What Parents Should Know...

About the Importance of Social Competence

Often, a child will not learn social skills just from being given an opportunity to interact with peers alone. Like any other skill (academic or athletic), they need to be taught what to do and when to do it!

Jannette Reg & Robert Putnam The May Institute

Saying “please” and “thank you,” taking turns, recognizing – and apologizing – when one has physically or emotionally hurt another, and managing anger or frustration, are examples of positive social behaviors that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social interactions with others, develop friendships and social support networks, and cope effectively with social environments.

Many children can learn and mimic social behaviors by observing their environment. Guidance from parents and other adults, as well as the natural consequences, reinforce these expected social behaviors. But some children struggle with reading non-verbal cues, responding in socially acceptable ways, and successfully engaging in social interactions with others.

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Children Learn Social Skills Just Like Any Other Skill...Through Informal & Formal Teaching & Practice

Families can utilize a wide array of strategies (actions) to help their child develop and practice social skills – at home, in the community and at school. For some students, additional efforts will be required to support them in generalizing (applying) skills from one setting to another. For students receiving special education services, social skills development may be an appropriate goal in the IEP.

Teachable Moment/Incidental Teaching — uses naturally occurring and “arranged” teaching moments at home and away.

Playdates — playdates with one other child allows a child to prepare for and practice conversational skills (take turns talking, ask about another’s interests), and skills such as taking turns when playing a game, playing games both agree on — or alternating activities that each prefers.

Children’s Literature/Videos/Movies — many options exist for children and youth of all ages to learn social skills through the actions of others. Topics are wide ranging, from making friends, to dealing with bullies, to peer pressure and more.

Games — playing a game generally requires taking turns, and both losers and winners can practice sportsmanship.

Role Playing — creates opportunities for your child to role play situations that have occurred or are likely to occur.

Peer Tutoring/Mentoring — positive peer role models can often teach and encourage children/youth to develop skills in non-threatening, fun, engaging, and effective ways.

Social Skills Autopsies — allow for a child to improve their ability to assess a situation, choose an appropriate response, and evaluate the effectiveness of the response. http://www.ldonline.org/article/14910/ by Rick LaVoie.

Play Groups — may be structured or free time groups and offer children the opportunity to practice skills with small groups of peers.

Social Stories — provide a mental rehearsal for a child to prepare for and better cope with new or challenging situations.

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Why Social Competence Matters

The benefits to children and youth who are able to develop social competence (a set of skills that can be generalized to a multitude of social situations) are far-reaching and long-term:

- Increased inclusion (participation) in general education and community settings
- Increased acceptance by peers
- Development of positive self-concept
- Better coping and attention skills
- Increased academic achievement
- Successful transition into post-high school and work settings
- Successful employment, including better job opportunities
- Overall improved interactions with others

Social Interactions are Complex:

Social skills require communication, problem-solving, decision-making, self-management, and peer relations abilities that allow one to imitate and maintain social skills with others. (Thomas McIntyre, 2003) And, as if this were not challenging enough, social conventions present anything but a straightforward “one size fits all” approach.
Resources

South Dakota Statewide Family Engagement Center SDFEC
https://sdsfec.org/collegecareer/whatissel/

South Dakota Parent Connection
800-640-4553
www.sdparent.org

Social Skills and academic success
www.thoughtco.com/teaching-social-skills-3110705

ADDidute Magazine
www.additudemag.com
(search social skills)

Adoption

Dr. Mac’s Behavior Management Site
www.behavioradvisor.com

LD Online
www.ldonline.org/indepth/behavior

Aperture Education
www.apertureed.com/parent-portal/free-home-resources

This communication was developed under grants from the U.S. Department of Education Project Grant H328M140021; Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Grant H84MC07994, Family to Family Health Information Center, $96,700 and approximately 5% financed with non-governmental resources. The contents should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by US Department of Education, HRSA, HHS or the Federal Government.