

Draw and describe your own “Light Force” and “Dark Force” -- Learning activities to help children with ASD to increase awareness of their challenges and strengths



(Downloads of the worksheets are on pages 4 and 5)

Many children with Asperger’s and other autism spectrum disorders are quite fond of fantasy characters. Social skill teaching interventions which employ fantasy characters can tap into these predilections, increase insight and sustain interest in the social skills teaching work.

In March 2013, I gave an all-day workshop in Seattle, “*Harnessing Fantasy and Fascination to Promote Social Skills Learning in Children with High-Functioning Autism.*” Based on feedback I received from participants during this presentation, I decided to create a series of structured drawing worksheets to help children in the process of identifying problems and beginning to work on solutions. You will find the downloads for these worksheets below. (The worksheets shown above are examples I created using kid art I found on the internet.)

(continued next page)

Why bother to incorporate imagination and art into social skills work with kids on the autism spectrum?

1. **Children with ASD lose stamina in social skills work if we don't lighten it up a little.** Think about it. Many are in for years of listening to people like us scrutinize and edify them.
2. **Children with ASD often do much better identifying problems if we employ a strategic, indirect approach.** If you ask a child on the spectrum, "Do you have any problems with changes or dealing with new schedules and routines?", the child might answer "No, not really." but if you show the same child a picture of Rock Brain (from Social Thinking) or Rigidity (a Ryuu character), and ask, "Do these characters ever cause any problems for you?", you will very often get a completely different and very substantial answer.

Drawing worksheets, designed to help children to identify their own unique problems and possible solutions

If you like, you can start by introducing social skills fantasy character kits such as the two described in [Part 1 of this blog series](#). Then, to introduce the drawing activity, you can try using language like this:

"No one is perfect. Almost everyone has lots of problems. There is a very important kind of smartness called "insight." That means, you are able to look inside yourself to see what things you are good at and also what things are hard for you. People who have lots of "insight" are especially good at noticing what problems they have. I wonder which of you kids is going to be good at knowing what your problems are? To find out, we are going to do a fun and challenging drawing activity. There are two different ways to do it. The first way is to pick out an Unthinkable character or a Ryuu Dark Force character that seems to be like you in some ways. Draw it, and describe how this Unthinkable or Dark Force character affects you. The second way to do this drawing activity is to invent your own Dark Force and Light Force character."



On the left is a character card I made based on one of the "Unthinkables" characters (see the book it came from at socialthinking.com.) At right, are Ryuu cards (designed by Rebecca Klaw and Joel Shaul, available at ryuu-world.com)

The worksheets are designed to be completed in pairs, with a “Light Force” opposing a “Dark Force”

You can suggest these possible categories below before the kids start inventing and drawing.

1. Dealing with anger
2. Dealing with worries
3. Dealing with sadness
4. Calming down your body. This could cover hyperactivity, or else finding appropriate places and times to stim.
5. Getting along with others. This could cover cooperation, conflict avoidance, concern for others, friendship skills.
6. Spending too much time alone
7. Trouble being organized
8. Talking too loud or too soft
9. Talking too much about what YOU like

You may find this group of methods is a useful one to promote problem self-awareness and to advance your work on communication, relationships and emotions.

I wish you well in your work.



I would be grateful if you would consider sharing with me your own experiences using these worksheets.

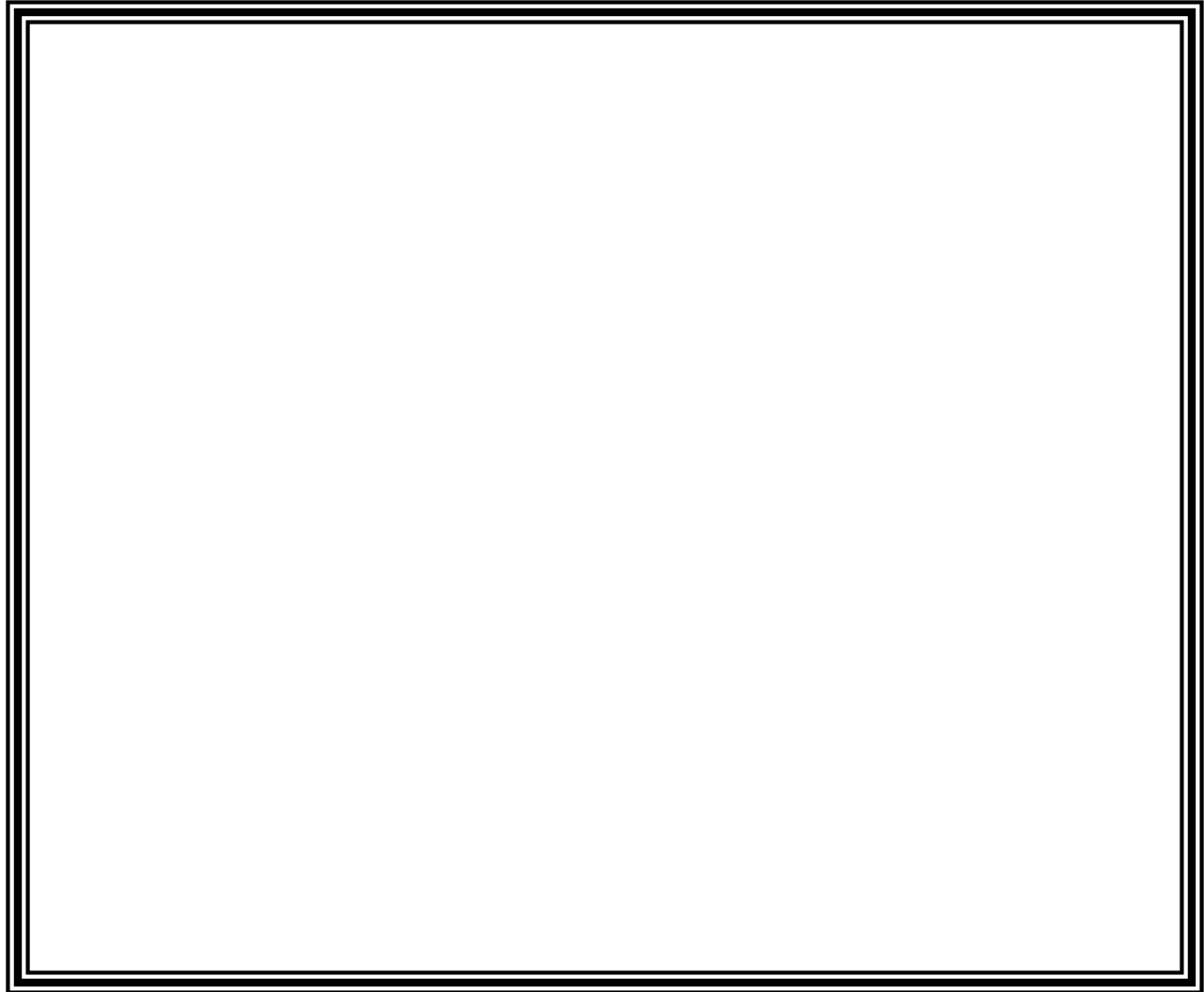
Joel Shaul, LCSW

Joel Shaul provides trainings nationwide on topics related to social skills counseling and teaching for children on the spectrum. To learn more:

<http://bit.ly/zGDQCi>

Invent your own "Dark Force"

The name of this Dark Force:

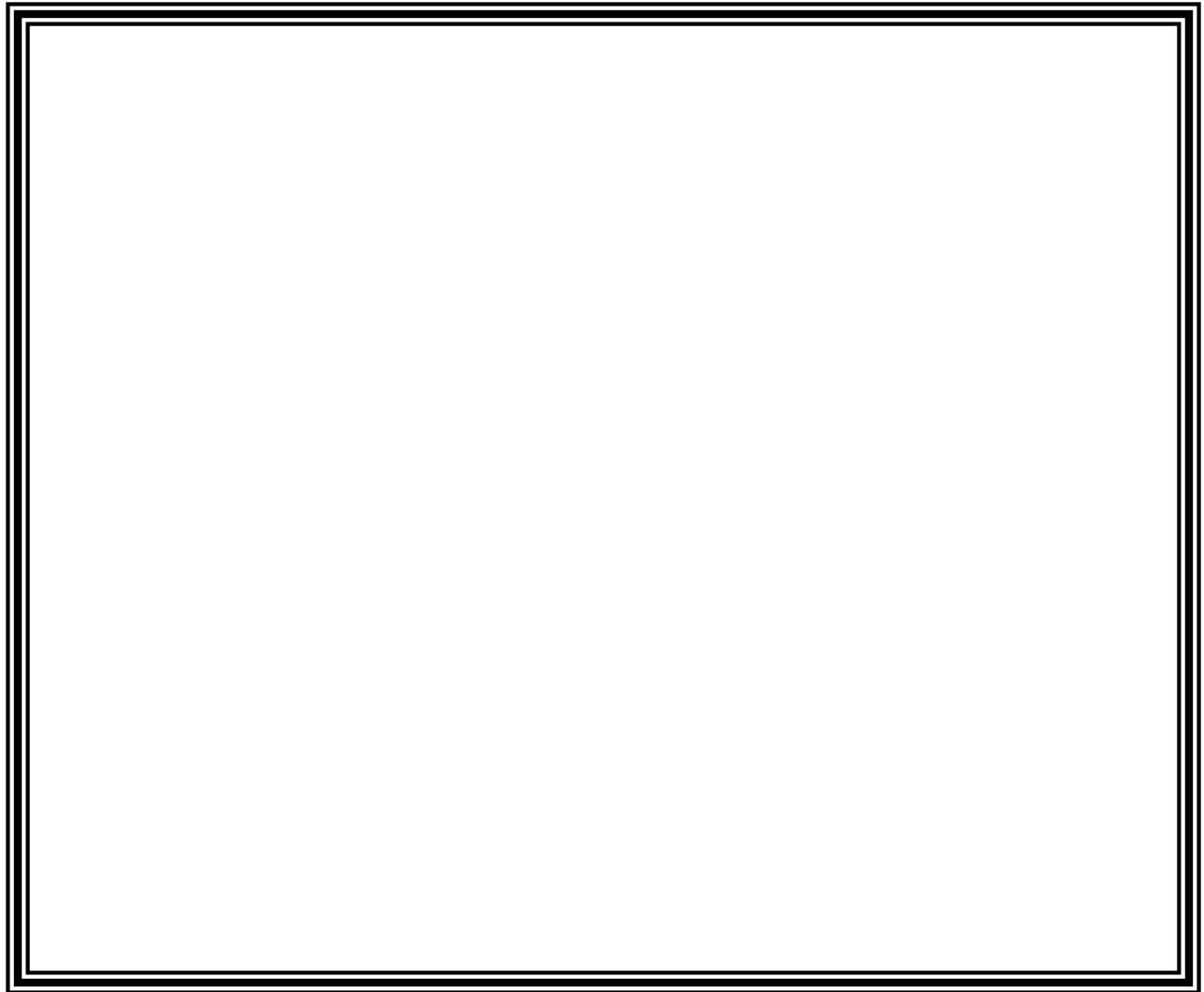


How this Dark Force gives me problems:

My Name: _____

Invent your own "Light Force"

The name of this Light Force:



How this Light Force helps me:

My Name: _____