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Getting Along

Teaching Social Skills

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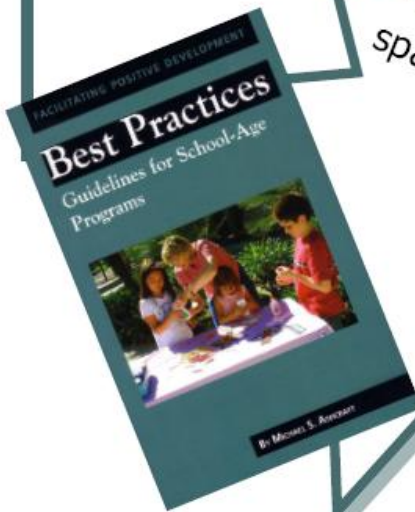
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What Are Social Skills?

“He is a friend” is a powerful statement. – Jimmy Carter

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get them interested in you. – Dale Carnegie

Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods. – Aristotle, 384 – 322 BC

Social skills are the skill humans use to interact and communicate to themselves and with others. They are the skills we need to live peacefully, assertively, and calmly with each other. They are all of the verbal and nonverbal tasks and expressions that we use to live with ourselves and each other. To me social skills are used in direct contact with others – communicating, listening, making friends. Some skills are tasks such as helping others, caring for animals, or dealing with emergencies. Some skills are expressed largely to ourselves such as how we deal with stress or how confident we are in ourselves.

Our sense of self, of personal power, of the future; our confidence, our curiosity, and our self-talk – the things we say to ourselves in our own minds, are all social skills we use to communicate to ourselves. These are intrapersonal social skills. – Christine Grimaldi said, “First of all, you have to be your own best friend.” What we communicate to ourselves establishes our own sense of competency, our purpose, our self-esteem, and our complete internalized identity.

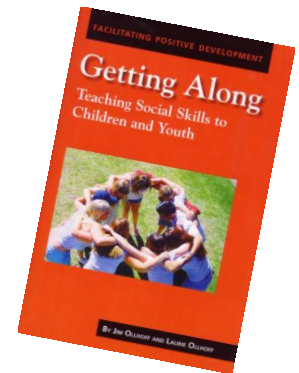
Interpersonal Social Skills are those we use to communicate or interact with anything outside of ourselves. Talking and listening are two obvious interpersonal social skills. When we make friends, help others, care for animals, ask for directions, and get in arguments, we are using social skills. Our success or failure depends on *how well* we use them.

Some social skills can be either internal or external, or both at the same time. Problem-solving and decision-making are two examples. One might solve a problem or make a decision by thinking it through *or* talking it over with someone else *or* both at the same time.

Much of the research on social skills focuses on making friends. I think that we are on the wrong track when we think of friendship as something to get, rather than something to give. If we can teach children how to *BE* a friend – we give them a social skill that will help them to form positive, meaningful, and lasting friendships.

Caregivers in school-age care programs can carefully observe the child’s interactions and get a sense of the skills they have and what skills need the most work. These caregivers have an ideal setting in which to teach social skills. They have kids in a mixed age group, in a playful setting in which much social interaction takes place. They have training in teaching social skills. They have a low enough ratio of caregivers-to-kids to be able to observe and interact with kids on individual goals. As we engage children through our program design, we have the chance to be intentional about what we teach. When we teach – through our environment, through our relationships, through our nurturing, through our discipline, through our experiences, through our program design – we can set children up for success by facilitating the development of social competencies.

By intentionally facilitating the development of these competencies, caregivers will help kids gain skills they need for a lifetime. The benefits of learning these skills are immediate. Children will experience closer and deeper friendships. They will be able to de-stress themselves and handle life with a positive outlook. They will have the opportunity to grow into competent, confident, caring and contributing adults. **Caregivers must think of themselves as intentional teachers of social skills in order to FACILITATE THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN.**



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Interpersonal Social Skills

Accepting responsibility
Answering questions appropriately
Apologizing
Arguing or Debating
Asking for help
Asking questions to clarify
Behaving appropriately
Behaving ethically
Being a leader
Being a follower
Being a friend
Being fair
Being independent of peer pressure
Being responsible
Being trustworthy
Caring for animals
Caring for the environment
Collaborating
Communicating effectively
Communicating needs and desires
Compromising
Confronting
Contributing to the group
Cooperating
Expressing emotions appropriately
Following instructions
Following through
Giving compliments
Helping others
Introducing others
Listening
Making facial expressions
Making friends
Meeting people
Negotiating
Obeying authority figures
Paying attention
Projecting an intentional tone of voice
Resolving conflict
Respecting others
Sharing
Showing manners
Showing respect
Solving problems
Speaking
Thanking others
Using good language

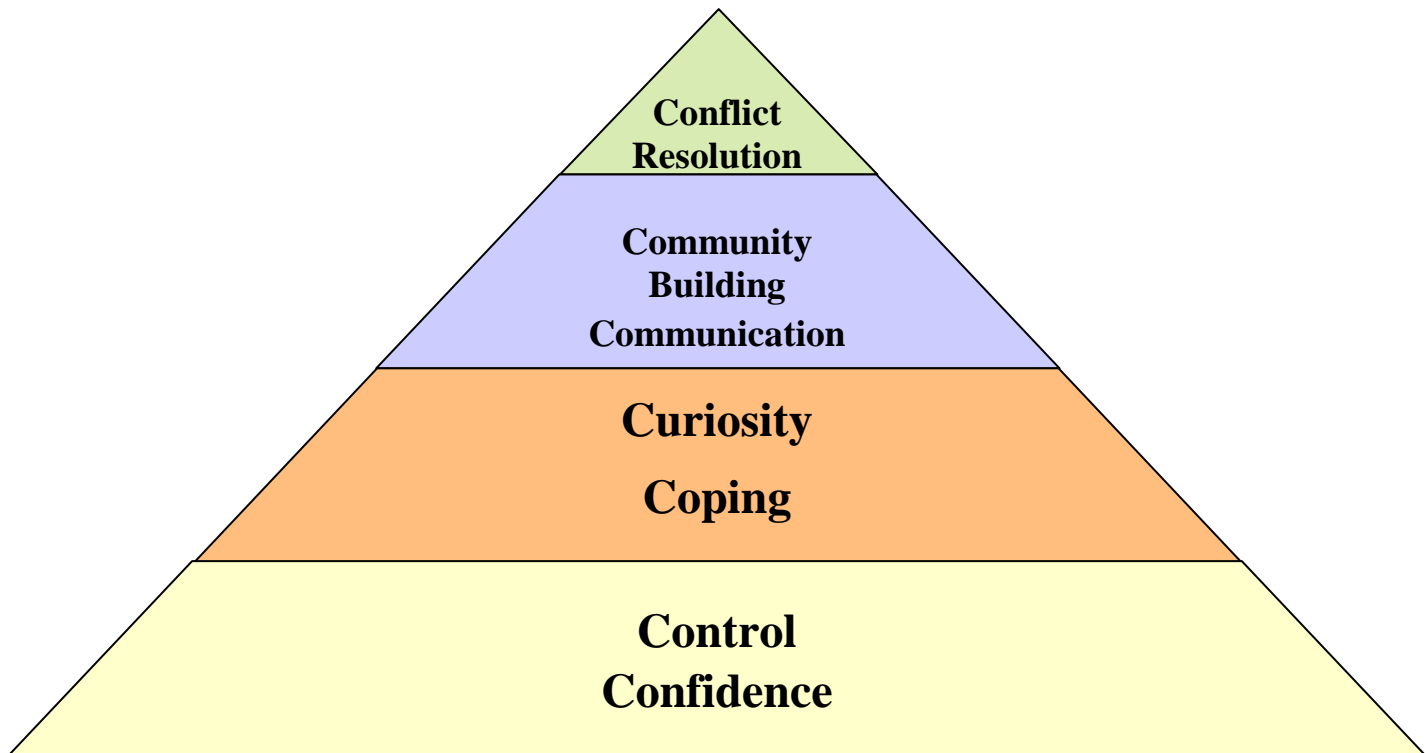
Intrapersonal Social Skills

Accepting consequences of behavior
Admiring
Assertiveness
Believing in one's abilities
Being able to "go with the flow."
Being loved
Being patient
Can think of solutions
Confidence
Coping
Curiosity
Delaying response to a situation
Delaying gratification
Desire to learn
Desire to explore
Distaste for violence
Empathy
Feeling calm in chaotic times
Feeling capable
Handling with stress, frustration/annoyance
Ignoring
Impulse control
Intrinsic motivation
Knowing how to behave in public places
Knowing manners and table manners
Laughing at oneself
Making wise decisions
Managing with anger
Open-minded thinking
Organizing your thoughts
Playfulness
Predicting consequences of behavior
Recognizing body language
Recognizing tone of voice
Relaxing
Self-awareness
Self-control
Self-discipline
Self-esteem
Sense of humor
Sense of self as resource
Sense of significance
Setting goals
Solving problems
Taking responsibility
Thinking
Thinking of others
Understanding others
Understanding how other people feel
Use of imagination
Values resolution to conflict

**EDUCATION BREEDS
CONFIDENCE.
CONFIDENCE BREEDS HOPE.
HOPE BREEDS PEACE.**



Hierarchy of Skills



Community Building in the Programming Triad of the ERE

Environment

Is the environment set up to make the children feel welcome?

- The space is warm and welcoming.
- There is space for conflict resolution.
- There is a “family corner” for parents.
- The overall sound in the environment is one of joyfulness and playfulness.
- Materials are culturally sensitive and reflective of the children in the program.
- Children and staff have a place to put their belongings.

Is the environment set up to encourage the children to freely explore?

- Games and activities are available that promote higher thinking.
- There are areas for art, dramatic play, fine motor skills, science, reading, and snack.
- Material and projects reflect the children’s interests and developmental level.
- Materials are plentiful and easily accessible to children.

Do the children work together to keep the room clean and safe?

- There is space for independent work as well as group work.
- There are games and activities that promote team building.
- Children are responsible for set up and clean up of room.
- The children create program rules.
- Discipline methods are agreed upon and discussed by children and staff members of program.
- Staff and children meet at the beginning of the season to devise a social contract for behavior in the program.

Relationships

Do the children feel cared for by the caregivers?

- Caregivers know and refer to each child by name.
- Caregivers interact heavily with children on a personal level.
- Children can express their feelings to a caregiver and know they will not be judged.
- Children trust caregivers, and approach them for help.
- Children are heard; caregivers listen at eye level.

Are the children encouraged to bring in their talents and share them with the other children?

- Caregivers and children are accepting of one another's abilities (or lack of).
- Caregivers and children are accepting of one another's ethnicity and culture.
- Caregivers share control and leadership.
- Caregivers encourage and support exploration.

Do the children consider their friend's feelings while playing a game or during a conversation?

- Children feel valued by peers.
- Children have empathy with other children (not just their friends).
- Caregivers assist children with conflict resolution without taking control of the situation.

Are parents cherished as partners?

- Parents are greeted by name when entering and leaving the program.
- Parents, staff and children are asked for their input about the program choices, services, and activities.
- Caregivers engage in conversation with parents.
- Caregivers are able to recognize and identify members of child's immediate family and important adult figures.

Experiences

Are children involved in planning the curriculum in the program?

- Children feel competent and take risks.
- Children feel comfortable asking questions.
- Field trips are child-centered and children assist in planning them.
- Children know and can anticipate the routine.
- Children have many choices.
- The site has a Kids' Council that meets at least monthly to discuss issues, plan activities, and solve problems.

Are the children able to play games, or work on a task together, and use skills of cooperation to make it successful?

- Activities are offered on a daily basis that incorporate teamwork.
- Children are not grouped by age, grade, skill level, or gender.
- Children are encouraged to discuss and handle interpersonal conflicts on their own (staff coaching is available).
- The site has a "buddy system." Children cannot leave the room without a buddy.
- Children are *not* involved in competitive activities where an actual winner is awarded a prize.

Are the talents of families and community members an integrated part of the program experience?

- Community outreach volunteers are part of the program.
- Program takes field trips to locations with relevance to the community.
- The program has presentations from community groups.
- Family members are invited and often participate in field trips and curriculum.

Do the caregivers have a thorough understanding of their vital role in the development of children?

- Caregivers have paid time to plan activities.
- Program experiences are designed to give children opportunities for success.
- Caregivers intentionally plan activities to develop social skills.

How to Observe a Child

Tips for good observation include knowing the names and family backgrounds of the children, knowing the child's favorite things, seeing how the child interacts – does the child share, participate? What does the child's breathing and body language tell you? Look for patterns at particular times or events.

These questions are meant to spark your insight and help you to become a more effective observer of children. Through careful observation, we can gain insight into the behavior and social skill needs of the children. This will help us to *Facilitate the Positive Development of Children*.

What do you know about the child?

- What is the child's family make-up?
- Who are their friends?
- What are their likes and dislikes?

Observe the child in the program setting.

- How does the child act in a large, open space?
- How does the child act in a small space?
- How does the child act in the quiet area?
- How does the child act in the creative play areas (art and drama)?
- How does the child act in the construction zone?
- Does the child become easily engaged or roams about?
- Does the child take cues from the environment (quiet in quiet area)?
- Does the child respond to environmental changes in a positive way?



Observe the child's relationships and interactions with others.

- How does the child interact with peer groups of two or more?
- Is there a time when the child's involvement with the group becomes stressful for the child?
- Does the size of the group change the behavior of the child?
- How does the child do in mixed-age groups?
- Does the child know how to approach others?
- Does the child know how to engage in friendships?
- Does the child know how to maintain friendships?
- Is play with others limited in any way?
- Is the child assertive or is the child a follower?
- Does the child listen and respond to others?
- Does the child need intervention and support from adults? When? How does child respond?

Observe the child's experiences – the structured activities.

- How does the child interact and become involved in group experiences?
- Does the child prefer to play alone?
- Is the child willing to share?
- Is the child willing to participate fully?
- Does the child participate in activities that are novel or new?
- What is the child's attitude toward the experience (boring, aggressive, engaged)?
- What does the child's behavior in an experience tell you about the child's perceptions of its own skills?

Direct Teaching

This is when you sit the child down and give a mini-lecture on the social skill.

The **first step** is to engage the children – find out what they know about the skill, find out how it is important to them, find out what problems it is associated with for them.

The **second step** is to frame the skill – answer the question of, “What is the value of learning this skill for me?” Describe how the skill will help them to get reach the goals they have for themselves, how it will make them happy, how it will give them control, how it will help them make friends, how it will help them to be more competent and confident, etc.

The **third step** is to explain the skill – what it looks like, what it doesn’t look like, what sub-skills support the target skill (what other skills are needed to practice the target skill), and strategies for developing the skill.

The **final** step in the direct teaching method is to provide a way for the kids to practice the skill. The adult may model the skill and then let the kids practice the language and tone modeled by the caregiver. The adult may model the skill and then let the kids practice it by role-playing or using puppets. The practice step is important in the learning of the skill and should not be omitted.

Direct teaching can be a precursor to an activity using an integrated teaching lesson that focuses on a specific skill.

Integrated Teaching

Integrated Teaching Lesson Plan	
Step 1: Choose	What social skill do you want to teach; and what activity will be good for teaching it? Or What activity do you want to do and what social skill is most needed for a successful activity?
Step 2: Plan	What social skills will we need to teach? How will we carry out the activity?
Step 3: Introduce and Ask	Explain the Activity and Ask, “What will it take to be successful?” and “What will YOU do when it comes time to use that skill?”
Step 4: Do the Activity	Situational Teaching may arise here.
Step 5: Debrief	Closure and Recap. How did it go? What did we do well? What could we do better?

Situational Teaching

Situational teaching focuses on the emerging teachable moment. Situational teaching involves coaching, mentoring, and giving suggestions on possible strategies. Situational teaching may occur during an integrated teaching lesson or it may be a follow up to an integrated or direct teaching strategy. Situational teaching happens in the heat of the moment (or just before it if caregivers are observing well), when kids who do not have developed social skills may need some gentle coaching or reminders to “use that skill of ____ we were talking about right now.” The caregiver does not swoop in as judge and jury taking control of the situation. The caregiver first observes carefully, and then intervenes with some questions. The caregiver intervenes gently, objectively (not taking sides), and not intrusively and stays just long enough to give them a boost – some coaching. The caregiver may remind children of relaxation strategies such as walking to the water fountain, muscle exercises or intentional breathing.