

Enhancing Social Cognition through Structured CBT Exercises

Affect – The observable expression of an individual's internal emotional state, often conveyed through facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. Related terms: Emotional regulation, facial affect recognition. In the context of CBT for autism, clinicians teach clients to identify and label their affective responses during structured exercises such as role-play. Example: A teenager notices a rapid heartbeat and clenched fists when anticipating a social interaction, then labels the affect as "anxiety". Practical application includes using affect-rating scales before and after exposure tasks to monitor change. A common challenge is that many autistic individuals may have atypical affective expression, requiring clinicians to adapt observation methods and incorporate self-report tools.

Automatic Thought – A spontaneous, often unexamined cognition that arises in response to a situation, typically influencing emotions and behavior. Related terms: Cognitive distortion, negative automatic thought. Structured CBT exercises target these thoughts through thought-record worksheets where the client records the trigger, the automatic thought, and the resulting feeling. Example: "If I say something wrong, everyone will think I'm stupid." The therapist helps the client examine evidence for and against the thought. Practical application includes teaching clients to pause, label the thought, and replace it with a balanced alternative. Challenges involve the client's tendency toward concrete thinking, which may limit insight into abstract mental processes; visual aids and concrete examples can mitigate this.

Attentional Bias – The preferential allocation of attention toward certain types of stimuli, often threat-related, which can maintain anxiety and social avoidance. Related terms: Cognitive bias, threat perception. In CBT for autism, attentional bias training uses computer-based tasks where clients practice shifting focus from threatening facial expressions to neutral ones. Example: A client practices identifying the direction of a gaze in a series of images, gradually reducing fixation on angry faces. Practical application includes integrating bias-retraining into weekly homework. A challenge is that some autistic individuals may have heightened sensory sensitivities that interfere with visual tasks; adapting stimuli to lower intensity can improve engagement.

Alexithymia – Difficulty in identifying, describing, and distinguishing one's own emotions, frequently co-occurring with autism. Related terms: Affect labeling, emotional insight. Structured CBT exercises address alexithymia by using emotion-cards with pictograms and accompanying verbal descriptors. Example: A client selects a card showing a furrowed brow and learns to associate it with "frustration." Practical application involves repeated practice during social story sessions to reinforce emotion vocabulary. The main challenge is that clients may rely on external cues rather than internal feeling states; pairing internal bodily sensations with emotion labels (interoceptive training) can enhance internal awareness.

Behavioral Activation – A therapeutic strategy that encourages engagement in rewarding activities to

counteract withdrawal and depressive symptoms. Related terms: Activity scheduling, reinforcement. Within structured CBT for autism, therapists design a weekly activity chart that includes low-sensory social opportunities, such as a brief coffee chat with a peer. Example: A client schedules a 10-minute “talk-time” with a classmate after school. Practical application requires monitoring the client’s affect before and after the activity to assess mood change. Challenges include difficulty predicting sensory overload; therefore, activities must be graded, starting with brief, predictable interactions and gradually increasing complexity.

Baseline Assessment – The systematic evaluation of a client’s social cognition, emotional regulation, and functional skills before initiating CBT interventions. Related terms: Functional analysis, pre-treatment evaluation. Tools may include the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test, Social Stories comprehension checks, and self-report anxiety scales. Example: A client scores 45% on a theory-of-mind task, indicating the need for targeted interventions. Practical application involves documenting baseline data to measure progress across structured exercises. A challenge is ensuring that assessment materials are autism-friendly, avoiding ambiguous language and providing visual supports to enhance validity.

Behavioral Experiment – A structured activity in which the client tests the validity of a belief by observing the outcome of a specific behavior. Related terms: Hypothesis testing, exposure. In a social cognition module, the client may predict that “If I ask a question, the teacher will think I’m incompetent.” The experiment involves asking a question and recording the teacher’s response. Example: The teacher replies positively, disproving the belief. Practical application includes using a simple data-log sheet to capture predictions, behaviors, and outcomes. Challenges arise when the client’s anxiety interferes with execution; therapist-guided role-play can serve as a rehearsal before the real-world test.

Cognitive Distortion – A systematic error in thinking that reinforces negative emotions and maladaptive behavior. Related terms: Thought record, cognitive restructuring. Common distortions in autistic clients include “all-or-nothing” and “mind-reading.” Structured CBT exercises teach clients to identify distortions using a checklist during social interactions. Example: After a conversation, the client notes the thought “She didn’t smile, so she must dislike me.” Practical application involves collaboratively generating balanced alternatives. A challenge is that some distortions may be rooted in genuine social perception difficulties; thus, therapists must differentiate between inaccurate inference and legitimate observation, often using video feedback for clarification.

Cognitive Flexibility – The mental ability to shift perspective, adapt to new information, and modify behavior in response to changing demands. Related terms: Set-shifting, executive function. Structured CBT exercises enhance flexibility through “What-If” scenarios that prompt the client to consider multiple outcomes. Example: A client imagines three possible responses a peer could give after a greeting. Practical application includes incorporating flexibility drills into social story rehearsals, encouraging the client to practice alternative responses. Challenges include rigidity often observed in autistic cognition; therefore, tasks should start with low-complexity alternatives and gradually increase the number of options.

Cognitive Restructuring – A therapeutic process that involves identifying, challenging, and modifying maladaptive thoughts to produce healthier emotional responses. Related terms: Cognitive distortion, thought record. In the autism-focused CBT curriculum, restructuring is taught using visual thought-mapping sheets where the client links a trigger, automatic thought, evidence, and balanced thought. Example: A

client replaces “I will be rejected” with “I may be accepted, and if not, I can try again.” Practical application includes weekly homework where the client completes a thought-record after a social encounter. A challenge is the client’s preference for concrete evidence; therapists can use tangible examples (e.G., Video clips) to illustrate the process.

Concrete Thinking – A literal, detail-oriented cognitive style that emphasizes tangible facts over abstract concepts. Related terms: Abstract reasoning, literal interpretation. Structured CBT must adapt language to concrete terms, especially when teaching concepts like “self-esteem.” Example: Instead of saying “You feel confident,” the therapist says “You feel good about the way you solved the puzzle.” Practical application includes using visual metaphors (e.G., Building blocks) to represent abstract ideas. The challenge is bridging concrete and abstract thinking; gradual scaffolding, moving from concrete examples to more abstract generalizations, aids skill transfer.

Declarative Memory – The system responsible for storing factual information and personal experiences, essential for recalling social rules and past interactions. Related terms: Episodic memory, procedural memory. In CBT for autism, exercises such as “Social Story Recall” test declarative memory by asking the client to recount a previously learned interaction script. Example: After practicing a greeting, the client later describes the steps without prompts. Practical application includes spaced repetition to strengthen retention. A challenge is that memory deficits may lead to rapid forgetting; incorporating visual cue cards and digital reminders can compensate.

Double Empathy Problem – A theoretical framework proposing that communication breakdowns arise from mutual misunderstanding between autistic and non-autistic individuals, rather than a unilateral deficit. Related terms: Neurodiversity, social reciprocity. Structured CBT acknowledges this by teaching both perspective-taking and self-advocacy. Example: A client learns to ask “Can you repeat that?” While also recognizing that neurotypical peers may need clearer signals. Practical application includes joint role-plays where both parties practice clarifying statements. Challenges involve confronting ingrained stigma; facilitators must foster a collaborative environment that validates both viewpoints.

Developmental Social Cognition – The progressive acquisition of skills that enable understanding of others’ mental states, intentions, and emotions throughout childhood. Related terms: Theory of mind, joint attention. CBT modules target developmental milestones by sequencing exercises from basic joint attention tasks to complex perspective-taking scenarios. Example: A client first learns to follow a pointing gesture, then moves to interpreting a peer’s hidden desire in a game. Practical application requires age-appropriate materials and gradual difficulty escalation. A challenge is the variability in developmental trajectories among autistic individuals; individualized pacing is essential.

Empathy – The capacity to understand and share the feelings of another, encompassing both affective (emotional) and cognitive (perspective-taking) components. Related terms: Affective empathy, cognitive empathy. Structured CBT enhances empathy through “Emotion Matching” drills where the client watches short video clips and selects the matching emotion label. Example: After viewing a clip of a child crying, the client identifies “sadness.” Practical application includes pairing the exercise with role-play to practice responding appropriately. Challenges include differentiating empathy from mimicry; therapists must emphasize genuine feeling rather than rote labeling.

Executive Function – A set of high-order cognitive processes—including planning, inhibition, working memory, and mental flexibility—that regulate goal-directed behavior. Related terms: Cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control. CBT for autism integrates executive-function training through “Step-by-Step” worksheets that break complex social tasks into manageable sub-steps. Example: Planning a birthday party is divided into “invite friends,” “choose a venue,” and “prepare a thank-you note.” Practical application involves using visual schedules and timers. A common challenge is that executive deficits may cause difficulty completing multi-step tasks; frequent check-ins and reinforcement of completed steps improve adherence.

Emotional Regulation – The ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions to achieve adaptive outcomes. Related terms: Affect regulation, self-soothing. Structured CBT teaches regulation through “Calm-Down” kits that include sensory items, breathing scripts, and visual cue cards. Example: Before a noisy cafeteria, the client practices a 4-7-8 breathing technique and uses a noise-reducing earplug. Practical application includes documenting pre- and post-regulation affect scores. Challenges involve heightened sensory reactivity; therefore, individualized sensory profiles guide kit composition.

Emotional Recognition – The skill of identifying emotions in oneself and others, often measured via facial expression tasks. Related terms: Affect labeling, social perception. CBT exercises employ “Emotion Flashcards” that pair a face with a word and an interoceptive cue (“tight chest = anxiety”). Example: The client matches a surprised face to the label “surprise” and reports the bodily sensation. Practical application includes progressive difficulty, moving from basic to subtle expressions. A challenge is the “own-race bias” where individuals are better at recognizing emotions of familiar cultural groups; using diverse stimulus sets mitigates this.

Executive Dysfunction – Impairments in executive-function processes that hinder planning, organization, and flexible thinking. Related terms: Executive function, cognitive inflexibility. Structured CBT addresses dysfunction by incorporating “Think-Aloud” strategies during social rehearsals, prompting the client to verbalize each decision step. Example: While role-playing a phone call, the client says, “First I greet, then I state my request.” Practical application includes using checklists to track completed steps. Challenges include the client’s tendency to become overwhelmed; breaking tasks into micro-steps and providing immediate feedback reduces cognitive load.

False Belief Task – A classic experimental paradigm used to assess theory-of-mind abilities, requiring the participant to recognize that another person can hold a belief that is false. Related terms: Theory of mind, perspective taking. In CBT, the task is adapted into a “Story-Based” version where the client predicts a character’s action based on hidden information. Example: “Sally puts a ball in a box and leaves; John moves the ball. Where will Sally look?” Practical application includes using the task as a pre- and post-intervention measure. Challenges involve language comprehension; simplifying narrative and providing visual icons improve accessibility.

Functional Analysis – A systematic evaluation of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences (ABC) to understand the function of a target behavior. Related terms: Behavior chain, reinforcement. In social-cognition CBT, functional analysis identifies why a client avoids eye contact (e.G., Antecedent: Crowded room; consequence: Reduced anxiety). Example: Therapist maps the ABC for a client’s refusal to join a group game. Practical application includes creating a hypothesis and testing it through structured

exposure. Challenges include the client's limited introspective ability; incorporating caregiver reports and video observation enhances accuracy.

Generalization – The transfer of learned skills from the therapeutic setting to real-world contexts. Related terms: Transfer of training, maintenance. Structured CBT includes "Bridge Sessions" where the client practices a skill in a new environment, such as applying a greeting script at a community center after rehearsing it in the clinic. Example: After successful role-play, the client initiates a conversation with a store clerk. Practical application involves setting specific, measurable goals and tracking performance across settings. A challenge is that skills may remain context-bound; using varied practice scenarios and caregiver reinforcement promotes broader generalization.

Group CBT – A therapeutic format where multiple clients engage in CBT interventions together, fostering peer modeling and social interaction. Related terms: Peer-mediated intervention, social skills group. In the advanced autism certificate, a group of five participants practices "Social Narrative Creation" collaboratively. Example: The group co-writes a script for asking a friend to play a game. Practical application includes assigning each member a role (writer, actor, observer) to ensure active participation. Challenges involve managing differing sensory needs; providing breakout spaces and flexible seating accommodates diverse preferences.

Hierarchical Task Analysis – A method of breaking down complex tasks into a hierarchy of sub-tasks and actions. Related terms: Task decomposition, step-by-step protocol. CBT uses this analysis to teach multi-step social interactions, such as "ordering food." Example: The hierarchy includes "approach the counter," "greet the server," "state the order," and "pay." Practical application involves creating visual flowcharts that the client can reference during the activity. Challenges arise when the client becomes fixated on a single sub-task; therapists must reinforce progression through the hierarchy using prompts and positive reinforcement.

Hyperlexia – An advanced decoding ability that emerges early in development, often accompanied by difficulties in comprehension and social interaction. Related terms: Decoding, reading comprehension. In CBT, hyperlexic clients may excel at reading social-story scripts but struggle to apply the concepts. Example: A client can recite a social rule verbatim yet fails to use it in conversation. Practical application includes coupling reading with experiential role-play, ensuring comprehension through "show-me" tasks. A challenge is that the client may rely on rote memory; integrating interactive elements encourages deeper processing.

Interoception – The perception of internal bodily states, such as hunger, heart rate, and emotional arousal. Related terms: Body awareness, sensory processing. Structured CBT incorporates interoceptive training through "Body Scan" exercises that guide the client to notice sensations linked to emotions. Example: After a stressful interaction, the client identifies a "tight chest" as a sign of anxiety. Practical application includes using a simple rating scale (0-10) for each sensation. Challenges involve atypical interoceptive awareness in autism; using visual analogs and therapist modeling supports skill acquisition.

Intervention Fidelity – The degree to which a therapeutic protocol is delivered as intended, ensuring consistency and reliability of outcomes. Related terms: Treatment adherence, protocol compliance. In the

advanced CBT course, fidelity is monitored through session checklists and video recordings reviewed by supervisors. Example: A therapist is rated on adherence to the “thought-record” sequence during a session. Practical application includes regular fidelity audits and corrective feedback. Challenges include therapist drift due to client-specific adaptations; balancing flexibility with core component integrity is essential.

Insight – The client’s awareness and understanding of their own mental processes, symptoms, and the relevance of therapeutic techniques. Related terms: Metacognition, self-awareness. Structured CBT fosters insight through reflective journaling after each exercise. Example: A client writes, “I realized I assumed my friend was angry because she didn’t smile, but she was actually thinking about homework.” Practical application includes discussing journal entries in supervision to reinforce learning. A challenge is that limited insight may hinder engagement; using concrete examples and visual summaries can gradually build self-knowledge.

Joint Attention – The shared focus of two individuals on an object or event, a foundational skill for social learning. Related terms: Shared attention, gaze following. CBT exercises incorporate joint attention by having the client and therapist point to a picture together and verbalize the object. Example: The therapist says, “Look at the red ball,” while both gaze at it. Practical application includes using “attention-shifting” games that require alternating focus between the therapist and an object. Challenges involve sensory overload that distracts attention; minimizing background stimuli enhances joint-attention success.

Knowledge Integration – The process of combining new information with existing cognitive schemas to form coherent understanding. Related terms: Schema, cognitive restructuring. In CBT for autism, knowledge integration is practiced through “Concept Mapping” where the client links a new social rule to previously learned concepts. Example: Linking “personal space” to the earlier learned rule “keep a comfortable distance.” Practical application includes creating visual maps on a whiteboard that the client can reference. A challenge is that rigid schemas may resist modification; repeated exposure and positive reinforcement support integration.

Literal Interpretation – The tendency to understand language in its most direct, concrete meaning, often leading to misunderstandings of idioms or sarcasm. Related terms: Figurative language, pragmatic language. Structured CBT addresses this by teaching “Idioms Decoding” using a two-column chart: Idiom on the left, literal meaning on the right, and contextual meaning in the middle. Example: “Break the ice” is explained as “start a conversation.” Practical application includes role-playing scenarios where the client must identify and respond to idiomatic expressions. Challenges involve overgeneralization; therapists must emphasize that not all expressions are idiomatic, reinforcing discriminative judgment.

Metacognition – Awareness and regulation of one’s own thinking processes, enabling self-monitoring and strategic adjustment. Related terms: Insight, executive function. CBT enhances metacognition through “Thinking Aloud” protocols during social rehearsals. Example: The client verbalizes, “I’m noticing that I’m feeling nervous, so I’ll take a deep breath.” Practical application includes post-session reflection sheets where the client rates the usefulness of each strategy. A challenge is that metacognitive skills may be underdeveloped; scaffolding with prompts and visual cues facilitates growth.

Mindfulness – A state of non-judgmental, present-moment awareness that can reduce anxiety and improve

emotional regulation. Related terms: Grounding, relaxation technique. Structured CBT incorporates brief mindfulness practices before exposure tasks, such as “5-4-3-2-1” sensory grounding. Example: The client identifies five things they see, four they hear, etc., Before entering a social gathering. Practical application includes daily mindfulness logs to track consistency. Challenges include difficulty sustaining attention; using short, structured exercises and visual timers helps maintain engagement.

Negative Automatic Thought – A spontaneously generated pessimistic cognition that contributes to emotional distress. Related terms: Automatic thought, cognitive distortion. CBT teaches clients to capture these thoughts using “Thought Capture Cards” during social interactions. Example: “I always mess up” recorded after a failed conversation attempt. Practical application involves reviewing cards with the therapist to challenge evidence and formulate balanced alternatives. Challenges include the client’s reluctance to disclose internal thoughts; building trust and using anonymous cards can encourage honesty.

Neurodiversity – The concept that neurological differences, such as autism, constitute natural variations of human cognition rather than deficits. Related terms: Autism spectrum, inclusive practice. In CBT, neurodiversity informs a strengths-based approach, emphasizing skill building while respecting innate processing styles. Example: Leveraging a client’s pattern-recognition strength to decode social scripts. Practical application includes co-creating goals that align with the client’s identity and preferences. A challenge is balancing acceptance with therapeutic change; clinicians must negotiate interventions that honor neurodiverse perspectives while addressing functional impairments.

Narrative Therapy – A therapeutic approach that externalizes problems and encourages clients to reauthor their life stories. Related terms: Social story, identity. Within structured CBT for autism, narrative techniques are used to rewrite maladaptive social narratives. Example: A client reframes “I’m always ignored” to “I sometimes need to signal my interest.” Practical application involves collaborative story-building worksheets where the client identifies problem-saturated narratives and constructs preferred alternatives. Challenges include the client’s preference for concrete over abstract storytelling; integrating visual storyboards supports narrative construction.

Observational Learning – Acquiring new behaviors by watching and imitating others, a core mechanism in social skills acquisition. Related terms: Modeling, imitation. Structured CBT utilizes video modeling where the client observes a peer successfully navigating a conversation, then practices the same steps. Example: A video shows a child greeting a teacher, maintaining eye contact, and responding to a question. Practical application includes “copy-and-practice” drills after viewing. Challenges involve attention deficits; segmenting videos into short clips and providing pause-and-repeat options increase retention.

Peer-Mediated Intervention – An approach where typically developing peers are trained to facilitate social interactions and model appropriate behaviors. Related terms: Group CBT, social skills group. In the advanced CBT curriculum, peers act as “social coaches” during role-play exercises. Example: A peer prompts the client to initiate a conversation and provides immediate feedback. Practical application includes training peers in prompting techniques and reinforcement strategies. Challenges include ensuring peer commitment and preventing over-reliance on peers; rotating peer partners promotes generalization.

Perspective Taking – The ability to consider another person’s viewpoint, thoughts, and feelings. Related

terms: Theory of mind, cognitive empathy. Structured CBT enhances perspective taking through “What-Would-You-Do?” Cards that present a social dilemma from multiple angles. Example: A client reads a scenario where a friend is upset and selects the most empathetic response from options. Practical application includes debriefing to discuss why alternative responses might be appropriate. A challenge is that abstract reasoning may be limited; using concrete, visual representations of each perspective aids understanding.

Pragmatic Language – The functional use of language in social contexts, encompassing turn-taking, topic maintenance, and non-literal meanings. Related terms: Social communication, figurative language. CBT exercises target pragmatics through “Conversation Mapping” where the client outlines the sequence of greetings, small talk, and topic shifts. Example: The client practices transitioning from “How are you?” To “What did you do this weekend?” Practical application includes real-time feedback during peer dialogues. Challenges involve sensory overload during conversations; scheduling brief, low-stimulus interactions reduces pressure.

Positive Reinforcement – The process of increasing a behavior by delivering a rewarding consequence immediately after the behavior occurs. Related terms: Reinforcement schedule, behavior shaping. In structured CBT, therapists use token-economy systems where each successful social interaction earns a token redeemable for a preferred activity. Example: After initiating a conversation, the client receives a “star” that can be exchanged for extra screen time. Practical application includes tracking reinforcement data on a visual chart. Challenges include over-justification effects; varying reinforcement types and gradually fading tokens promote intrinsic motivation.

Question Prompting – A technique that uses guided questions to elicit client reflection and deeper processing of thoughts and feelings. Related terms: Socratic questioning, guided discovery. CBT sessions employ question prompts such as “What evidence supports this thought?” And “What might be an alternative explanation?” Example: After a client reports anxiety about a group project, the therapist asks, “What past experiences suggest you can handle group work?” Practical application involves a cue-card with standard prompts for therapist reference. Challenges include client fatigue; limiting prompts to two per session maintains focus.

Reinforcement Schedule – The pattern or timing of delivering reinforcement, which influences the strength and persistence of behavior change. Related terms: Positive reinforcement, variable ratio. Structured CBT utilizes a “fixed-ratio” schedule initially, providing reinforcement after every successful social attempt, then shifts to a “variable-interval” schedule to promote maintenance. Example: After three greetings, the client receives a preferred snack; later, reinforcement occurs unpredictably after several greetings. Practical application includes a reinforcement log to monitor frequency. Challenges involve the client’s preference for predictability; gradual transition with clear explanations helps acceptance.

Role-Play – A simulated interaction where the client practices specific social skills in a safe, controlled environment. Related terms: Behavioral rehearsal, social modeling. CBT sessions incorporate role-play to rehearse greetings, complaint handling, and conflict resolution. Example: The therapist acts as a peer who interrupts, and the client practices assertive communication. Practical application includes video recording role-plays for later review and self-assessment. Challenges include performance anxiety; providing a

supportive, low-pressure atmosphere and offering positive feedback mitigates stress.

Schema – A cognitive framework or mental structure that organizes knowledge and expectations about the world. Related terms: Core belief, cognitive restructuring. In CBT for autism, schemas such as “I am socially awkward” are identified and challenged. Example: The client lists evidence that contradicts the schema, like successful past interactions. Practical application includes a “Schema Diary” where the client records situations that activate the schema and the outcome after restructuring. Challenges involve deeply entrenched schemas; repeated exposure to disconfirming evidence and reinforcement of new schemas are necessary for change.

Social Cognition – The mental processes involved in perceiving, interpreting, and responding to social information. Related terms: Theory of mind, empathy. Structured CBT targets social cognition through multi-modal exercises: Emotion identification, perspective taking, and pragmatic language practice. Example: A client completes a “Social Cue Quiz” that asks them to infer feelings from body language. Practical application includes integrating these exercises into daily routines, such as interpreting classmates’ reactions during lunch. Challenges include variability in social-cognitive development; individualized pacing and frequent feedback ensure progress.

Social Motivation – The drive or desire to engage in social interaction and relationships. Related terms: Intrinsic motivation, reinforcement. CBT enhances motivation by linking social goals to personal interests, such as discussing a favorite video game. Example: The therapist sets a goal for the client to share a game review with a peer. Practical application includes a “Motivation Board” where the client visualizes desired social outcomes and associated rewards. Challenges involve low baseline motivation; using interest-based activities and celebrating small successes boost engagement.

Social Narrative – A brief, personalized story that outlines a specific social situation, the expected behaviors, and possible outcomes. Related terms: Social story, visual script. In CBT, social narratives are co-created with the client to prepare for upcoming events. Example: A narrative for “Attending a Birthday Party” includes steps for greeting, joining a game, and saying thank you. Practical application includes printing the narrative on a laminated card for the client to reference. Challenges include over-generalization; tailoring narratives to the client’s sensory profile and preferences improves relevance.

Social Stories – Structured, descriptive texts that explain social situations, expectations, and appropriate responses, often using simple language and visuals. Related terms: Social narrative, visual schedule. CBT utilizes social stories to introduce new social skills, such as “How to Ask for Help.” Example: The story depicts a child noticing a spilled cup, walking to the teacher, and saying “Can you help me?” Practical application involves reviewing the story daily and rehearsing the dialogue. Challenges include limited generalization; supplementing stories with role-play and real-world practice enhances transfer.

Structured CBT Exercise – A planned activity that follows a specific CBT protocol to target a cognitive or behavioral skill, often incorporating worksheets, role-play, or exposure tasks. Related terms: Behavioral experiment, thought record. An example is the “Thought-Record Exercise” where the client logs a triggering event, automatic thought, evidence, alternative thought, and outcome. Practical application includes assigning the exercise as homework after each therapy session. Challenges involve adherence; using visual

checklists and providing immediate feedback increase completion rates.

Structured Play – Play activities that are organized with clear rules, roles, and objectives to facilitate learning of social skills. Related terms: Role-play, social games. CBT sessions may include a “Board-Game Turn-Taking” activity where the client practices waiting, asking for a turn, and celebrating wins. Example: Using a simple dice game with explicit turn-taking cues. Practical application includes debriefing after play to discuss feelings and strategies used. Challenges include sensory sensitivities to noise or tactile components; selecting low-stimulus games mitigates discomfort.

Theory of Mind (ToM) – The ability to attribute mental states—beliefs, desires, intentions—to oneself and others, recognizing that these states may differ. Related terms: Perspective taking, mentalizing. CBT addresses ToM deficits through “Mind-Reading” drills where the client predicts a character’s feelings based on contextual clues. Example: After reading a short story, the client selects the character’s likely thought from multiple options. Practical application includes progressive difficulty, moving from explicit cues to subtle hints. Challenges include the client’s reliance on literal interpretation; incorporating visual emotion cues and explicit teaching of inference strategies supports development.

Thought Record – A CBT worksheet that helps clients systematically examine the relationship between situations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Related terms: Cognitive restructuring, automatic thought. The record includes columns for the event, automatic thought, cognitive distortion, evidence for/against, and balanced thought. Example: After a group activity, the client records “I think I embarrassed everyone” and then identifies supporting and contradictory evidence. Practical application involves reviewing records weekly with the therapist to reinforce skill use. Challenges include the client’s difficulty with abstract categorization; using icons for each column and color-coding simplifies the process.

Transfer of Training – The application of skills learned in one context to different, real-world situations. Related terms: Generalization, maintenance. In CBT for autism, transfer is facilitated by “In-the-Moment Coaching,” where the therapist provides brief prompts during actual social encounters. Example: During a lunch break, the therapist whispers a cue to initiate a greeting. Practical application includes tracking successful transfers on a log to monitor progress. Challenges involve context specificity; varying practice settings (classroom, playground, home) promotes broader transfer.

Validation – The therapeutic act of acknowledging and accepting a client’s feelings, thoughts, or experiences as understandable and legitimate. Related terms: Empathic listening, supportive feedback. CBT therapists use validation before challenging maladaptive thoughts, ensuring the client feels heard. Example: “I can see why you felt nervous before the meeting; many people feel that way.” Practical application includes pairing validation with a reflective statement and then moving to cognitive restructuring. Challenges include over-validation that may reinforce unhelpful beliefs; balancing acceptance with gentle challenge is key.

Video Modeling – An instructional technique that uses video recordings of desired behaviors for the client to observe and imitate. Related terms: Observational learning, social skills training. In the advanced CBT curriculum, a video shows a peer successfully navigating a group conversation, highlighting eye contact, turn-taking, and appropriate humor. Example: The client watches the clip, pauses to discuss each

component, then practices the behavior in a role-play. Practical application includes creating personalized videos featuring familiar peers to increase relevance.