

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 and stuffs it in his mouth, sauce dripping 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. By helping kids learn these skills, they can fit in with others and succeed.

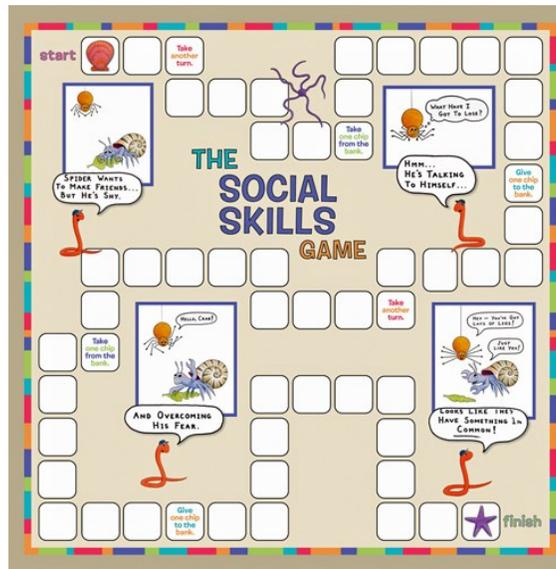
Where to Begin

As a first step, figure out how your children do with social skills. Observe their behaviors. Ask them, their families, their teachers, and their case workers about social skills that they're good at and those that need improvement. Kids will often surprise you with their own insights about where they need help.

Children 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 yourself may include:

- Do your children identify and express feelings in particular circumstances?
- Are they considerate of others' feelings and do they get along with others?
- Do they express 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 or her emotions and then has poor judgment?



Ongoing Teaching

How can we support and teach kids social skills? On a daily basis, foster and adoptive 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."

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- ◆ **Confirm** the feeling. “I understand that you were really frustrated and mad.”

Selfmanagement 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 the next time.

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 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. 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:

- 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 there were successful interactions and why.
- Role play 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 reminds to use newly learned skills.
- Practice how to meet others, including starting and ending a conversation.
- Discuss facial expression and body language between actors on TV.
- 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.

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Building social skills takes time. Boost your child's confidence and self esteem by teaching him how to be in control of himself and make good choices. He will fit in with family, peers, and the community through your mentoring of good social skills.



Coalition Library Resources

How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger
by Elizabeth Verdick (children's book)

The Behavioral Survival Guide for Kids by Tom McIntyre

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.

Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self Esteem by SiriNam Khalsa

Be Polite and Kind by CJ Meiners
(children's book)

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 by Ira Hackner (DVD)

The Social Skills Game
www.childtherapytoys.com



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