

Top Tips for Building Social Skills

Organise Play Dates

Children develop social skills through interacting with other children. Help your child build their social skills by organising play dates even if your child attends day care or pre-school. Keep play dates short and structured, have activities planned and monitor activities closely. As your child's social skills grow, remove yourself from their play. If your child is older (3½ years +) avoid immediately jumping in to solve problems when they arise – kids learn through experience and will benefit from being given a chance to resolve their own social conflicts.

Read Books about Social Skills

There are some great picture books for kids that cover social skills and positive social behaviour. Use books like this to help your child understand their social world – label appropriate social behaviour (e.g. “look Tom is sharing his toy truck with Sally”) and link this to positive outcomes (e.g. “because Tom took turns with his truck, Sally wants to be his friend”)

Have Quality Time with Your Child

Spending quality time with your child will boost their self-esteem, build confidence, and improve their language and social skills. Set aside regular blocks of quality time. Put away your mobile phone, turn off the TV and give your child your undivided attention. Try to make your time together as positive as possible. Give your child lots of positive feedback and avoid criticising your child, giving commands, or asking too many questions. Let your child choose how you spend time together, but try to encourage activities that will strengthen their social skills. For example, pick games that require turn taking or activities that you know your child's friends play at school.

Practice Social Skills

Help your child practice social skills at home, especially: taking turns, saying please and thank you, joining in, and asking others to play. Focus on one skill at a time and use day to day situations to practice the skill. For example, if you're working on asking others to play and your child wants you to do something with them prompt them to say “can you come and play with me?” When your child spontaneously uses a positive social skill, give lots of praise and positive feedback.

Help Your Child Understand Feelings

Understanding feelings and the feelings of others is an important building block for social skills. If your child is having difficulty making friends due to a lack of understanding of others feelings or difficulty regulating their distress (leading to tantrums) help build skills in these areas. Visit our website for further tips.

think TOP TIPS

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Social Skills

Friendships are important for a child's development. They provide a sense of belonging and a feeling of being valued and this helps kids to feel confident and happy.

When kids have trouble developing friendships it can negatively affect their self-esteem and put them at higher risk for other emotional problems.

Some kids have a natural and innate ability to develop friendships, while others require a bit of extra help. Signs that might indicate a need for extra coaching are:

- Regular fights with other children
- Refusal to take turns in play
- Regular tantrums in social contexts
- Poor eye contact
- Trouble making friends
- Trouble keeping friends
- Few same aged peers (friendships with younger or older kids instead)
- A strong preference for playing alone

Social difficulties may be a symptom of an underlying problem – like in the case of Autism Spectrum Disorder or ADHD – but they may also be the result of lagging social skills. Either way, it's worthwhile seeking the advice of a child clinical psychologist.

A clinical psychologist can assess your child's social skills and provide you with specific strategies for supporting the development of your child's social skills.