



## Social Skills Autopsy

By Rick Lavoie

A *Social Autopsy* is an innovative strategy wherein an adult assists a socially deficient child to improve social skills by jointly analyzing social errors that a child makes and designing alternative strategies.

- ❖ In order to ensure the success and generalization of the *social autopsy* procedure, the process should be taught to all adults who have regular contact with the child for example, bus drivers, administrators, grandparents, cafeteria workers, and baby-sitters. In this way, the child will participate in dozens of autopsies daily, in a variety of settings. This intense exposure will foster growth and generalizations of target skills.
- ❖ Use *social autopsies* in order to analyze successful social interactions on occasions. When the child has been particularly appropriate in a social setting, assist him in examining and identifying the behaviors that contributed to these positive situations. In this way, he is more likely to repeat those behaviors in other settings.

Keep in mind what the *social autopsy* process is . . . and what it is not:

IS	IS NOT
a supportive, structured constructive strategy to foster social competence	a punishment
a problem solving technique	negative
an opportunity for the student to actively participate in the process	controlled/conducted exclusively by the adult
conducted by any significant adult in the child's environment	a "one-time cure" for the target behavior or skill (several autopsies on the same behavior may be needed to ensure mastery)
most effective when conducted immediately after the social error	
generally held as a one-to-one session	done in front of his/her peers

- ❖ The *autopsy* process is particularly effective in enabling the child to see the cause/effect relationship between his social behavior and reactions of others in his environment.
- ❖ During *autopsies*, the child may have difficulty analyzing and identifying his own feelings and emotions. For example, the child may report that he is "mad" at his friend when, in fact, he is actually jealous. The Kline scale, developed at Riverview School by consultant Adam Kline, can be a useful tool to assist the child in identifying and classifying his feelings.
- ❖ The success of the *autopsy* approach is linked to the fact that it provides the child with the three things that special needs students require in order to develop and learn:
  1. practice, or drill
  2. immediate feedback
  3. positive reinforcement

Students with social competency problems also have paralinguistic (non-language) deficiencies that can be effectively isolated and remediated via the *social autopsy* approach. Among these deficiencies are:

**KINESICS** (inability to read body language of self or others)

Manifestations may include: failure to respond to facial expressions of others; inability to “read” feelings and attitude of others; incorrect use of gestures.

**PROXEMICS** (inability to understand how physical space communicates with others)

Manifestations: stands too close in social situations; stares; avoids eye contact; touches inappropriately.

**VOCALICS** (inability to understand how volume pitches of voice communicates to others)




Manifestations: misinterprets sarcasm; talks in monotone; talks too fast or too slowly; talks too loudly or too softly.

### THE KLINE SCALE

Children with learning disabilities often have difficulty identifying their feelings or emotional states. For example, they may report that they “are mad” at a friend and that they “hate him”. Actually, the child may be feeling jealousy over a real or imaginary slight. Before a child can deal effectively with his emotions, he must first be able to identify them.

The Kline Scale, developed at Riverview School by Adam Kline of the National Center for Achievement, assists the child in identifying his emotions by providing him with a list of feelings under the broad headings of “Sad”, “Mad” and “Glad”. When a child reports that he is feeling “mad”, for example, the parent or teacher can use the chart to initiate a discussion aimed at determining the true feelings that he is experiencing. It is important for the child to understand that there is wide variety and intensity of feelings and that several emotions can be experienced simultaneously.

### HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

<p><b>GLAD</b></p> 	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Important</li> <li>Accepted</li> <li>Brave</li> <li>Confident</li> <li>Secure</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; padding-left: 20px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compassionate</li> <li>Determined</li> <li>Excited</li> <li>Grateful</li> <li>Fascinated</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; padding-left: 20px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loved</li> <li>Proud</li> <li>Relaxed</li> <li>Relieved</li> <li>Happy</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Important</li> <li>Accepted</li> <li>Brave</li> <li>Confident</li> <li>Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compassionate</li> <li>Determined</li> <li>Excited</li> <li>Grateful</li> <li>Fascinated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loved</li> <li>Proud</li> <li>Relaxed</li> <li>Relieved</li> <li>Happy</li> </ul>
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