

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



Social Skills

Social Skills are a skill for life.

Research indicates a strong relationship between positive friendships and success in adolescence and adulthood.

Why are Social Skills Important?

Social Skills enable children to get along with others. They enable children to:

- Make friends
- Increase their resilience through gaining self-esteem and confidence
- Resolve conflicts
- Avoid rejection
- Perform better at school
- Become better adjusted adults

Children who lack social skills often show similar patterns of behaviour. They may:

- Be withdrawn and hesitant to interact with other children
- Be socially aloof and unaware of other children
- Want to interact with other children but not aware how to
- Rarely respond when other children approach
- Grab toys from other children, push or hit other children to get what they want

Simply placing children who lack social skills in an early childhood setting does not automatically result in a child increasing their ability to socially interact with others or achieve acceptance by other children.

What skills are required for children to interact socially with other children?

The skills that children need to interact socially with other children include:

- Sharing and taking turns
- Waiting
- Following Directions

- Asking for help
- Joining in with others
- Greeting others
- Making appropriate requests
- Gaining attention in a positive way
- Looking at the person you are speaking to
- Maintaining appropriate personal space
- Recognising and labelling feelings and emotions in self and others
- Managing emotions
- Negotiating

Some children acquire these skills naturally, others need to be taught

Strategies to help your child develop social skills

- Comment on social responses during everyday activities. “I feel happy when you share your toys” or “Look at Sam’s face, he feels sad when you take his toy away”
- Make time to play simple games with your child e.g. hide and seek, board games (age appropriate). Keeping in mind to focus on only one or two skills at a time
- Using visual prompts to support the learning of new skills e.g. when practicing turn taking, have an object to pass around to identify the person having the turn. You can use specific language - when you pass the object to the next person say “Daddy’s turn finished, now its Katie’s turn.”
- A visual timer e.g. an egg timer, a visual timer App or a kitchen timer may be helpful for a child who has difficulty moving from one activity to another, and helps to teach sharing and turn taking skills.
- Play Dates – Invite a friend to play to practice social skills – observe from a distance and support the interactions where necessary. This will help you learn more about the particular skill your child is having difficulty with – you can then create more opportunities for practice.
- Join social groups or local activities e.g. story time at the library or local playgroups. Prepare your child before attending – show pictures of the building or visit prior to the first session.
- Create a Social Story™ - see Social Story™ sheet or visit the website <http://thegraycenter.org> There are a number of free social stories available on the internet.
- Enrol your child in a social Skills Group
- Observe other children at play and talk about what they are doing
- Read stories about friends and talk about what the characters were doing. “Joe was being a good friend when he gave Sam one of his cars to play with.

References:

Challenging behaviour in your Children – Understanding, preventing and responding effectively – Kaiser and Rasminsky, Pearson Education 2007

Prevent Teach Reinforce for Young children. The Early childhood Model of Individualised Positive Behaviour Support – Dunlap, Wilson, Strain & Lee, Brookes Publishing Co. 2013

Young Children’s Behaviour – Practical approaches for Caregivers and Teachers – Louise Porter, Elsevier Australia 2008