

SCHOOL

Social Skills

What does Social Skills mean?

Social skills are the skills such as:

- Making eye contact/looking at the person who is talking or you are talking to.
- Taking turns in games/activities/when talking with someone.
- Knowing how to make friends and be a friend.
- Knowing how to start, continue and repair conversations.
- Knowing what to do when things go wrong in social situations e.g. in the playground.
- Understanding other people's feelings.

These skills often come naturally to us, but some children find it harder to know when or how to use these skills.

5 Top Strategies to Help Develop Social Skills in the Classroom

- Make **specific rules** for good communication during classroom discussions, such as 'no interrupting', 'hands up if you have a question' and 'look at the person talking'.
- Create **opportunities** for children to have focused conversations in groups or pairs. Get them to report back on what was said.
- During group work nominate a child to be the **social communication monitor**. They walk around and observe and rate if everyone is following the rules of good communication. They can report back to the group and remind people about which rules they need to use.
- On the carpet, before you ask the group to answer a question, get them to use **'talk partners'** discuss the possible answer with the person next to them.
- Get children to **support** less confident peers in the playground by setting up a rotating buddy system. The buddy can look out for a particular child and ensure they are included in playground games.

Activities to Help Develop Social Skills

Shake my hand

- Each person in turn shakes the hand of person to their left and says "hello". At the end everyone can hold hands in a circle and says hello to the group. You can also sing a song to match this game, e.g. "Shaaake my hand... hello!"

It's me!

- Adult shuts eyes and puts head down, then counts out loud to three and then looks at one child, and says, "who am I looking at?" When the child notices the adult looking at them, they should say or indicate "It's me!"

Pass the Look

- One pupil begins by looking into the eyes of the pupil on their right. In order to receive 'the look' eye contact is essential. The 'look' is passed around the group. When the pupils are familiar with good eye contact, the game can be made harder by passing the 'look' across the group.

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Winking Witch

- One person in the group is named as the 'detective'. Everyone else picks a folded piece of paper from a box. If the paper is blank they are potential victims. If there is a picture of a witch they are the witch. The witch can wink at people and make them fall into a deep sleep. The detective must use good eye contact and look carefully to identify who the witch is. Group members must remember to keep looking at the witch, but without making it too obvious!

Pass the emotion

- Pupils take it in turns to think of emotion and make the face to go with it (use picture prompts to make this easier). The next child copies the face and 'passes' it on around the circle.

Emotions dice

- Children take turns to throw the dice. They must name the emotion that matches the facial expression on the dice.
Harder: Child picks up the dice and chooses an emotion secretly. They make a corresponding face. Other children have to guess what it is.
Harder: Children have to give a reason why people might feel like that.

Iceberg

- Explain to the group that your posture can be tense or relaxed, depending on how you feel. Introduce the 'iceberg' to the group: 5 = very tense (freezing) 1 = very relaxed (melted) and show what the different postures might look like. Adult calls out a number from 1-5 and asks pupils to change their posture to reflect the number. Group could then discuss what makes our posture change (e.g. being nervous, being angry, feeling proud etc).

Give Me Space

- This game aims to show children that we need our personal space, and what it feels like when you stand too close or far from someone. Divide the group into two groups (A and B) and ask them to stand up, facing each other in pairs, about two metres apart. Adult asks pupils in group A to walk slowly towards their partners in group B. Ask group B to call out "stop" when they don't want their partner to get any closer. Then everyone looks to see how close everyone got to each other and talks about why.

Compliments game

- Go round the circle. Each child has to turn to the person next to them and give them a compliment. You may like to model ideas to start them off by saying something positive about each child in the group. This is a nice game to end a session with

'Bad' instructions game

- Collect together some familiar objects. Start by giving each child a simple instruction to follow (e.g. 'Give Sarah the ball'). Then deliberately make the instructions difficult to follow (exaggerate as necessary to illustrate the point) e.g. too quiet, too fast, mumbled, too many words. Children talk about what was wrong and suggest what to do about it e.g. ask for repetition or ask to slow down.

Right and wrong role play

- The adult demonstrates examples of **good** and **bad** (inappropriate) ways to use social skills, using another child as a partner to demonstrate with. The children then have a turn at practising the right and the wrong way to use a particular social skill. There are lots of different role plays that might be appropriate, depending on the needs of the particular children in the group (ask the speech and language therapist for more specific advice). Examples include:

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- Physical skills, e.g. eye contact, excessive fidgeting, standing too close
- Taking turns in conversation / interrupting
- Starting and ending conversations at the right time / abruptly
- Staying on topic in conversation / going off on a tangent

Assertive / Passive / Aggressive?

What do we mean by Assertive

- Group discussion on different kinds of behaviour. Consider using TV characters and how their behaviour is different. Talk about how their behaviour affects other people and how they could improve it.

What does a passive/aggressive person look/sound like?

- A more specific brainstorm about the qualities that are associated with each of the concepts
- Thinking of examples of when they were aggressive/ assertive/ passive
- Ask the children to tell the group or write down a time when they were one of the three and what happened and what they would have liked to happen differently.

How to appear more assertive

- Using the idea the children have generated about what an aggressive/ passive person looks/sounds like, take five points for each and ask the children in small groups or pairs to think how they could change that behaviour to be more assertive. Guidance from adults should be available to help them make the answers assertive.

Brainstorms

- Brainstorms are useful as a starting point to get children thinking about these three concepts.

Video clips and role plays

- These are a very useful way of demonstrating these ideas and asking the children what they think they're good ways of communicating or not.
- Give the children a situation written down and they have to act it out in one of the three ways.
- When teaching these concepts it is helpful to always get the child to think about how **they** do it and how **other people** around them do it.

