super fun.

This is the book. Adapted and illustrated by Jan Brett, a very popular book. It's a cute story about this grandson who wants his grandma to make him mittens. His grandma makes him mittens, but she says, "Be careful with your mittens, do not lose a mitten." And so he goes out and of course, he loses one mitten and then all these animals come in and they come into the mitten. It's a very cute book. Kids really enjoy this book. And so what we did for my station was I had these mittens that I just Googled, okay? I just Googled clip art mitten, and this came up on images on Google, I just cut that out. And then underneath it, these may look familiar, these are just my labeling cards.

So some of the students that I was seeing in this particular group were working on labeling functional items. And so what I did is I hid under their mitten, I had a mitten for each student, or a couple mittens for each student, they took a turn. And they would find the mitten in the room, they would open the mitten up, and then they would see what was under that mitten. And it was one of their labeling targets that they were working on. So it was a really cute activity and a way to tie all their goals in. And then the teacher was working on Match The Mittens. And so she printed these, I think she did laminate these, and then she had the students matching in pairs based on their color and their design. And so this was a really cool way to work, again, on that foundational skill of matching.

SLP as a consultant and coach. I do a lot of consulting. I do a lot of consulting in my district where I go in and I help support communication across environments and I do a lot of private consulting, a lot of private consulting with other speech therapists, VCBA's, clinic owners, parents. I do a lot of coaching and support, and I love that. I love being able to look at the big picture and give ideas on how to help support our students in their journey to communication.

So SLP as a consultant and coach. What student or students are you going to consult with? When's a good time to come in? Always goes back to that scheduling. How does the teacher work best with feedback? Setting up a Google Drive document and sharing it with the teacher or the team. And then something I always try to do is let parents know that I went into the classroom if possible. And too, if you're a parent and you're listening, something that can be really great for you is going in to observe, going in to observe the speech therapy sessions, going in to observe the classroom groups so you know exactly what is taking place during the day and how communication is being worked on in a school setting.

All right, therapy in action. Here's an example. Speech therapist goes in to observe a student in morning meeting. Student's having trouble participating. This is based on something, when I was an autism facilitator, this happened. The teacher has asked for support. So I would go out to this 35 school district, I'd go out to the speech therapist and the teachers and I would support them with their autistic students. We noticed that this particular student who was having trouble engaging in this morning meeting time didn't have any way to really participate. Student was a struggling communicator. Student was not yet communicating independently. And so what we did is we developed a morning meeting book. So it went with the calendar and the weather and counting and songs, all these things that make up morning meeting, and we created this really beautiful book for this student.

And so what happened is, I would work on this with the student during their speech therapy sessions, part of the time. And then some of my time I would go in when the student was using the book in the classroom and I would model, I would model for the student how to use it, I was also modeling for the teacher and paraprofessionals as well. Its really cool.

Awesome. I love this module so much because it's all about group. I love that. I always say, my goal is to work myself out of a job, right? So the kids are just engaging together and this are some of the foundations, the bedrock to get you there. So in this module, you get the weather adapted book that we looked at, the farm adapted book, such great resources to use. I'm going to see you in the next module, which is all about parent and team training. See you.