

Social Development Intervention

Social Development Intervention (SDI)¹ is the social therapeutic intervention taught in tandem with academics in the ASD Nest program. It is based on the developmental language model, relationship development, and social cognitive theories and is used to remediate the social and pragmatic language skills of children with ASD. SDI is a mandated therapeutic program facilitated by a Nest speech-language pathologist (SLP) in collaboration with a teacher. A crucial parallel to the focused SDI sessions is the generalization of SDI strategies and language throughout the day. Teacher participation in SDI sessions, as well as active planning in team meetings, ensure that students' social and pragmatic development is also supported in the classroom environment.

SDI focus time and generalization:

SDI focus time is a speech mandate—planned and facilitated in collaboration with the classroom teachers—that takes place three times a week. A Nest teacher participates in SDI sessions, developing their understanding of the social supports so that they can be generalized across the students' day.

SDI Units & Team Planning Map:

There are five two-month SDI units that form the backbone of SDI: 1) *Finding my place and my role across contexts*, 2) *Listening and gathering information to support shared thinking*, 3) *Connecting feelings & emotions to the situation at hand*, 4) *Making connections and communicating with peers*, and 5) *Awareness, responsibility and advocacy*. These units are introduced to the ASD Nest teams by the SLP at team meetings once every other month. The SDI Team Planning Map guides the interdisciplinary team in planning SDI sessions for each unit, differentiating activities to account for the pragmatic language, problem solving, and social relational goals for each student in the group. The ASD Nest teams discuss how SDI concepts and goals will be woven throughout classroom activities and instruction to support generalization.

SDI Goal Planning Sheet:

The SDI Goal Planning Sheet (GPS) is divided into three goal areas—social relational development, problem solving, and pragmatic language—with a list of corresponding goals in each area. The GPS guides social goals, and is revisited three times a year by the SLP to plan and monitor goals for each individual student. The SLP uses these goals as objectives for the student's IEP.

Scheduling SDI:

It can frequently be a challenge to schedule related services in middle and high school. When scheduling of SDI, Nest students should not miss major academic subjects or electives regularly, nor should they be pulled from lunch. SDI may be scheduled during some rotating combination of the following (each option typically not more than once per week):

- The second half of a double-period ELA or math class
- Additional academic support times (independent reading block, math enrichment, etc.)
- Study hall
- PE class
- Foreign language
- Advisory

¹ From the work of Susan Brennan, CCC-SLP, SDI Developer

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Additional Questions & Considerations:

Which team members participate in SDI focus time?

The ASD Nest SLP runs the SDI focus time session along with one Nest teacher. The Nest teacher is either the ASD Nest coach or a consistent teacher designated by the principal. There should always be at least one less adult than students actively involved in an SDI session (e.g., if four students, no more than three adults).

Who plans SDI focus time?

Planning SDI sessions is the responsibility of the SLP, but the participating Nest teachers collaborate in this process. The teachers' perspective is critical as the social experiences of the classroom inform the therapy. These sessions are planned in advance and take into account the current SDI unit, the needs of the students in the group, and individual goals outlined in the IEP and informed by the GPS. It is essential that all adults participating in each SDI session know the plan for, and their role in each session. SLPs turn-key each SDI unit during five full team meetings across the year (September, November, January, March, and May), and teams complete the SDI Team Planning Map in lieu of case conferencing Nest students on that day.

How are strategies from SDI generalized across classes?

Social learning is critical to the success of students in the Nest. Some structures exist to help with this process: 1) SLP turn-keys SDI units during one team meeting every other month—this meeting is used solely for SDI generalization planning. 2) The SLP turn-keys SDI language and strategies in each weekly team meeting, providing examples for teachers. To ensure reinforcement of the social concepts developed in SDI focus time, teachers must also understand and use SDI strategies and language in their classes. To this end, schools can:

- Utilize the Nest Coach position: the Nest coach attends SDI sessions and works with classroom teachers to generalize social concepts
- Internal PD: SLP conducts PD on Nest strategies at team, grade, department, or staff meetings
- Teachers rotate: several Nest teachers participate in SDI sessions on a regular rotation
- Additional teacher participates: in addition to the regular SLP and teacher, another Nest teacher pushes in, in a rotation, to understand concepts & to focus on techniques generalize
- Study groups/Inquiry teams: groups of Nest teachers examine SDI, sharing strategies, etc.

Are behavior systems used during SDI focus time?

The primary supports used in SDI focus time are social strategies due to the social, pragmatic foundation of the intervention. These supports differ from traditional behavioral strategies utilized in the classroom. Behavioral supports that organize students and promote self-regulation may be used in coordination with social strategies following a discussion by the interdisciplinary team.

Why do only Nest students attend SDI?

SDI focus time is specifically designed to meet the social relational, pragmatic language, and problem solving needs of students on the autism spectrum. This "lab time" allows Nest students to explore the concepts essential to their social development in a small, therapeutic setting with others with similar challenges. While some general education students may also benefit from traditional social support, the therapeutic nature of SDI is not relevant for these students.

A note on the ASD Nest Model:

This paper outlines an element of the ASD Nest Model. Fidelity of implementation to the model is essential for program consistency. While a degree of flexibility is necessary given individual school needs, the program benefits from schools' commitment to a cohesive model.