



Tips for Tots



Tip #2: Building Social Skills in Young Children

Strategies

Did you know?

Infant/Toddler:

The capacity to communicate is the ability and desire to connect with others by exchanging ideas and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally. Most children learn to communicate to get their needs met or to establish interaction with a loved adult. Babies communicate from birth, through sounds (crying, cooing), facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, grimacing), and gestures/ body movements. After age one, children increase their peer interactions. Toddlers begin to make attempts to get peers' attention.

Preschool:

Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interactions among people. Some examples of important social skills for young children are sharing, taking turns, cooperating and communicating clearly. Not surprisingly, children who have poor social skills often have a hard time getting along with other children. Fortunately, daily opportunities can be created to help strengthen these skills in children.

Infant/Toddler:

- Model words for children to use in conflict situations such as “Mine” or “Stop!” Even very young children can learn to use simple words such as these. Share phrases you are teaching toddlers with their family members.
- Encourage communication with babies by taking turns listening and copying each other’s sounds.
- Help each child develop vocabulary for how they are feeling. “You’re sad because we could not stay longer and play at the park” or “You feel mad because you wanted to play with the truck next.”
- Teach each child about non-verbal communication. “Tim, do you see how Abby has her hands over her ears? She doesn’t like it when you scream. Please speak with a quieter voice so it will not hurt her ears.”
- Encourage children to work in groups when possible. Pair children up to complete simple classroom tasks such as picking up toy cars, blocks, etc. Ask children to help pass out napkins, etc. together in class.
- Read together daily with the children. Encourage the child to help you turn the pages and tell you what she sees. Ask questions about the characters in the books and how they might be feeling.

Preschool:

- Practicing social skills is a way to work on specific aspects of social interactions. For example, if you notice a child stands too close to peers or has difficulty getting a classmate’s attention, help them learn about personal space or conversational skills through role play in the classroom. Create stories to help teach these skills.
- While reading books, ask children many questions about how the characters may be feeling and why. Ask the children what someone in the story could do to make a character feel better.
- Use puppets, dolls, stuffed animals, and play figurines as props to help demonstrate and teach social skills. You can use the props to help discuss frequent classroom issues or to help children discuss an individual problem.
- Set up dramatic play situations that give practice in turn-taking. Going to a restaurant, grocery store, or the movies are examples of activities in which we must sometimes wait in line.
- Pair the children up for certain activities. Assign a child who has difficulty interacting to work with another child with a similar temperament. Some activities could include: finger painting, puppet plays, or creating artwork.

Resources:

CSEFEL-<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

Pathways to Play, Heidemann, S. & Hewitt, D. (1992)
Social and Emotional Development, Riley, D., San Juan, R.R., Klinkner, J., & Ramminger, A. (2008)

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