



## Strategies for Supporting Students: Social Skills

Everyone will experience some degree of peer conflict or frustration with peers; however, some students have significant difficulties with social interactions, often resulting in feelings of loneliness, frustration, sadness, or worry. It can be very isolating for them not to connect effectively with their peers and can lead to an array of feelings when they are not included. Some students struggling with social skills may not have an awareness of their deficits and may be confused by or indifferent to peer rejection or their lack of social connections.



### MODEL APPROPRIATE INTERACTIONS

Leading by example is an important tool to teach social skills. Through your actions, students learn how to interact with one another and value individuals' feelings. For example, watching you apologize for a mistake can teach them not only the importance of apologies but also how to do it. Moreover, if you emphasize the importance of using inside voices, it will be just as important for you to modulate the tone of your voice as well, even when frustrated.

### TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

For many individuals, learning social skills comes naturally from watching and practicing social skills within informal, unstructured settings. However, some students need direct and detailed instruction to improve their social skills. Welcoming students into the classroom each day can be a great time to practice social skills, such as making eye contact and exchanging pleasantries as well as providing an opportunity to build and improve the teacher-student relationship. Teachers can also teach social skills through regularly scheduled classroom or community meetings, which can be used to explicitly

teach social skills, with the added benefit of improving classroom culture. These spaces can also be used to practice social skills, such as listening to others, the use of personal space, how to interpret nonverbal cues, and how to ask others to join in on their activities.

## **PRACTICE SOCIAL SKILLS**

After teaching social skills, students can practice a skill by acting out situations with their peers. For example, provide students challenging social scenarios like conflict with a peer or meeting someone new and have them role-play how to navigate the situation effectively. The teacher and classmates can provide ideas and coaching during practice sessions.

## **REWARD POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS**

Just as we want to provide positive attention and rewards to all students to reinforce their appropriate behaviors, we want to make sure we praise students with social skills every time they engage in an appropriate social interaction. For example, some students may have difficulty recognizing how their behavior impacts others and therefore have difficulty negotiating conflicts or disagreements. If you witness a student initiate problem-solving strategies, such as apologizing or compromise, provide explicit praise for that interaction.

## **PEER PARTNERS**

Teachers may ask a willing peer with good social skills to be a partner or buddy to another student who struggles with social skills. The partner receives some brief training on how to interact with the other student, such as talking to them, playing with them, and staying by their side more often than would happen naturally. Over time, the student see appropriate examples on how to interact with peers and will be provided new opportunities for natural interactions.

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