

Family Social Skills Activities Packet

Learning social skills is all about practice, encouragement, and reinforcement. These are some fun and simple activities that we will be doing in group, but they can also be done at home with family in order to strengthen the skills.

An important note about building confidence

A person can have a solid understanding of social skills but fail to use them appropriately due to a lack of self-confidence. If a child lacks the confidence to speak to others, and they avoid social interactions, then the child may appear to lack social skills. Therefore, it is important to note that self-esteem building also be a component of social skill development. Increasing self-esteem will help individuals feel more empowered in how they approach social situations.

3 Ways to boost self-esteem during activities:

1. Focus on your child's strengths in real time

When working on these activities, be sure to point out what your child is doing well in real time. For example, "I like the way you are making eye contact right now," or "You are doing a great job of using the correct tone of voice." Children need to understand specifically what they are doing correctly in order to keep practicing.

2. Offer constructive feedback

Tell your child up front that we all need help sometimes, and we all have strengths and weaknesses. We are all human! If your child is having difficulty with the activity, model the correct behavior and have them try again. Explain the reasoning for the activity and a way that they can approach it differently. Avoid punishing your child for doing something incorrectly.

3. Promote a growth mindset

A growth mindset is the idea that our brains and abilities can change and improve over time with practice. A child with a fixed mindset might say, "I can't do this, it's too hard." In contrast, a child with a growth mindset might say, "This is hard for me, but if I keep trying I will make progress." Again, we all have challenges in life so reassuring your child that they have the ability to conquer some of these difficulties is imperative.

Activity #1: Pick a Slip/Stick

Materials needed:

- Paper or popsicle sticks
- Dice (optional)

Directions:

Using either slips of paper or popsicle sticks, write down conversation starters. Put them in a cup or pile. Examples might include:

What is your favorite sport?

What are qualities of a good friend?

Do you like roller coasters?

Do you have any pets?

Have you been on vacation lately?

Chocolate or candy?

Do you like winter or summer?

What is your favorite video game?

Are you a dog or cat person?

Take turns picking a slip or stick, reading and then answering the questions. After answering, the person should then ask the question to the rest of the group. It is a good idea for the adult to go first so they can best model the correct way.

Rules:

No interrupting

No one-word answers

Make eye contact when speaking and listening

Use appropriate tone and volume of voice (no yelling, but speak up so others can hear)

This activity teaches your child how to:

- Take turns
- Control the impulse to interrupt, especially if it is a question they really want to answer
- Make eye contact
- Stay on topic
- Learn multi-step directions
- Start a conversation
- Think about topics in a new way
- Listen to others
- Use appropriate tone of voice

Added Challenges:

Use colored or numbered slips of paper or popsicle sticks and have the person roll dice first to determine what they should choose. This adds another step that they have to remember.

Have the person who answered the initial question repeat back and summarize what the others said when they gave their answers. This promotes the development of active listening skills.

Activity #2: Conversation Ping-Pong

Materials needed:

- Ball
- Paper
- Timer or clock (optional)

Directions:

Write several group topics on pieces of paper, fold them, and put them in a cup or pile. Pick one from the pile and read the topic out loud so everyone can hear. Examples might include:

Sports Animals Holidays School Video games Food Friends

The person holding the ball starts by asking a conversation starter related to the topic. For example, if the topic is food, they might say, "What is your favorite restaurant?" Then they will pass the ball to another person. That person should answer the question and then ask a follow-up question back or to another person (depending on how many are playing). For example, they might say, "My favorite restaurant is Wendy's because I like their cheeseburgers. Do you like cheeseburgers?" Then they will pass the ball. Continue passing the ball back and forth and try not to ask the same question twice.

Rules:

ONLY the person holding the ball is allowed to speak

When holding the ball, don't play with it and focus on the conversation

Make eye contact when speaking and listening

Use appropriate tone and volume of voice (no yelling, but speak up so others can hear)

This activity teaches your child how to:

- Take turns
- Stay on topic
- Start a conversation
- Control the impulse to interrupt
- Focus on body control
- Pay attention to how long he/she is speaking
- Make eye contact
- Think about topics on a deeper level
- Listen to others

Added challenge:

How long can you stay on topic? Set a timer for 2-3 minutes to see if you can outlast the clock.

Activity #3: Tone of Voice Challenge

Directions:

Say the following statements with different tones of voice. Use feelings or emphasize different words. For example, you might say, “What were you thinking?” while emphasizing the word “what”. Then you could say, “What were you thinking?” while emphasizing the word “you.” How does the meaning change? Say the sentences with different emotions (sad, excited, happy, angry), and see if your partner can guess what you are thinking or feeling.

This field trip is the best.	I love your haircut.	It was great to work with you.	I'm really busy right now.
Please leave me alone.	Did you do your chores today?	You have no idea.	Did I already tell you that?
What did you just say?	Thanks so much.	Get out.	That's great.
I can't wait to hear all about it.	What were you thinking?	I really tried my best.	I did great on the math test.

This activity teaches your child how to:

- Understand how tone of voice impacts communication
- Practice using different tones of voice
- Recognize tone of voice meaning in others and sarcasm
- Practice emotional awareness

Activity #4: Perspective Detective

Directions:

Have your child answer each of the following prompts. Next, have them ask other family members their perspective and write down their answers.

Prompt:	My Perspective:	Another Perspective:
Best type of food		
Most important quality in a friend		
Favorite season of the year		
Favorite sports team		
What a perfect day would look like		
Favorite hobby		
Place you most want to visit		
Favorite color		
Would you rather be hot or cold		

After they have filled out the chart, review it with them. Are the perspectives the same? How are they different? What can we learn from different perspectives? It is a great time to discuss how people think and feel differently, and that is okay because we are each unique! As we learn and grow, our perspectives can also change with each experience.

This activity teaches your child how to:

- Think about their own perspective on various topics
- Ask others questions about themselves
- Listen to others' perspectives
- Understand that we all have unique tastes and preferences, and they are all equally important

Added Challenge: Have your child come up with their own prompts and ask at least two other people their perspectives.

Activity #5: The Face Says It All

Directions:

With your child, take turns acting out each emotion using only facial expressions. See if you each guess the correct emotion.

Angry	Embarrassed	Angry	Bored
Excited	Disgusted	Happy	Sad
Curious	Frustrated	Scared	Focused
Surprised	Confused	Nervous	Exhausted
Relaxed	Content	Hurt	Disappointed
Sleepy	Grumpy	Curious	Confident
Shameful	Proud	Upset	Furious

This activity teaches your child how to:

- Understand how others might be feeling based solely on their facial expressions
- Recognize how their own facial expressions impact communication

Added Challenge:

As your child what they might say to someone who is expressing each emotion. How can they show empathy?

Activity #6: Reading Body Language

Directions:

Have your child look at the pictures below and have them identify what the person may be thinking or feeling based on their body language. You can also do this by looking through a picture book or pausing a scene on television. Have your child act out the emotions as well using only body language.



This activity teaches your child how to:

- Read body language by paying attention to posture and hand/arm positioning
- Understand how we communicate our emotions with our body language
- Think about how they use their own body language to communicate

Activity #7: Sticky Social Scenarios

Below are some “Sticky Social Scenarios” that your child might encounter. Depending on their age and development, feel free to create sticky scenarios of your own if these do not apply.

Directions:

Cut out the sticky scenarios, fold them up, and place them in a cup. Take turns pulling them out and reading the scenarios. What would you or your child do in that situation? Encourage your child to think about the perspectives of everyone involved. What might they be thinking or feeling? What could be done to problem-solve the situation? What are potential outcomes?

Suggestion: Keep the cup at the dinner table and read through one scenario each night or week

1. You forgot to turn your homework in again and you know your parents and teacher will be upset. No matter how hard you try, you just can't seem to remember. What can you do?
2. Ryan is a boy in your class that is constantly bullying others. He hasn't said anything mean to you, but you see him push another boy that you don't know, and the boy is very upset. What can you do?
3. There is a group of kids in your class that you really want to become friends with. You see them at lunch and one of them smiles at you. What can you do?
4. You were having too much fun in class with a friend and didn't listen to your teacher. She asked you to stop talking several times but you were disrespectful and eventually lost recess because of it. What can you do?
5. You see your group of friends talking about another girl, Emma, in the hallway. You're pretty sure they are making fun of her. Emma overhears them, puts her hands over her face, and runs away. What can you do?
6. You work really hard and make the basketball team. You are so happy! You rush to tell your best friend, but you notice they are crying. They tell you that they didn't make the team. What can you do?

This activity will help your child learn how to:

- Read social situations by imagining the scenario
- Prepare for challenging social situations
- Think about how they can better problem-solve social situations
- Analyze what the outcomes may be depending on how they react
- Become a self-advocate and stand up for others
- Show empathy
- Ask questions and gather feedback from parents if they are unsure of what they can do

Activity #8: Role-play Challenging Encounters

Role-play is a fantastic way to teach social skills because it requires the child to think about how they would react in a situation and practice the correct skill. Perhaps your child has certain situations that triggers or upsets them. By acting out the situation, you can provide support and teach them a new way to think, cope, and react. Your child can also see how different scenarios might play out, what possible road blocks they might face, and how to get around them. In addition, role-playing will build experience and confidence when approaching a real-world scenario.

Example:

Andy really wants to make new friends, but doesn't know how. There is a new boy in his class and he thinks they might have things in common. He saw him wear a basketball shirt last week and that is also Andy's favorite sport, but every time he tries to talk to him he gets too nervous and shuts down. He is afraid he will just blurt something out and the boy will think he's weird.

In this scenario, Andy can practice using his conversation starters through role-play, and you can pretend to be the new boy. Andy can think about and practice the best way to approach him, and you can throw out different reactions so that he can be prepared no matter what. This will allow Andy to feel more confident in his ability to reach out the next time in class.



Other Great Resources

PEERS for Young Adults Role Modeling Videos

UCLA's Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior has role playing videos on their website which are great for all ages. I recommend watching them with your child, and then discussing their observations. What were the individuals doing right? Wrong? How were they feeling in each scenario and why? How could they show empathy? The last page has a section on dating etiquette for older teens and young adults.

Website: <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers/resources/role-play-videos>

Books (available on Amazon)

What Should Danny Do? (Series)

With 9 Stories in 1, the fun never ends! *What Should Danny Do?* is an innovative, interactive book that empowers kids with the understanding that their choices will shape their days, and ultimately their lives into what they will be. Written in a "Choose Your Own Story" style, the book follows Danny, a Superhero-in-Training, through his day as he encounters choices that kids face on a daily basis. As your children navigates through the different story lines, they will begin to realize that their choices for Danny shaped his day into what it became. And in turn, the choices they make for themselves will shape their days, and ultimately their lives, into what they will be.

Boys and girls both love and relate to Danny, while enjoying the interactive nature of the book they never know what will come next! Parents and Teachers love the social-emotional skills the book teaches through empowering kids to make positive choices while demonstrating the natural consequences to negative choices. A "must-have" on every bookshelf.

My Secret Bully

Here is the all-too-familiar story of Monica. She and Katie have been friends since kindergarten. Monica loves being around her when she's nice. But there are times when Katie can be just plain mean. And Monica doesn't understand why.

Monica is a target of **relational aggression**, emotional bullying among friends who will use name-calling and manipulation to humiliate and exclude. But with a little help from a supportive adult, her mother, Monica learns to cope and thrive by facing her fears and reclaiming power from her bully.

Including a foreword by the founder of the The Ophelia Project, as well as helpful tips, discussion questions, and additional resources, *My Secret Bully* is a vital resource for children, parents, teachers, and counselors.

Have you Filled a Bucket Today?

While using a simple metaphor of a bucket and a dipper, author Carol McCloud illustrates that when we choose to be kind, we not only fill the buckets of those around us, but also fill our OWN bucket! Conversely, when we choose to say or do mean things, we are dipping into buckets. All day long, we are either filling up or dipping into each other's buckets by what we say and what we do. **When you're a bucket filler, you make the world a better place to be!** This 32-page picture book is perfect for children, parents, grandparents, teachers and people that want to teach empathy, nurture kindness and create a positive environment in their home, classroom, workplace and community.