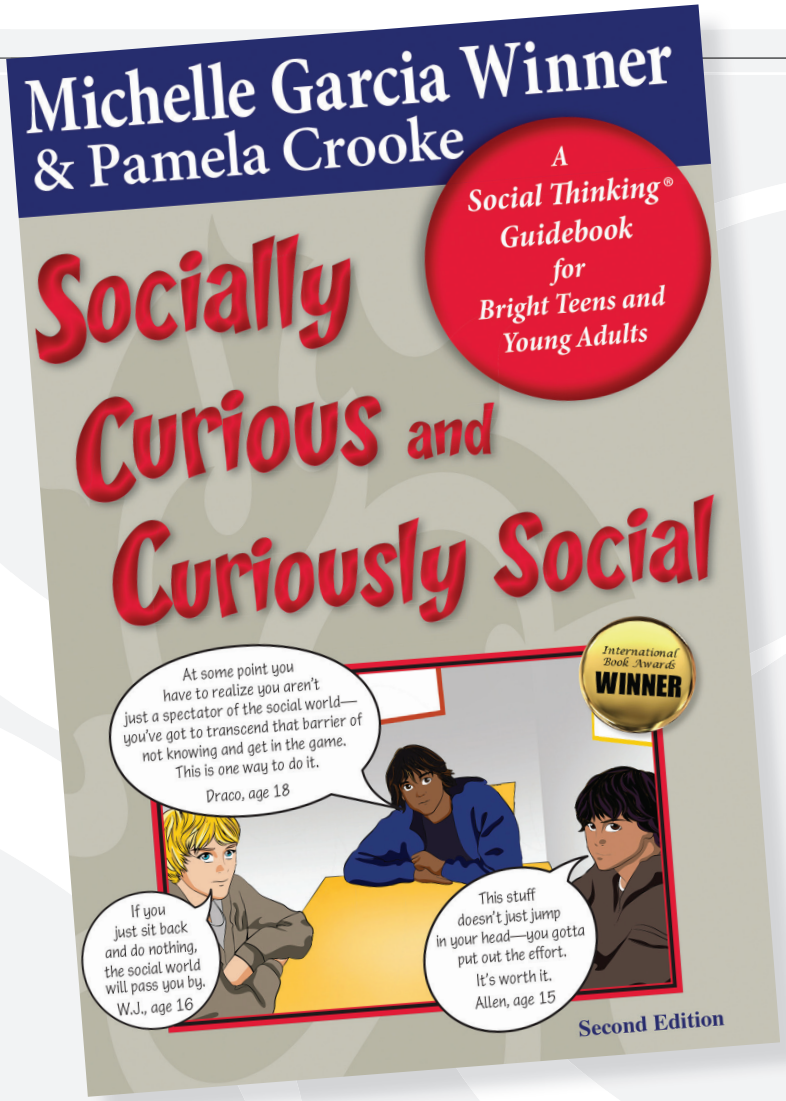

Thinking and Reading Guide
for
Socially Curious and Curiously Social

(2nd edition)

by Michelle Garcia Winner & Pamela Crooke

Guide created by Colleen Barry & Nicole Battestelli
Made available for download by Social Thinking

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www.socialthinking.com

Socially Curious and Curiously Social
Thinking and Reading Guide

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DISCLAIMER

Our thanks go out to Colleen Barry and Nicole Battestelli for creating this guide and allowing us to share it with the public via the TSP website. Parents and interventionists of all types will find this document useful as a starting point for further teaching and conversation with individuals with whom they live or work.

For instance, teachers can use the questions and activity sheets as they work chapter by chapter through the book with a group to gauge how well individuals are absorbing and learning the concepts, to identify gaps where additional teaching may be needed, and to personalize the learning experience to each individual. While point values are assigned to each chapter (note: they add up to well over 200), quizzes are, of course, optional! The goal is to encourage thinking and expanded discussions of the concepts rather than creating anxiety over scores. Parents may want to use the key points found at the end of each chapter alongside this guide in organizing their thoughts as a means to initiate conversations with their preteens and teens about social issues. A wide range of idioms are included in the book and this guide, which can be interesting explorations into the different ways we use words to communicate and help individuals better understand non-literal, figurative language. Make it fun! Individuals with social learning challenges (and those without!) can use the questions for self-reflection and deeper thinking about the social concepts explored in the book.

View this guide from Colleen and Nicole as a springboard, a starting point, rather than a destination in and of itself or a comprehensive "everything included here" document. Add your own questions or activities to make the social learning process more relevant and meaningful, which in turn will motivate us all to do the work that is involved in learning to be better social thinkers, social observers, and social problem solvers, no matter where we find ourselves in life.

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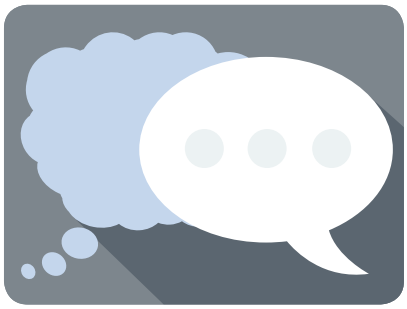

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Introduction

(5 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Look at the cartoon on page xv. Which thought bubble do you best relate to?

2. Explain one factor that can impact, change, or influence our social "rules" or what people refer to as the "hidden rules.".

3. What is important to remember in learning about the social world?

4. Name one way adults make and maintain friendships.

5. What might it take for someone your age to develop social thinking and related social skills?

My Smarts/Your Smarts Activity

Name _____ Date _____

"Everyone has different learning strengths and weaknesses. Not better or worse, just different."

I am "wired" to be good at learning and understanding:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

_____is wired to be good at learning and understanding:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

I can help _____with _____and

I can ask _____ to help

me with_____.

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Chapter 1

(8 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Describe in your own words: what is Social Thinking?

2. What analogy is used to describe what it's like to learn social thinking?

   a) Science

   b) Math

   c) Social Studies

   d) Psychology

3. When does social thinking happen?

4. How are social skills and social thinking different?

5. Explain what is meant by “weird” thoughts.

6. What are “hidden rules” and how do we learn about them?

Define the idiom

Hanging out

Hold up! Slam on the brakes!

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Idiom Extension Activity

Name Date

▶ **Directions**

Choose an idiom from this chapter to use to complete the activity. This activity can be repeated for each chapter you read.

My Idiom:	
The FIGURATIVE (Figure-It-Out) meaning is:	
The LITERAL meaning looks like	The FIGURATIVE meaning looks like

Write down an example of how this idiom could be used in conversation:

Using My Social Thinking Activity

Name _____ Date _____

Social thinking and social skills are required even when we are not friends with the people around us or we are not talking to the people around us.

► Directions

Pick 5 of the 10 scenarios below. Think of a specific way you would use social thinking skills for those scenarios. Extra credit will be awarded for completing additional scenarios correctly.

Example: Working on a project at the library

Voice volume- if you are working too loudly you will disrupt others.

Example: Going to the movies

Where you sit- if the theater is crowded you can sit in seats that are closer to people. If it is less crowded you will spread out from people.

1. Watching TV with your family

2. In an elevator

3. Being at a doctor's office

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4. Eating at a restaurant

5. Walking through the hallways at school

6. Hanging out with friends at the mall

7. Working in a group at school

8. Sitting in class listening to others talk

9. Being on the bus

10. Working out at the gym

Hidden Rules Activity

Name _____ Date _____

What we know…

- Expected behaviors for social situations change over time.
- People don't usually tell you the expected behaviors. They just assume you know!

Let's explore some Hidden Rules for Holidays.

Holiday	**Name one or more Hidden Rules**
Valentine's Day	
4th of July	
Halloween	
April Fool's Day	
New Year's Eve	

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Chapter 2

(14 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. How do we form opinions of others?

2. What is embarrassment?

3. What is a strategy for dealing with embarrassment?

4. What is social memory?

5. What is a reputation?

6. What is perspective taking?

7. What are the Four Steps of Perspective Taking?

Step 1. _____

Step 2. _____

Step 3. _____

Step 4. _____

Define the idioms

Your cup of tea

Go hand in hand

Putting ourselves in another person's shoes

On the flip side

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Our Social Memories Activity

Name _____ Date _____

What we know…

- Reputation is the standing one has in the opinions of others.
- A reputation can be good or bad.
- Our social memories are the thoughts we have about others over time.

Let's explore our memories/thoughts of the following people/companies. For each person/company in the first column, write down a memory or thought you have about them in the second column.

J.K. Rowling	
The President of the U.S.	
Ford Motor Company	
Nintendo	
The Queen of England	
Other _____	
Other _____	
Other _____	

Chapter 3

(11 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What is a surface behavior?

2. Why do we change the SSTest we use as we get older?

3. What does maturity mean?

4. Do people who are immature still use social skills?

5. What does it mean to have a social learning disability?

6. What is a social repair and when should you use it?

Define the idioms

Go with the flow

Horsing around

Hot water

Put my foot in my mouth

Just being human

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Chapter 4

(18 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Words are not enough to be social. Our _____ play a huge part as well.

2. How are cliques usually defined?

3. What is "networking"?

4. What percentage of the message we are trying to get across is carried by our bodies and faces?

5. Name some ways you can learn to relax your body.

6. To be a welcomed member of a group you need to :

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

7. What is one of the most basic social skills for letting people know that you are paying attention to them?

8. Describe what is meant by "thinking with your eyes."

9. List the Four Steps of Communication:

Step 1: _____

Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____

Step 4: _____

Define the idioms

Mixed message

Making friends with your body

In the loop

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Observing Cliques Activity

Name _____ Date _____

▶ Directions

Draw a clique map below to show where different groups of people sit in the cafeteria.

Pick one of these groups and list some of the characteristics of the people in the group.

_____

_____

_____

Chapter 5

(23 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What three factors affect whether or not people will want to listen to what you have to say?

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

2. What are huge contributors to our success or failure in relating to others?

3. What does the author call a "download"?

4. What is the main way we can figure out the real meaning behind others' words?

5. Do people who are not speaking have motives?

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6. What kind of messages do you send when you do not talk to others in class or at lunch?

BONUS: How can you get better at figuring out other people's thoughts?

Define the idioms

Bad mouth

Open up a can of worms

Know-it-all

Stuck on yourself

Clicks

Without breaking stride

Sure fire way

Two-way street

Messing with your mind

At face value

Aced

Very fine line

Talk a mile a minute

Shooting himself in the foot

Chapter 6

(13 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What does "context" mean?

2. What is just as important as learning how to communicate?

3. What are expected behaviors in a classroom or business meeting?

4. What are group dynamics?

5. What are people files?

6. What is the social fake?

7. What is a white lie?

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8. When is it okay to tell a white lie?

Define the idioms

In a nutshell

Bottom line

Know-it-all

Take a back seat

Honesty is not always the best policy

Chapter 7

(21 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What went wrong with Samantha, Kristy, and Mark's Social Thinking Group?

2. Conversations are a give and take interaction; they are like building a

   _____.

3. Explain how imagination is used in conversations.

4. What does small talk usually start with?

5. What is the difference between chatting socially and communicating in the classroom?

6. Why is it important to ask people questions about their lives?

7. During which conversation strategy is it perfectly acceptable to talk about your own life and your own experiences in a way to move the conversation along?

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8. What can you say to change the topic in a conversation or go back to an earlier topic?

9. What is empathy?

10. What are the ground rules for texting?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

11. What do "good cyber-social skills" involve?

Define the idioms

Put ourselves in another person's shoes

Stay on the same page

Tip of the iceberg

On the fly

Connect the dots

Fair game

Get on board

Chapter 8

(14 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What is the definition of a "friend"?

2. What are the norms for forming a friendship?

3. Who decides when a person moves up to the next level of friendship?

4. Fill in the Progression of Levels of Friendship:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Level 3: _____

Level 4: _____

Level 5: _____

Level 6: _____

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5. What special category do many friendships fall into because of how they change over time?

6. What is the only Level of the Friendship Pyramid that does NOT include dating?

Define the idioms

Turn on you

Got your back

Develop an edge

Chapter 9

(24 points)

Name Date

1. How can you tell if you are being bullied?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. True or False: ANYONE who teases you is a bully.

3. What is the difference between a bully and a jerk?

4. What does it mean to wear an "invisible target"? Give an example for each of the following:

Small target:

Medium target:

Large target:

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Define the idioms

Taking one day at a time

Develop an edge

Blend into the woodwork

Egg you on

Blow it off

Our dark side

Getting the best of us

Giving someone a dose of his or her own medicine

Crying wolf

Rub people the wrong way

Chip on their shoulder

Two to Tango

Let's Talk about Bullying Activity

Name _____ Date _____

What we know…

Bullying is NEVER okay. When you're being bullied it's often hard to find the right words to talk about it. Let's practice!

If you were dealing with a bully at school, what would you say to your parents so they could help you? Write EXACTLY what you would say.

If you were dealing with a bully at school, what would you say to your counselor or teacher so they could help you? Write EXACTLY what you would say.

If you were dealing with a bully at work, what would you say to your boss so he/she could help you? Write EXACTLY what you would say.

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Chapter 10

(12 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What is a personal problem?

2. Emotions are contagious. What does this mean?

3. Are all problems the same size?

4. What happens if we have a big reaction to a small problem?

5. Are emotions a good thing? What do we have to learn to do to them?

6. What equation can you use so your reaction to a problem makes sense to those around you?

7. How do we take care of our mental health?

Define the idioms

Fallout

Slipped your mind

Making a mountain out of a molehill

Walk on the dark side

Chill pill

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Chapter 11

(9 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Finish this sentence: It's okay to be alone as long as...

2. What are the two main reasons most people are alone?

   1. _____

   2. _____

3. Why can't we just be alone all of the time?

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

   4. _____

4. How can we learn to be social?

Define the idioms

Behind the curve

Chapter 12

(16 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Why is it important to know how to talk about "nothing" with people your age?

2. What is flirting?

3. What is the difference between flirting and friendly teasing?

4. What is the logical order to building a romantic relationship?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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- _____
- _____

5. What is one thing you learned about the opposite sex in the section dedicated to your gender?

Define the idioms

Nature of the beast

Messing with your mind

Under your belt

Chapter 13

(22 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What are signs of anxiety or depression that may warrant extra help?

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Do all people feel self-doubt, unsure, anxious, awkward, or insecure at some point?

3. What has to be in place before attempting to use the Spirals? (These are the things you have to answer "yes" to.)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

4. According to the text, what does it mean to "default"?

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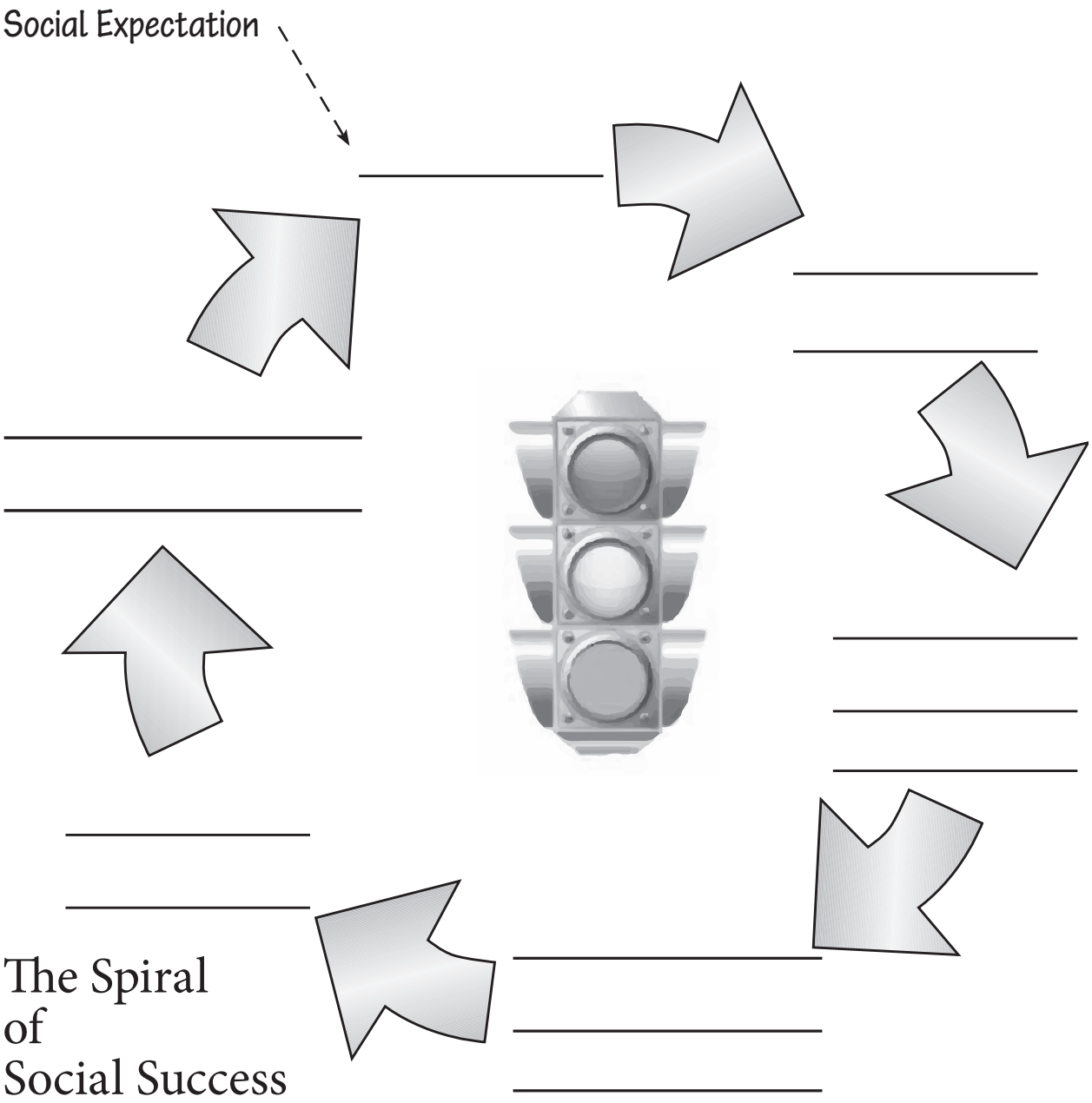
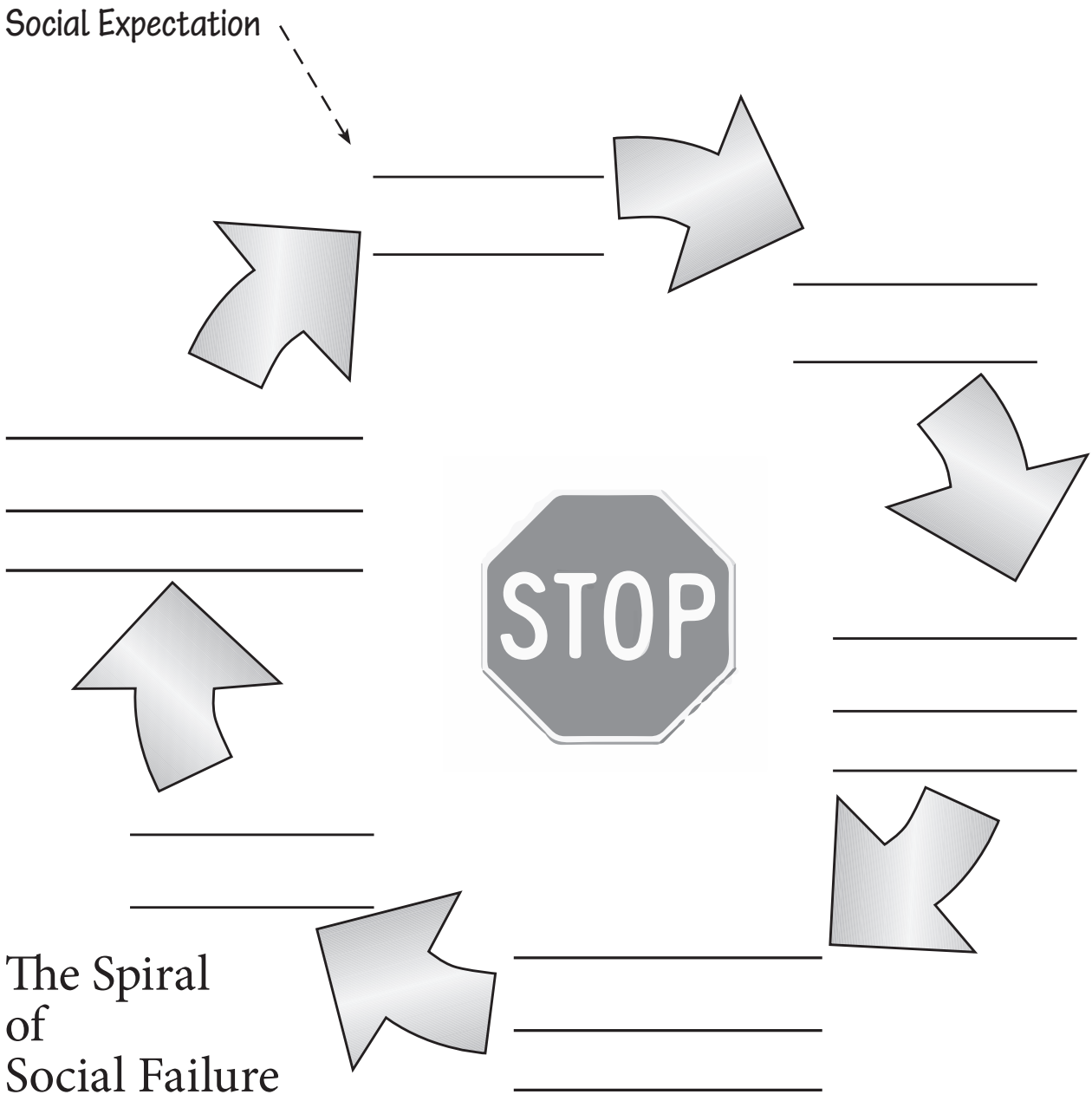
5. Fill in the Spiral of Social Success below.



6. What do you need to already have in place to use the Spiral of Social Success?

7. Fill in the Spiral of Social Failure below.



The Spiral
of
Social Failure

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Chapter 14

(17 points)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What are the six social aspects of life mentioned in the chapter that you may want to do at some point that require good social thinking skills?

   - _____
   - _____
   - _____
   - _____
   - _____

2. What message do you send if you fill out a job application and write in chicken scratch or have spelling errors?

3. What impression do people give who are not friendly at work?

4. People get jobs based on their technical skills. They keep their jobs based on

   their _____.

5. How is a social network built?

6. Why is it important to learn to be friendly with your roommate, even if you are not friends?

7. Why is it important to spend time now to work on social thinking skills?

BONUS: Write a positive statement you can say to yourself when you think about your own social thinking journey.

"I _____

Define the idioms

You can run but you can't hide

Red flag

Circular file

Off your back

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Socially Curious and Curiously Social

Thinking and Reading Guide

Answer Key

Introduction

(5 points)

1. Various answers
2. Culture, social, mix of people, ages, etc.
3. Flexible thinking
4. Social networks, blogs, groups, clubs, etc.
5. Thought, practice, and more practice

Chapter 1

(8 points)

1. Thinking about other people and what they are thinking about you
2. B: Math
3. 24/7 or almost all of the time
4. Social Thinking is the thought before the "doing" or "action"; the actions/doing are the social skills
5. Some behavior makes you noticed in a negative way. This makes people uncomfortable and creates weird thoughts (huh?). They don't think you are weird. They think what you did is weird
6. Hidden rules are expected behaviors for a situation. You use clues to figure them out

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Hanging out: Being with other people.

Hold up! Slam on the brakes! Immediately stop what you are doing

Chapter 2

(14 points)

1. From the thoughts - good or bad - we have of others

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2. You worry that people are having negative thoughts about you
3. 1) think for a quick minute about what caused it 2) make a note in your brain to avoid doing or saying that again 3) just move on
4. Remembering the types of thoughts we have about people over time
5. The standing one has in the opinions of others (good or bad)
6. Thinking about people and understanding that people have different thoughts from one another
7. 1- Think about people near you

   2- Think about why the person is near you (motive)

   3- Think about what other people may be thinking about you

   4- Monitor and modify your own behavior

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Your cup of tea: Someone or something you like

Go hand in hand: Things or ideas that go together; associated

Putting ourselves in another person's shoes: Considering what others are thinking or feeling

On the flip side: Providing one point of view and then acknowledging a completely different point of view on the same topic

Chapter 3

(11 points)

1. Things we do to get along with others and share space in a manner that allows us to be included rather than excluded
2. Various answers
3. We've figured out how to behave to avoid the weird thoughts while also taking on the added responsibility that is expected of us
4. Yes, but of a younger age group

5. You have difficulty processing information in the social area compared to your peers
6. Acknowledge a mistake in a social situation. Used when you realize you have made a mistake or are doing something socially unexpected

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Go with the flow: To accept things as they happen

Horsing around: Just being crazy with a group of friends

Hot water: Being in trouble

Put my foot in my mouth: To say something that makes someone feel embarrassed

Just being human: Acknowledging that humans make mistakes on a routine basis

Chapter 4

(18 points)

1. bodies
2. By a hobby, personality type, or pre-established friendship group
3. Social relationships start small, then grow larger; friends introducing friends
4. 93%
5. Dance/movement therapist, acting lessons, classes, meditation, OT
6. 1. Think about the person to whom you are talking
   2. Get your body in the group
   3. Keep your body looking like it's comfortable with others
   4. Use facial expressions to show interest and share feelings
7. Eye contact
8. Keeping your eyes looking at a person, what he/she is looking at, and other people in the group; using your brain to think about what you're seeing

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9. 1: Think about what other people may be thinking
   2: Establish physical presence
   3: Think about people with your eyes
   4: Relate to people with your language

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Mixed message: One person or group of people tell you one way you should do something and a different group of people tell you a totally different way to approach the same topic

Making friends with your body: Becoming comfortable with your body and the way it moves

In the loop: Someone has told you something, providing you with knowledge others share

Chapter 5

(20 points)

1. The situation: What we say; How we say it
2. Our own feelings or emotions and the feelings or emotions of others around us
3. Talking AT someone, not TO them
4. Determine someone's motive; use the social thinking process of reading others' plans
5. Yes
6. People may think that you are not friendly and not interested in getting to know someone or even being friendly to him/her

BONUS: Keep practicing the skills

IDIOM DEFINTIONS

Bad mouth: To speak very badly about someone or something

Open up a can of worms: Creating a situation that causes you a lot of trouble that you now have to handle

Know-it-all: Someone who acts like he has all the answers and is always right

Stuck on yourself: A person who appears to think highly about himself/herself and tends to talk about himself/herself a lot or frequently looks in the mirror

Clicks: When things fit together, connect

Without breaking a stride: Without hesitation

Sure fire way: Guaranteed to work well for you

Two-way street: Shared responsibility; people must make an equal effort to achieve good results

Messing with your mind: Someone is trying to manipulate you

At face value: To accept something because of the way it looks or seems without thinking about what else it could mean or a person's motive

Aced: To do something very well

Very fine line: When there is no clear definition between a good choice and a bad choice

Talk a mile a minute: Speak very quickly

Shooting himself in the foot: You do or say something that causes you problems

Chapter 6

(13 points)

1. The situation we are in
2. Knowing when not to talk
3. Think about others, monitor your behavior, keep your language connected to the group, make behavior adjustments, pay attention, listen, stay on topic

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4. The way people act and talk within a group contributes to how well the group functions overall
5. Stored memories about others
6. A way to show you are interested in connecting to a person even if you could care less about the topic
7. Lies you tell to take care of another person's feelings
8. When telling your honest thoughts will hurt someone's feelings

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

In a nutshell: A summary

Bottom line: The main point/most important factor

Know it all: Someone who acts like he has all the answers and is always right

Take a back seat: Make something a lower priority

Honesty is not always the best policy. Total honesty can hurt people's feelings

Chapter 7

(21 points)

1. No one showed any real interest in the other people in the group
2. It's like building a chain: we have to link our words to what others are saying, monitor, self-adjust, and imagine what the other person is talking about; it's give and take
3. You're imagining another's experience so you can ask questions based on what you already know to learn more about things you don't know about (social wonders). This helps you learn about things and connect to people
4. A small, fairly unimportant question to another person about that person
5. In the classroom you are supposed to know something about the topic and you should demonstrate your knowledge. Socially, you're not expected to know everything. Asking questions and making comments is expected and makes others feel connected and good

6. To show them we are interested in them
7. Add-a-Thought
8. "So back to…"; "Speaking of…"
9. Connecting with others on a social-emotional level; letting people know you understand how they are feeling; this can be learned
10. Have a reason for asking for a person's number; Once you get a number, use it sparingly; Texting is a foreign language so learn the shortcuts; Know when and where to text
11. Sharing written space effectively by using your social thinking smarts to avoid creating the weird or uncomfortable thought in another person

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Put ourselves in another person's shoes: Considering what another person is thinking or feeling

Stay on the same page: Thinking in a similar way

Tip of the iceberg: A tiny or small part of a problem or difficult situation that we can see; underneath there is is a much larger problem we may not be aware of

On the fly: Doing things without preparation

Connect the dots: To understand the relationship between different ideas or experiences

Fair game: Open to discussion; legitimate

Get on board: To join in with what others are doing or planning

Chapter 8

(14 points)

1. Share common interest, trust, and enjoy being with the person
2. Both people; friendship is a two-way street
3. Level 1–Greetings/Friendly

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Level 2-Acquaintance

Level 3-Possible Friendship

Level 4-Evolving Friendship

Level 5-Bonded Friendship

Level 6-Very Close Friend

4. On Again, Off Again Friends
5. Level 1- Friendly Greeting

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Turn on you: Trick you in a mean way

Got your back: Someone who will support you when you need it

Develop an edge: A person who seems reasonable but then has more negative reactions than expected; not predictably calm but "edgy"

Chapter 9

(24 points)

1. Bullies repeatedly make you feel embarrassed, stupid, or bad around other people

   Bullies laugh at you when you are not trying to be funny

   Bullies make you feel bad even when they are not laughing at you

   Bullies encourage you to do things you are uncomfortable doing

   Bullies threaten you if you do not do what they want you to do

   Bullies tell other people not to talk to you
2. False
3. Bullies have a strong intent to hurt others. Jerks do or say things that make others feel bad, but they do this unintentionally

4. There is potential for people to treat us badly just because we exist and share space with others
   - Small target: you do something minor that irritates someone else
   - Medium target: you do something that annoys another person or group of people
   - Large target: you do something obviously wrong that affects one or more persons

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Taking one day at a time: Living each day as it comes instead of worrying about tomorrow and the day after

Developed an edge: Acted like he was mad at everyone

Blend into the woodwork: Not standing out from others

Egg you on: Strongly encourage you to do something you are not comfortable doing

Blow it off: Let it go

Our dark side: Showing our negative, more angry emotions

Getting the best of us: Something that causes us to become unpleasant emotionally

Giving someone a dose of his or her own medicine: To do the same bad things to someone that they have often done to you to show them how unpleasant it is

Crying wolf: Repeatedly saying something that is not true, to the point that no one believes or trusts you anymore

Rub people the wrong way: To annoy someone without intending to

Chip on their shoulder: To blame other people for something that has happened to you and continue to be angry about it so it affects the way you behave

Two to Tango: Both people involved in a situation are responsible for how it goes

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Chapter 10

(12 points)

1. Issues that cause you to have an emotional response (reaction) which causes one or more people around you to have an emotional response
2. It's human nature to react to other people's emotions in a similar way
3. No!
4. Others have uncomfortable thoughts. They may think the person is too sensitive or overreacting or is just using the problem to get attention from others. This also influences people's social memory of you
5. Yes. But we need to control them
6. Size of Reaction = Size of Problem/Issue
7. We try to find emotional balance in reacting to the daily problems we experience

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Fallout: What happened as a result of a reaction

Slipped your mind: You forgot something you were supposed to do

Making a mountain out of a molehill: To make a slight difficulty seem like a serious problem

Walk on the dark side: To look at or do something that is bad or dangerous

Chill pill: You need to relax, calm down and not let things upset you so easily

Chapter 11

(9 points)

1. … you are still seeking some social balance and not living in total or almost total social isolation (avoidance)
2. Need some time away from people to "recharge"

   Need to escape so they don't have to deal with people

3. You don't develop a connection with others and that ultimately does not feel good

   You don't get "validation" from others when you are alone

   It puts you at risk for mental health problems

   Without social practice you have a harder time holding a job

4. Practice!

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Behind the curve: Lagging behind

Chapter 12

(16 points)

1. It's a way to relate to other people and is the way friendships and relationships start
2. Giving special attention to someone you think you might like to get to know better in a romantic way
3. Your motive. If you want to be friends, it's friendly teasing. If you want to date someone, it's flirting
4. Notice and think; use your eyes

   Talk to your friends about the person

   Let them know you notice them (smile, say hi)

   Talk or text the person

   Hang out in a group at school

   Talk or text some more

   Hang out a little more in a group at school

   Hang out in a group outside of school

   Hang out alone with the other person
5. Various answers

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IDIOM DEFINITIONS

Nature of the beast: Something we all do because we are human

Messing with your mind: Someone is playing games with your mind, trying to manipulate you through mental tactics

Under your belt: Having already acquired a skill or knowledge

Chapter 13

(22 points)

1. You're really upset for a long time and it is getting in the way of doing things

   You find yourself doing and saying things to avoid something causing you stress

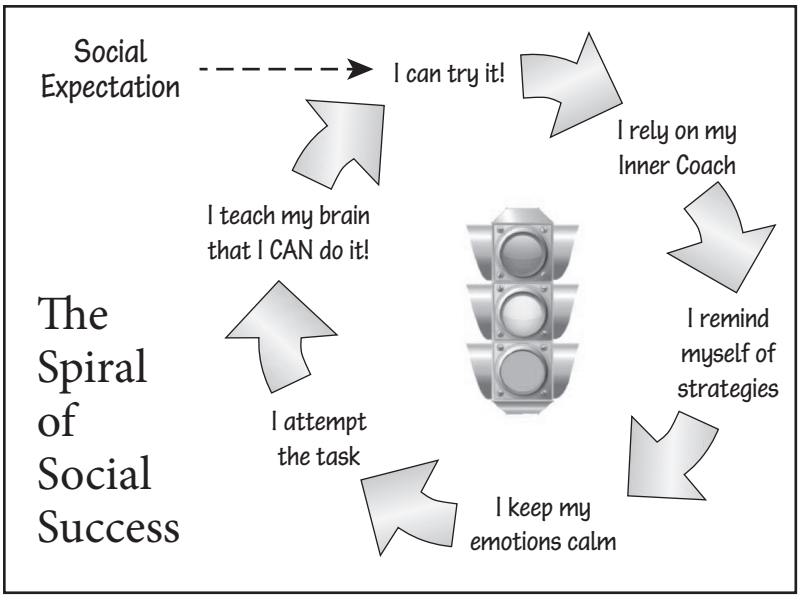
   You're on edge/feel like you could erupt like a volcano
2. Yes
3. Ok, I own it; I'm ready to help myself

   I understand that this will sometimes feel uncomfortable

   I avoid making excuses when faced with uncomfortable social demands

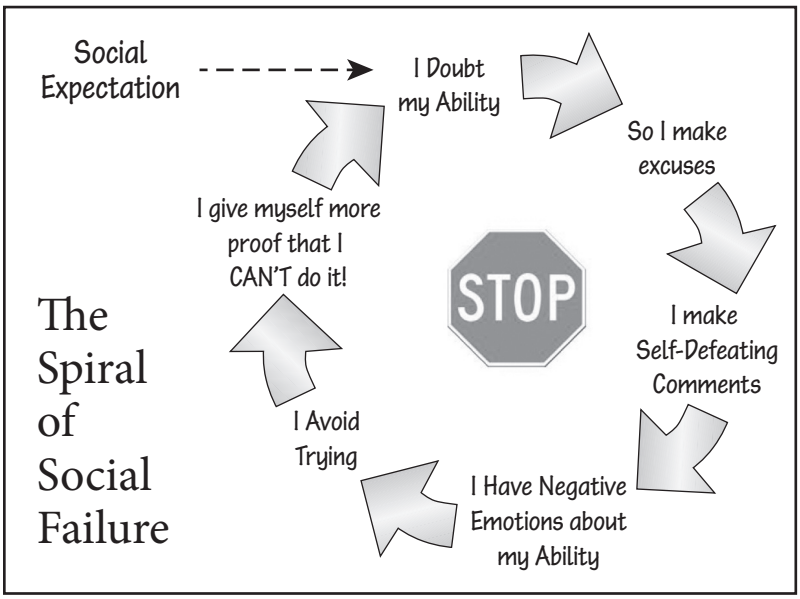
   I'll use my inner coach (rather than my self-defeater)
4. What your brain is most comfortable doing

5.



6. The skill base

7.



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Chapter 14

(17 points)

1. Find a companion or friend

   Keep that relationship over time

   Get a job

   Keep your job and get along with your coworkers

   Figure out how to enjoy time in the community by developing leisure skills

   Live on your own or with a roommate and tolerate that other person in your space
2. You don't care
3. They are not team players
4. Their ability to relate to others
5. Creating work-based friendships ; having discussions over lunch or before and after meetings to demonstrate mutual interest in each other's lives and not just in the work expertise
6. You are sharing space and should try to make each other comfortable
7. Social thinking takes practice! Stalling often creates more problems and eventually means more work for you

BONUS: Various answers

IDIOM DEFINITIONS

You can run but you can't hide: You can try to avoid a situation but you will eventually have to deal with it

Red flag: A warning sign that something is not right

Circular file: Trash can or waste basket

Off your back: Keep someone from getting emotionally frustrated or upset with you