

20 ways to help your Child with Social Skills

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Why are social skills important?

- Most people lose their jobs not for what they know or don't know but how they get along with others (96%)
- Children without social skills feel left out, disconnected, isolated, and lonely.
- It is extremely frustrating for children when they don't know what to say or how to act in certain social situations. This increases anxiety levels and may lead to undesirable behaviors.
- Kids are with kids all day long

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What the stats say...

- Research has found that children with poor peer relationships are more likely to develop serious problems
 - Low academic performance
 - Depression
 - Failed relationships
 - Poor parenting skills
 - Troubled careers
 - Alcohol/drug abuse
 - Anxiety
 - Low self esteem
 - At-risk behaviors (suicide, premature sex, etc)
 - Emotional well being
 - Health

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The good news...

- Social skills can be taught to children with or without diagnosed disabilities
- Children respond well to training
- Progress is seen often in a small group setting first
- Changes will happen...just not overnight

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Strategy #1

- Know what social skills are...they are more complex than you think


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What are social skills/pragmatics?

- Pragmatics is the area of language function that embraces the use of language in social context (knowing what to say, how to say it, when to say it, and how to be with other people) Bowen, 2001

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What are social skills?

- Nonverbal Communication
 - Eye contact
 - Use and understand facial expressions
 - Understand and respond to emotions
 - Recognize nonverbal cues/gestures
 - Personal Space
 - Refrain from inappropriate noises

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•Expressive Skills

- Speak clearly
- Tone/volume/Intonation (Ex. Too much/too little)
- Perspective Taking (put yourself in someone else's shoes)
- Awareness of others (interest, topics, humor)
- Can let go of an argument
- Understands one's own internal state
- Use gestures to enhance expressive skills

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•Conversational Skills

- Topic maintenance
- Starting conversations
- Continuation of conversation
- Appropriate topics
- Changes topic appropriately
- Audience (peers, adults)

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•Turn Taking

- In conversation/games
- Attending to the speaker
- Appropriate ways to interrupt
- Waits to be called on
- Asks for help or clarification
- Flexibility

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•Standards for speech

- Introductions
- Pleasantries
- Approachability

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•Peer Skills

- Establish & maintain friendships
- Refrains from teasing
- Includes others
- Offers/accepts criticism
- Offers/accepts compliments
- Understands slang
- Empathy
- Listening Skills
- Compromise
- Conflict Management
- Can let others win



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•Other

- Understands rules
- Emotional self regulation
- Remorse
- Assertiveness
- Respects hierarchy
- Cares what others think

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Strategy #2

- Understand/Learn about typical child development
 - See handout
 - For example: a typical seven year old can be moody and sensitive to what others say and do
 - Yardsticks and Lousie Bates Ames

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#3 :Structured Playdates

Have several activities in mind
Ask your child what the other child likes
Scripted language-coming soon!

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#4 :Social Stories

- Use pictures of expected behaviors
- Can be developed on power point
- Look for books
- Carol Grey, school staff, can be developed by parent



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5: Modeling

- Adult or child
- Let your child hear your thinking about social skills
 - I.e. My friend is having a rough day. Let me see how I can help
 - My friend is having a birthday. They like Basketball. I will get them a basketball

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#6:Scripting & Fading

- Preplan some verbage with your child before the playdate
- Ex. When we meet Billy, please say Hello it is nice to meet you and hold out your hand
- Ex. Billy likes football. Ask him about his favorite team. Ask him if he would like to play football in the yard.
- Gradually encourage your child to come up with his own ideas with less and less prompting (aka fading)

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#7: Role play

- Before you call Bobby, let's practice I'll be Bobby and you play you

Follow up with coaching

I like how you....

How about.....

This is important for carryover

- Role playing is important to practice in a comfortable environment. This reduces anxiety and increases familiarity with social skills.



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8: Treat All Underlying Conditions

- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Other children will not be as patient and accepting.



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#9: Team Sports & Activities on your child's level

- Soccer/basketball/t-ball
- Boy scouts/girl scouts
- Drama club
- Science club/chess club
- Summer camp
 - The more children your child interacts with who have common interests the more likely they are to have friends
 - Team sports teach group work, cooperation, responsibility, conflict resolution, ability to work with different people, etc



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#10: Board Games

- Let nature take its course (sometimes your child will win, other times they won't—learn how to handle both gracefully) - This is a life skill
- Model sportsmanship, turn taking, etc



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#11: Family Dinner

- Research supports those who sit down to eat as a family are less likely to engage in risky behaviors
- Practice conversation skills, manners,
 - Turn taking, etc.
 - General conversation starters
 - This is a very naturalistic way of teaching



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#12: Non-verbals are as important as verbal communication

- Non-verbals can be very difficult for children to learn and recognize
- Include eye contact, tone, body posture, gestures, objectics of style, paralanguage (speed, intensity of speech), personal space, facial expressions
- The more children struggle socially...the more they struggle with non-verbal communication



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#13: Use visuals

- Create topic cards with pictures
- Create a successful picture for the child on how to use a social skill
- Helps the child remember the skill
 - Especially for children with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders

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#14: Teach Problem Solving

- Identify the problem
- Brainstorm solutions without judgement
- Pick one or more
- Follow up to determine whether to use next time

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#15: Feelings recognition

- Helps child understand how what they are saying or doing affects others
- Teach your child to read others faces
 - Feelings bingo
 - Picture cards

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#16: Scene Sizeups

- What do you think is happening in this picture/playground/TV show?
- What clues are you using?
- How do you think the characters feel? Why might they feel that way?
- Analyze all aspects of the picture
 - Begin with choices
 - Move to child generated ideas

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#17: Accepting Differences

- Teach children about differences and what they may entail.
- Talk to children about what they can say or do when they are around children that are different (looks, abilities, emotions etc...) then themselves.

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#18: Teach specific skills

- Joining In
- Starting conversation
- Maintaining conversation
- Listening skills
- These need to be taught directly. We use social stories, biblio-counseling, role plays, visuals, coaching, listening games, etc. They require a great deal of practice.

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#19: Social Etiquette

- Manners
- Personal space
- Interrupting politely
- Sharing...specifically, how to share
- Don't expect your child to automatically know how to share. This skill often needs to be taught.



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#20: Self advocacy

- When to walk away
- How to ask for what you need
- Don't run to the rescue (problem solve, model, role play, follow up)
- INDEPENDENCE!!!!



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#21: Charades

- This skill can be applied to all verbal and non-verbal skills
- Your child needs to be both the actor and the interpreter to work on expressive and receptive verbal and non-verbal skills.



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#22: Watch TV without sound

- This helps the child to simply focus on non-verbals
- Teach one non-verbal at a time (ex. Have the child watch the character's face and describe how the character may be feeling and how they know and why they may be feeling that way)



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