



Building on Social Skills: Fostering Success

Naomi comes to school without brushing her hair and usually wears drab clothes, which may or may not be clean. She usually stares off in the distance and often doesn't answer when people talk to her. She complains to her therapist that she doesn't have any friends.

Coming in from play, Tyson races to the dinner table, grabs a meatball from the plate and stuffs it in his mouth, sauce drooling from his lips.

Often kids like Naomi and Tyson have not learned how to interact with others, both verbally and non verbally. For a variety of reasons, they haven't learned such skills as being respectful, having good manners or controlling their emotions and behavior. Social skills help us to fit in and succeed. Often, not being able to control emotions gets in the way of using good social skills. By helping kids learn these skills, they can fit in with others and succeed.

Where to begin

As a first step, figure out how your child does with social skills. Observe her behavior and reactions. Ask her, her family, her teachers and case worker about social skills that she is good at and those that need improvement and training.

Remember that kids develop at different rates, despite their chronological ages. Additionally, what is accepted social behavior in one culture or family may be less effective or appropriate in another culture or family.

Questions to ask may include:

- Do your children identify and appropriately express feelings for the situation and circumstance?
- Are they considerate of others feelings and get along with others?
- Do they express and control frustrations and anger appropriately?
- Do they interpret or "read" other people's behavior and unspoken messages?
- Is your child friendly and helpful to others?
- Are there specific social situations (school playground, dinner table, shopping mall) where your child is unable to control his emotions and then has poor judgment?

Ongoing teaching

How can we support and teach kids social skills? On a daily basis foster and adopt parents model, shape and reinforce the social and emotional skills of a child. Ways to further guide and teach the child include:

Help kids identify their feelings. Have your children think about the situation. Ask them:

- "What happened? What was going on?"
- Help your child recognize how she **feels**. "What was going on inside? Name the feeling."
- **Confirm** that feeling. "I understand that you were really frustrated and mad."

Self Management of emotions. Teach kids to control emotions by using the "STORM" method in stressful situations. Suggest that they do the following:

- **Sit:** Find a relaxing place to clear your head.
- **Think:** Come up with as many choices as possible.
- **Organize:** Put your choices in order based on the possible consequences.
- **Rethink:** What did you miss? Try to think of any other actions you could possibly take.
- **Make the best choice:** pick the choice best for you for next time.

Responsible decision making. Help kids figure out situations and how to make good choices. Give them these suggestions:

- **Standing back.** Remove yourself from the stressful situation.
- **Talking it over,** which may defuse the problem.
- **Reading or writing** offers a way to quiet down.
- **Exercising** may provide an outlet for anxiety.
- **Slowing down.** Take deep breaths and feel back in control.
- **Singing or listening to music** helps relax you.

Practice different social situations with your children and how to react. Consider situations such as when they are teased, left out of peer groups, how to compliment others and how to follow directions appropriately.

Social awareness: interpreting nonverbal and verbal emotional messages. Helping kids learn the meaning

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Social Skills, continued from front

of their body language and that of others is important, along with the meaning of eye contact, personal space, body posture, tone, volume of voice, and language. Practice the same social situations with varying body postures, personal space, eye contact, voice and language. Point out and talk about the different meanings that it portrays to others.

Practical Suggestions

Through social skills groups with peers and practicing skills with family and friends, kids can improve how they relate to others. Try these suggestions:

- Practice and show kids their personal space and others' space and how not to invade it.
- Practice making eye contact during conversations.
- Keep tabs on conversations, making sure not to monopolize the discussion.
- Remind your child to think before speaking in order to avoid inappropriate comments.
- Read storybooks about friendships and social situations. Discuss if they were successful interactions and why.
- Role play and practice various social situations (teasing at school, talking to a clerk, calling someone on the phone).
- Read books about (and practice) good hygiene.. Practice good manners within the home (please, thank you, excuse me) and praise your kids when they display them.
- Use visual and physical cues (shoulder tap, special gesture or word) as reminders to use newly learned skills.
- Practice how to meet others, including starting and ending a conversation.
- Discuss facial expressions and body language between actors on a television program.
- Practice use of different body language and the different messages it gives.
- Practice negotiation—how to get what you want appropriately.
- Role play appropriate assertiveness without being overly aggressive.
- Model how to give and receive compliments.
- Practice “out to eat” behavior at the home dinner table, using good table manners and etiquette.

Social skills building take time. Boost kid's confidence and self esteem by teaching them how to be in control

of themselves and make good choices. They will fit in with family, peers and the community through your mentoring of good social skills.



Resources

Sources for this article

Wings for Kids

<http://wingsforkids.org/files/WINGS-Learning-Objectives.pdf>.

National Center for Learning Disabled at:

http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Tips_Building/ and <http://www.ncl.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=320>.

Center for Social and Emotional Education at:

http://www.csee.net/climate/pdf/SEEA/resources/FactSheet_social_emotional_learning.pdf.

Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center life Library Resources

(You can find the following by going to this link wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp and then typing in the title or other keyword in the search box.)

- **How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger** (Children's book) by Elizabeth Verdick
- **The Behavioral Survival Guide for Kids** by Tom McIntrye
- **Learning Disabilities and Social Skills-Last One Picked** by Richard Lavoie (VHS and Book)
- **Your Child's Social and Emotional Development** by Channing Bete Co. (book)
- **Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self Esteem** by SiriNam Khalsa (book)
- **Be Polite and Kind** (Children's Book) by CJ Meiners

Other Recommended Resources

- **How Rude: The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out** by Alex J. Packer
- **Dude, That's Rude! (Get Some Manners)** by Pamela Espeland and Elizabeth Verdick
- **Making Choices And Making Friends: The Social Competencies Assets**, by Pamela Espeland and Elizabeth Verdick
- **Manners For The Real World: Basic Social Skills** by Dan Coulter (DVD)
- **The Kids Good Manners**, Ira Hackner (DVD)