

Social Situations: Talking on the Telephone

Developed by the Project Work Group

(Note: There is a vignette on the DVD based on this material.●)

Because of the anxiety associated with fragile X syndrome, many individuals with the condition have difficulty with simple phone conversations. It is important to help such individuals learn strategies to overcome this anxiety. In this example, Daniel and his helper will examine ways to become more successful in this important everyday skill.

The phone rings.

Helper: Hey Daniel, it's for you; I think it's your friend Ryan from school.

Daniel: I don't want to talk now.

Helper: Daniel is busy right now; can he call you back later? Okay, bye.

A little later:

Helper: Hey Daniel, remember Ryan called earlier—you should call him back.

Daniel: I don't want to.

It can be hard for Daniel to use the phone even when the caller is a friend. He may not know what to say, so help him out by giving him a way to start the conversation.

Helper: How about if I dial the number for you? When he answers, I'll say hi and then give you the phone, is that okay? I know you can do it!

Daniel: I'll try.

When Daniel is on the phone, help facilitate the conversation with specific statements. You may need to take it sentence by sentence at first.

Helper (to Daniel): You can start by telling him what you did today.

Daniel: I went to the gym. And I went to work.

Helper: Then ask him what he did today.

Daniel: Okay.

Helper: Ask him if he'd like to come over to watch the football game.

If Daniel is still resistant to talking on the phone, you can model the flow of a phone conversation.

Helper: I'll dial the number—you pick up the extension and listen while your friend and I talk. Will you try that for me?

Daniel: Don't tell him I'm on the phone.

Helper: All right. You talk when you're ready.

Daniel: Okay.

Another approach is to set up a call in which the other person is aware of Daniel's anxiety, and asks questions for Daniel to answer so that he doesn't have to initiate conversation himself. Over time and with practice, Daniel should become more comfortable talking on the phone.

Social Situations: Sensory Issues

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(Note: There is a vignette on the DVD based on this material.●)

Many individuals who have fragile X syndrome can become overwhelmed by sensory stimuli. It is critical to help them learn techniques to deal with sensory issues, which will affect them for their entire lives.

Nick and his helper are having dinner. The noise level is high, the area is crowded, and people keep bumping into Nick. To a person who has fragile X syndrome, an accidental bump can feel like someone rubbing sandpaper on him. It can make him want to run away, yell, or hit something.

Helper: It is crowded in here. People keep bumping into me.

Nick: Me too—I don't like it. I've got to get out of here.

Nick may not know how to ask for or secure his own space.

Helper: Here are two things you can do: Tell the person, "Please don't bump into me."
Or ask to sit at the end of the table.

Nick: Okay, good idea. Thanks.

To help the individual with FXS, pre-plan social activities so you select restaurants that are not too small or too noisy.
