



Helping your child develop Social Skills

A practical guide for parents

We understand that not only are parents concerned about their child's academic education but you are also anxious about their social skills and how they relate to others.

Helping children build social skills and relationships can have a lasting influence on their overall success in life. Strong friendships are important for

1. Making friends with extra-curricular activities

Children should attend clubs in and out of school. Your child can discover strengths and gifts that they did not know they had and clubs will help develop those skills and talents. It will also develop social skills in an enjoyable and supervised setting. Other children will get to see your child in a successful role outside of the classroom yet still in a controlled environment.

2. Building friendships in easy-to manage steps

Social skills do not always come easily to children and building them should happen in the same way we would build a wall - one brick at a time. Assemble your social skills wall brick by brick. Make sure your foundations are in place.

Just being around others may intimidate your child and asking them to jump in and start 'making friends' would be like asking them to do a bungee jump without a rope! Start small. Ask your child to smile at people. Smiling at older people is generally easier as they will usually be met with a positive



response. After they get used to smiling at people and trying to make eye-contact (without staring as this can be very unnerving) then move on to saying 'Hello' and so on. This is often enough to reduce the pressure and start a conversation. This is the foundation for building friendships.

3. Making friends takes practice

You are the best person to practise making friends with. Your child feels comfortable with you, they don't mind talking to you or making mistakes in front of you so use this to your advantage. Rehearse social situations ahead of time. Role-play meeting a new person. Take turns playing each role.

After they have practised with you get them to try this with other family members and family friends, people that you know will encourage and your child will feel less anxious talking to.

4. Asking questions to make friends

Teach your child how to ask questions to get the other person to talk about themselves. Suggest topics of shared interests that will help them get to know people better. Focusing on others will take the attention from them and hopefully make them feel less self-conscious.

Questions can be tricky as you need to ensure your child knows there is a difference in asking appropriate questions and being nosy or interrogating the other person. Suggest appropriate and inappropriate questions so they know what to say and what not to say.



5. Games and sportsmanship can teach making friends in advance

Play games and activities with your child that are popular in school. This way they can learn the rules and learn how to win and lose appropriately. As well as being a good way to practise skills and develop co-ordination it will make your child feel more confident when they are faced with these activities and enjoy them more as they play with skill and knowledge. This reduced anxiety of the activity will mean they can make friends more naturally.

6. Schedule time and make making friends a priority

Just as you would ensure your child put in the necessary work for their academic studies put the same effort into learning social skills. Actively encourage friendships without being overbearing. Invest in the relationships, have friends come around to your house, where your child will feel more comfortable and you will have some control. Do not stay around the whole time as this will be off-putting for the friends and your child needs to learn to be independent. Friends made in school can last a lifetime. Friends from the same class can provide important social and emotional support. And not to mention, occasional homework help when a worksheet or assignment fails to make it from school to your house!

9. Say sorry

Teach your child how to apologise and how to accept an apology. Sorry is indeed the hardest word to say but often it helps. In a difficult situation it can be the largest step on the journey to reconciliation and reparation of relationships. Tell your child if they are not sure what they have done to upset someone, ask.

10. Is it true, is it kind, is it necessary?

Tell your child sometimes it is fine to not say the first thing that comes into their head, or answer a question too directly if it will make someone upset or unhappy (e.g. saying someone looks fat in their new dress - even if they do).

Stop and think: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? If the answer is 'no' then don't say it. Try to avoid the question.

E.g. Do you like my new dress? Don't say: 'It is ugly!'

Instead say, 'It has really bright colours!'

Try thinking of situations where this might be the case and act them out.

11. Manners matter

Manners cost nothing and mean everything.



Remind your child saying please and thank you is appropriate in *all* situations. This shows other people that you are a polite person.



12. Start talking

Starting a conversation can be difficult. With your child, write a list of conversation starters that would be helpful and keep them in a jar in the house. E.g.

- 'Hello. How are you?'
- 'It's nice to see you.'
- 'Did you enjoy the film/play/game?'

Suggest topics for conversation too:

- The weather
- TV programmes
- Sport

Every so often practise using these in role plays and add to the jar as you think of them.



13. Stop talking

Ending a conversation can be difficult too.

Talk to your child about the signals to look for when someone wants to end a conversation. These may include:

- Not asking questions back
- Looking around the room
- Yawning
- Saying they have something else to do

Tell your child not to get upset if a person does this.

Sometimes it is better to end a conversation before you run out of things to say.

If they want to end the conversation, say something like, 'Well I'd better be going now,' before saying 'Goodbye' as this is more polite than just end saying 'Goodbye' and walking off.

Again, together, think of other ways to end the conversation.

14. All by myself

Even if your child does not want to socialise with other people and prefers to be on their own, it is good idea to develop social skills because they need to know how to act appropriately in social situations that cannot be avoided e.g. school, work, a family party.

Teaching your child to develop social skills (and making friends) is like eating an elephant - you need to do it one bite at a time.

Do not take on too many things at once. Start small or the task will seem overwhelming. You may feel you are only taking baby steps but at least you are moving the right direction. The fact that you care enough to look for help and advice shows that you are probably already doing a lot to help your child, just keep up the good work! Just remember to praise yourself as well as your child for all your successes - no matter how small a bite you feel you have taken.

Please feel free to contact us at the school if you have any more questions.

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