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Let’s Get Social: Practical Strategies to Help Teachers & Parents Encourage Social Skills Development

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This workshop was developed as a result of experience and observations. Children are constantly exposed to social situations in the classroom and surrounding environments and need to be able to have the skills necessary to succeed socially, emotionally and mentally. Parents and teachers need more practical strategies to help children both identify social skills and improve their social interactions.
• Teachers will be aware of children’s social development and understand how to help children communicate and interact with their peers better. Children will benefit from the new strategies and be empowered to communicate and interact confidently and appropriately with their friends, teachers and family.
• 1. The learner will be able to identify crucial social skills for early learners.

• 2. The participant will be able to identify when children need extra help in social skills development and when to refer to a specialist.

• 3. The learner will be able to create and use play, art and classroom environment to help children develop sound social skills.
Social skills are skills that facilitate healthy and positive interaction and communication with others.

They are the skills a person uses to communicate and interact with others.
Important Social Skills In Early Childhood

- What social skills do you think are important in this age group?
- Which skills do you see children having the most difficulty with?
Important Social Skills In Early Childhood

- Making and keeping friends
- Listening
- Following directions
- Joining in with peers
- Communicating
- Compromising
- Impulse control
- Starting a conversation
- Staying on-topic

- Good sportsmanship
- Making a good first impression
- Going with the flow
- Managing anxiety
- Expressing emotions appropriately
- Self confidence
Children's social skills are important for early school success and later adjustment.

Children without adequate social skills are at risk for difficulties including peer rejection, behavior problems, and poor academic achievement.

Recent research shows disturbing rates of expulsion in preschool and kindergarten, which has fueled efforts to promote these skills (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).

Research has found that interpersonal skills are important for peer acceptance and social adjustment throughout childhood and adolescence (Masten et al., 2005).
Social Skills At School

- Schools & Teachers play a huge role in a child’s overall development.
- There are techniques schools and teachers can implement to help ensure and cultivate social success among children.
• How can teachers and preschools help cultivate social skills in the classroom?

• What things can they implement to help children develop sound social skills?
Arrange the Environment to Promote Positive Social Skills

- Learning areas can be large enough to give children the space they need to play together, but small enough to provide an intimate setting for social interaction.

- * in the housekeeping center, low dividers enable adults to supervise children as they play and learn. They also set clear boundaries to provide sufficient space for several children to play with the sink, appliances, and table.
Toys that promote cooperative play as well as are always available in a classroom designed to facilitate social skill development.

* Cooperative play include pretend cars and trucks, blocks, imaginary food and cooking props, and puppets. Select toys and activities that promote cooperation, helpfulness, and generosity, rather than those that are competitive (Honig & Wittmer, 1996).
Play provides a means and opportunity for children to learn and improve their social skills (Barbakoff & Yo, 2002). For children who are socially isolated, play offers important occasions for social interaction and skill development.

Free play is an effective, spontaneous way for children to apply social skills that have been taught directly.

Enhance Social Functioning Through Play
Stages Of Social Play
Stage 1: Solitary Play

This is the first stage of play. Babies and toddlers (birth to around two) are in this stage. They love to be with family members and also enjoy time by themselves.

They are very busy exploring and discovering their new world.

These very young children tend to play alone regardless of whether other children are in the same room.
The second stage of play begins around the age of two.

Children play next to each other simply because they are in the same area but they are engaged in their own activities.

They play side-by-side, watch and listen to each other.

At this age they are interested in the same toys and both see the toys as belonging to them.
Stage 3: Associative Play

- At this stage most children are still playing independently but often do the same thing as other children.
- For example, if one child puts on a dress-up outfit, another child will put one on also.
- The children will begin to interact through talking, borrowing and taking turns with toys, but each child acts alone.
Stage 4: Cooperative Play

- Associated with the later preschool years, (during the 4th and 5th years), when children have acquired the skills to interact together for the purpose of play.
- Speaking and listening skills are more developed so children can communicate with each other.
- Children can share ideas and tell each other what to do. Communication about play is the critical skill of cooperative play.
Teachers are urged to show children how to share and negotiate before problem behavior occurs, because it is nearly impossible to teach children social skills when they are arguing or upset.

Typical classroom opportunities to teach social skills include sharing in the work of cleaning up, thanking a classroom visitor for bringing in something to share, or inviting a newcomer to the classroom to join in play. When teaching young children appropriate social behaviors, everyday events often become teachable moments.

Build on Teachable Moments
When a child demonstrates a problem behavior, view it as an opportunity to facilitate social growth.

When Madison grabs a new doll from Carly and Carly cries, knowledgeable teachers recognize that these children are ready to learn negotiation, communication, and conflict solution skills.

Such events also provide opportunities for children to learn about the feelings of others, a foundational support for social growth.

**Use Conflict**
Children are still learning to recognize and understand the feelings of others, so they can benefit from specific guidance to learn to identify the emotions of other children and adults. With these children, the teacher can:

- Name feelings as other children demonstrate them.
- Suggest why they may feel that way; then later.
- Describe feelings observed in additional children.
- Ask the children who are having difficulty why they think their peers may feel as they do.
- When teachers use classroom conflict as an opportunity to promote social growth rather than to punish children, everyone involved benefits (Stone, 1993).
My Feelings

* Images of children engaged in activities to understand and express emotions.
Social Skills At Home
Do parents play a role in a child’s social skills development?

What types of activities do you think parents can/should implement at home?
Parents are fundamental contributors to their child’s success. As many educators acknowledge, parents are a child’s first teachers. A home environment that promotes academic and social success should not be undervalued.

Many parents work to improve a child’s academic success by making sure the child completes all homework, studies for tests, and develops creative projects.

But parents also have opportunities to help improve a child’s social success. Below are suggestions for teaching social skills that parents can practice with their children at home.
5 Simple Steps To Begin At Home

1. Discuss the Need for Social Skills
2. Work on One Social Skill at a Time
3. Talk About the Social Skill
4. Practice the Social Skill
5. Pause, Reflect, and Review
Discuss the Need for Social Skills

- Children need to understand that social skills are important.
- Share with your child that adults use social skills in their workplaces and community.
- Talk about/point out experiences that you or your child may have had or observed when social skills were necessary.
- Brainstorm and come up with a list of social skills that you and your child can work on throughout the year.
Common Social Skills For Preschoolers

- Taking turns
- Helping others
- Sharing materials
- Asking for help
- Using quiet voices
- Participating
- Staying on task
- Saying kind things
- Using people’s names

- Good sportsmanship
- Sharing ideas
- Organizing materials
- Following directions
- Resolving conflicts
- Active listening
- Accepting differences
- Communicating clearly
- Waiting patiently
• When working with your child on social skills, focus on just one skill at a time.
• You may want to select one skill to focus on each week.
• Create a chart to list the skill for that week and record how the child is doing.
• Use a simple system such as happy face, neutral face, and sad face to show progress.
Help your child identify what appropriate behavior looks and sounds like.

For example, praising looks like a thumbs up, clapping, or smiling. Praising sounds like, “Terrific!” “I knew you could do it!” “You’re so smart!” or “Way to go!”

Make a list with your child of “looks like” and “sounds like” behaviors and post it next to your chart for recording the target behavior and the progress your child makes in demonstrating appropriate behavior.
• After discussing what some social skills look and sound like, provide an immediate opportunity for your child to practice the appropriate social skill behavior (looks like and sounds like).
• Act out a scenario with your child in which he/she must use appropriate behaviors to respond in a social situation.
At the end of each day, take the time to pause, reflect, and review your child’s use of social skills that day.

You may want to encourage your child to keep a journal to write down thoughts about the day.

If your child is not yet writing, you can keep a journal together, in which you write the entries.

Help your child celebrate his/her social skills successes—if you make it a big deal, your child will, too.
Parents can engage their children in these types of activities anytime during the day. Think about using time in the car or at the dinner table to discuss social skills.

As parents, emphasizing the necessity of social skills is one of the most important things you can do to help your child succeed in school—but more importantly, in life.
Hands On Social Skills
• Use visual aids. Tape googly eyes on your forehead when practicing with your child.
• This will remind him to look at yours and other peoples’ eyes.
• It reinforces what eye contact is.
• Experiment with other aids to gently guide your child to look at your eyes. Try colored stickers placed between your eyebrows.
• Invite your child to move around (dancing, hopping, skipping, running) while the music is playing and to freeze into a statue when the music stops.

• Tell him to remain like a statue until the music starts again.

• Randomly stop and start the music by pressing and releasing the pause button on your CD player.

• Surprise your child by varying the amount of time you play and pause the music.

• You can also give your child a streamer, scarf, or hoop to manipulate as the music is playing!
• Play any game that has a competitive nature.
• “Sorry” is an excellent board game to teach this skill.
• As you play talk and demonstrate good vs bad sportsmanship
• Using words and communicating is a huge skill learned in the early years.
• Model and coach children in situations where it may be hard for them to communicate!
• Giving details in a conversation is a huge skill learned in childhood.
• Headbandz is an excellent game for this.
• In order for children to be successful at this game they have to give as many details to describe their friends picture card!

Conversation Skills/Giving Detail
• Teach feeling words
• Make feeling puppets depicting the facial expression for each emotion covered
• Kids get anxious too!
• Have the child imagine their favorite baked good, have them imagine what it would smell like
• Pretend to put mittens on and grab the goods out of the oven
• Take a deep breathe in through nose to smell the yummy goodness
• Blow out your mouth to cool it down!
• Repeat 3 times then pretend to bite a piece!
• To begin, first player picks a card (feeling/character), and starts the narrative.

• He can take the story into any direction he likes, but he must incorporate the emotion depicted on the card.

• After a minute or two, the next player picks a card and continues the narrative.

• Players continue to take turns until they have used all the required story elements and reached a satisfying conclusion.
“Kerplunk” is an excellent game for impulse control. Children have to control the want to pull out all the straws at once so that they can save as many marbles as possible!
- Slap jack is an excellent game for this skill.
- In order for children to be successful at this game they have to visually concentrate and wait for a jack to appear!

*Concentration/ “Tune in”*
• It is important to keep children motivated! If you are working on a particular skill.
• Each time the child demonstrates the skill they earn a point once an agreed upon total is reached reward the child with a previously agreed upon reward i.e. party, stickers, favorite meal, a treat.
• Remember Play is a child’s language so make social skills fun and get creative!

Have Fun! Be Creative
Social Skills: What To Look For At Different Ages
• 2- to 3-year-olds: able to seek attention from others, initiate social contact with others both verbally (saying "Hi" and "Bye") and physically, look at a person who's talking, have the ability to take turns talking, and laugh at silly objects and events.

• 3- to 4-year-olds: are able to take turns when playing games, treat a doll or stuffed animal as though it's alive, and initiate verbal communication with actual words.
• 4- to 5-year-olds: are able to show more cooperation with children, use direct requests (like "Stop"), are more prone to tattling, and pretend to be Mom or Dad in fantasy play.

• 5- to 6-year-olds: are able to please their friends, say "I'm sorry," "Please," and "Thank you," understand bad words and potty language, are more strategic in bargaining, play competitive games, and understand fair play and good sportsmanship.
6- to 7-year-olds: are able to empathize with others (like crying at sad things), are prone to sharing, use posture and gestures, wait for turns and are better losers and less likely to place blame, joke more and listen to others tell their points of view, and maintain and shift/end topics appropriately. At this age, however, they still can't understand the clear difference between right and wrong, and may not take direction well.
Signs A Child Needs Extra Help
Trouble with social skills may not be that obvious in early childhood, depending on the cause. Some kids don’t show signs until grade school. That’s when socializing becomes more complex.

You might start noticing that your child doesn’t seem to get it when others look or sound annoyed. Or maybe he responds inappropriately in conversations or has trouble sharing.
What Can Cause Trouble With Social Skills
• This brain-based condition makes it hard for kids to understand communication that isn’t spoken. Kids with NVLD tend to miss social cues. Those are the messages people send through body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. For instance, kids with NVLD might not understand that a classmate who is crossing her arms and looking away doesn’t want to talk.
Many kids with NVLD don’t get abstract concepts. They may have trouble reading between the lines. If someone says, “I’m so mad I could spit,” they may take it literally. NVLD often affects self-control skills like taking turns, letting others speak and keeping emotions in check. It can also cause problems with coordination and balance, along with math skills. Here are some of the main symptoms of NVLD that involve social skills.
Symptoms of NVLD that involve social skills:

- Talks too much
- Doesn’t understand facial expressions
- Withdraws from conversations with peers
- Prefers talking to adults rather than other kids
Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- The symptoms of ADHD can make it hard for kids to socialize.
- Kids with ADHD tend to have trouble with focus and impulse control. They may also be overactive or withdrawn.
Behaviors of ADHD that affect social skills:

- Has trouble taking turns
- Interrupts or blurts out answers
- Wants things immediately
- Doesn’t give others the chance to speak
- Is a poor listener and loses the point of what’s being said
- Gives up easily on tasks, even in group activities
- Constantly moves around and fidgets
Social communication difficulty (SCD)

- Kids with SCD have issues with spoken language.
- Unlike those with NVLD or ADHD, they often don’t want to talk to people.
How SCD Affect Social Skills:

- Has little interest in social interactions
- Goes off-topic or monopolizes conversations
- Doesn’t adapt language to different situations or people
- Doesn’t give background information when speaking to an unfamiliar person
- Doesn’t know how to properly greet people, request information or gain attention
- Is overly literal and doesn’t understand riddles and sarcasm
- Has trouble understanding nonverbal communication
- Has difficulty understanding things that aren't spelled out
Sometimes children just need extra help and practice.

Social Skills help does NOT mean your child has a disorder or diagnoses.

Please consult your pediatrician/psychologist for formal testing.

Sometimes Kids Just Need Extra Practice!
Kaleidoscope Kids has services for the entire family!

- Social Skills Groups
- Parent Coaching
- Child & Family Therapy
- Co-parenting Help
- Sibling Rivalry Help
- Divorce Support
- Yoga & Meditation
  - Workshops
  - Playshops
- Support Groups.
• Social skills enrichment can be for anyone, diagnosed or not.

• Social skills groups have begun to be a mainstream enrichment program rather than an intensive type of therapy.

• In this age group it is common for children to struggle with certain social skills and with some coaching and practice we can help!

Who Benefits From a Social Skills Group?
• Children participate in fun and interactive games, activities, team challenges, crafts, improve, conversations, discussions and even yoga!

• We try to create as much of a natural environment as possible to ensure kids get in the moment feedback and practice.
- During our groups, we coach our kids on skills in a safe and supportive environment where we can give helpful feedback.

- During our groups our kids have some of the most positive social experiences that they have had in a long time.

- These positive experiences help build self-confidence and prove that they can be socially successful.

- This will make them more likely to use these skills outside of the group.

- Social skills enrichment gives kids a toolbox of skills, they gain confidence and a range of real life experiences to draw from. This helps ensure our kids reach their social success!
• Kaleidoscope Kids Social Skills Groups meet once a week after school for an hour and the groups run for the entire school year.

• We incorporate art, games, activities, team challenges, yoga and discussions to develop vital social skills and create positive connections with others in a fun, active and safe environment.

• There are typically 3-6 children in a group. Groups are created based on age and area of improvement. We work with children ages 3 to 13.
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