



Encouraging Social Skills in Children

Provide children with opportunities to play with peers

This can be through formal social groups such as cubs, sport activities, or through having friends over to play and visiting other children on a regular basis. Children who have many opportunities to play with peers from an early age are at an advantage when they enter formal group settings such as school. Children especially benefit when they can develop long-lasting relationships.

Play with children in a “peer like” way, just for the sake of having fun

Children whose parents frequently play with them have more advanced social skills and get along better with peers. Studies indicate that the parents of the most socially competent children laugh and smile often, avoid criticising child during play, are responsive to the child’s ideas, and aren’t too directive.

Talk with children about social relationships and values

Children who have more frequent conversations with a parent about peer relationships are better liked by other children in their classrooms and are rated by teachers as more socially competent. As part of normal, daily conversation, these parents and children talk about the everyday events that happen in school, including things that happen with peers.

Take a problem-solving approach

Parents don’t have to know the answers to all children’s problems to talk to them in helpful ways. They can provide support for the children to consider the problem themselves.

When problem-solving, parents can help children consider various solutions and perspectives. Therefore, it is helpful for children to learn how to think about relationships and weigh the consequences of their actions for themselves and others. Children who are encouraged to think in terms of others’ feelings and needs are more positive and pro-social with peers. Also, children react more positively to peers who try to solve problems by negotiation or compromise rather than through tattling, aggression, or verbal coercion.

Reflect a positive, resilient attitude toward social setbacks

Exclusion by peers is a fact of children’s lives. Children have different reactions to these rejections, ranging from anger to acceptance. Socially competent children tend to explain these rejections as temporary or in ways that recognise that a social situation can be improved by changing their own behaviour. Their parents avoid defeatist comments such as “Maybe they don’t like you,” and instead offer suggestions constructive statements to encourage children to take an optimistic view of others and themselves as play partners. They reflect an up-beat, resilient attitude toward social setbacks and the belief that social situations can be improved with effort and positive behaviour. Also:

- these parents realise that children need practice to fully develop their social skills, and that children get their practise from playing both with other children and their parents;
- these parents provide opportunities for their children to develop stable relationships with other children. Adults are more relaxed and have more fun when they are with people they know well, and this is true for children as well;
- these parents find ways to offer their children helpful information about how social relationships work. Casual discussions about the events of the day can sometimes lead to conversations in which parents guide children to consider the reasons for peers’ behaviours and various options for responding; and
- finally, these parents show how important a positive attitude is for getting along with others.

The full version of the is article is in the August edition of Feedback, which is available at your front office.