



Helpful Tips For Parents: Social Skills

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Adapted from:
<http://www.meddybemps.com/7.27.html>
http://www.idonline.org/article/Teaching_Social_Skills_to_Kids_Who_Don't_Yet_Have_Them
<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/SocialSkills.html>
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/socialskills_fs.aspx
<http://www.autism.org.uk/>

“Social skills” generally means any of the following:

Conversational skills (greetings, joining a conversation, verbal turn-taking, listening skills, talking about a particular topic, awareness of personal space, ending a conversation, etc.)

Play skills (observational skills, joining play, turn-taking, sharing, compromising, conflict resolution, coping with 'no', coping with losing, reciprocal play, ending play, etc.)

Understanding emotions (reading facial expressions, reading body language, voice quality, awareness of own body language, having a large emotional vocabulary e.g. not just happy/sad, anger management and self-regulation skills)

Dealing with conflict (anger management and self-regulation skills, communication skills such as the ability to ask for help, ability to walk away from a stressful situation, being assertive but not aggressive, dealing with bullying, etc.)

Friendship skills (like knowing what a friend is, and being able to choose appropriate friends, develop the ability to share a friend, deal with peer pressure, etc.).

How to practice social skills:

- Try to link a skill you are teaching to a real tangible situation that your child has experienced. Refer to examples, use people's names, and use detailed descriptions. Help your child practice the skill they are working on in as many environments and with as many different people as they can.
- Cartoons are a great resource when it comes to teaching facial expressions because they are very over exaggerated. Watch an episode of a cartoon together and pause at appropriate spots and talk through what happened. Use a mirror to imitate the copy facial expressions. See if your child can predict what will happen next.
- Use a camera to take photos of you and your child or other people making a certain facial expression to see the similarities in how their faces work. This will help your child generalize the skill of reading facial expressions to many people.

- Use old magazines and cut out pictures of people whose body language is 'negative' and 'positive' and talk through what this means. Get your child to copy the body language, name a feeling that matches it and put the cards in positive and negative piles.
- Use a video camera or digital camera to record your child. This allows them to see how they look (and communicate with) to other people. They may be very unaware of how they appear to others.
- Using a visual tool such as a drawing of a thermometer can be a really good way to teach children the different intensities of emotion. It can then be placed in a prominent part of the house (the fridge, by the front door, etc.) with photos of everyone in the family next to it. Make it a part of the family's routine that everyone rates themselves at different times of the day and talk it through at different times of the day - after getting up, when the children come home from school, after dinner, etc. They will then see that everyone may be feeling different things at different times and that not everyone feels as they do.
- Using a well-known character can be a good idea if a child is really interested in a particular topic. For example, young children may benefit from learning about appropriate energy levels using Winnie the Pooh, Tigger and Eeyore. One character is obviously very calm, level headed and friendly. Another is very bouncy, loud and boisterous. And the last is very tired, lethargic and has very low-self esteem. Referring to a child's behavior as "you are being a bit like Tigger, you need to calm down a little so your brother can understand you" may help them grasp how they might appear to others at times. For older children, try using characters from their favorite movie, television show, video game, book, etc.

It is important to reward your child when they attempt to understand and communicate. By doing this you can increase the likelihood that they will try and do it again. By using simple descriptive praise that comment on what they have achieved, they can make a connection between their own actions and your specific words.