

Tips for Helping Your Child Build Social Skills

As young children, we develop what are known as “scripts,” or abstract descriptions of a series of actions or events that are necessary to achieve an objective. Typical scripts a child may have include:

- The format for a birthday party (i.e., you arrive, play games with others, eat cake and/or ice cream)
- Going shopping (i.e., you arrive at store, pick out items to buy, pay at the cash register)
- Eating at a restaurant (i.e., you order from menu, eat, pay)

Depending on the nature and severity of your child’s learning disability, he or she may need additional support from you to develop strong social skills — skills that are critical for building and maintaining friendships. Guiding your child through various social scripts will enable him or her to navigate such situations with greater ease and less apprehension, especially when he or she is interacting with other children.

Activities to Help Your Child Create Scripts

- Read storybooks on topics that address friendships and social interaction and discuss the social components of successful interactions with others.
- Identify areas of social difficulty exhibited by your child and role-play how to handle situations requiring such skills.
- Discuss situations that occur in everyday life, such as a conversation with a supermarket cashier, or the dialogue, facial expressions, and body language between two actors on a television program.
- Present your child with an opening vignette involving a social situation, and ask him or her to provide an ending. Afterward, discuss his or her input and other possible endings.
- When watching a movie or television show, point out subtle social cues, such as non-verbal behaviors and various social situations, that may be unfamiliar or complex, and discuss them with your child.

Putting Scripts into Practice

- When push comes to shove, nothing is better than real life experience! Allow your son or daughter to spend time with friends and peers. Trial and error is sometimes the only way a person can truly learn.
- Enroll your child in activities outside his or her known social circle if your child feels unpopular in his or her regular setting. Allowing a child to start anew will give him or her opportunities to confidently practice new social skills.
- Engage your child in conversation whenever possible. Eat family dinners together at the kitchen or dining room table instead of in front of the television. As the parent, make the promise to not answer the phone during family meal times so you can better focus on conversation with your child.

General Tips to Share with Your Child

- Be aware of the personal space of others and learn not to invade it.
- Practice making and maintaining eye contact during conversations.
- Pay attention during conversations. Don’t let your mind wander or daydream.
- Learn how (and when) to begin and end a conversation politely.
- Try not to monopolize the discussion. Remember, a dialogue is at least two-sided, so allow the other person (or people) to speak their mind (or minds).
- Engage in self-monitoring — that is, adapt your behavior to reflect the social situation at hand. When you are with friends, feel free to let loose and act more relaxed and playful. At school, be attentive and responsive.

- Think twice before speaking to avoid inappropriate comments.
- Patience is a virtue. Allow others to finish speaking before you begin to talk. You wouldn't want someone to interrupt your train of thought, would you?
- Always be courteous — say please and thank you.

Remind your child that practice makes perfect. The more you socialize the more confident you will become in social situations. And, make an effort to praise your child when he or she is being socially proper and is clearly striving to make a change in behavior.

For more on social skills and self-esteem, check out “Resources to Help Build Your Child’s Self Esteem” at www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/self-esteem

Information provided by National Center for Learning Disabilities; www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/social-skills-issues/understanding-childrens-trouble-with-social-skills



The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, H328M150022 (PATH), H328M150023 (PEN), & H328M150024 (TEAM). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



PATH Project: 1-800-866-4726



PEN Project: 1-877-762-1435



TEAM Project: 1-877-832-8945

www.partnerstx.org