



## Building Social Skills: A Promising New Tool

### Social Skills: Crucial for Children and Teens

**Ages 12 through 18 are a critical period for developing social skills and learning to interact with peers and adults.** Learning and psychiatric disorders can impact children's relationships, but social skills training can help reduce the symptoms of ADHD, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, Asperger's and PDD, and OCD.

### Social Skills Training (SST)

Social skills training is a form of behavior therapy used to help children who have difficulties relating to others. It is often conducted in a therapy group, where participants can practice new skills "live."

### SST in the Virtual Environment

InWorld Solutions has created an interactive, avatar-based reality platform called InWorld that allows the clinician and child to interact in a safe, controlled 3D environment. As a supplement to face-to-face SST, it allows young people to:

- have real-world experiences, conversations, and interactions with less social pressure
- practice new behaviors safely, using avatars to simulate family members, peers, and others
- simulate potentially risky behavior safely (such as aggressive behavior or domestic violence)
- see new behaviors modeled by the leader in a realistic environment, and see themselves acting and reacting in a new way to reinforce their new learned skills

### The Company

InWorld Solutions is an innovative leader in the application of virtual environments to healthcare and behavioral medicine. The InWorld virtual environment platform incorporates a wide range of avatars, content, and features specifically designed to facilitate clinical and educational applications. The company is a member of the CFG Health Network, a comprehensive medical and behavioral health care provider dedicated to transforming access to cost-effective quality behavioral health care.

### Clinical Data from Our Pilot Program

In winter of 2010, a group was initiated for children with social skills issues via ADDvantages Learning Center in New Jersey. The group was used to test the effectiveness of a virtual reality environment for social skills training.

### THE STUDY

The group included 28 children, ages 7 to 14, with ADHD, anxiety disorder, PDD/Asperger's, bipolar disorder, and OCD. Several had more than one diagnosis. The children participated in group sessions that ran 1.25 hours per week for eight weeks.

### THE RESULTS

Preliminary outcomes, measured using the Social Skills Rating System (SSiS), revealed a:

- 54 % decrease in problem behavior
- 66 % improvement in social skills

Meanwhile, surveys showed that 83 % of the older children enjoyed the sessions and made new friends, and 75 % of parents found the sessions helpful.



Virtual reality enabled the children to maintain focus and become self-observers. That wasn't possible before this tool.

– Linda Karanzalis, M.S.

I can get more information during an initial evaluation from a kid via the use of virtual reality than it would take in three traditional sessions.

– Jeanine P. Miles, MS, LPC

Victoria would scream all day, sometimes until 2 a.m. Now there are hardly any tantrums and she is calmer.

– Jennifer, parent

I learned how to use eye contact and start a conversation.

– Ryan, participant

I learned how to keep friends.

– Zach, participant