



## **Social Skills: Promoting Positive Behavior, Academic Success, and School Safety**

Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. The extent to which children and adolescents possess good social skills can influence their academic performance, behavior, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety.

While most children pick up positive skills through their everyday interactions with

are increasingly seeking ways to help students develop positive social skills, both in school and in the community. Social skills related to school safety include:

- Anger management
- Recognizing/understanding others' point of view
- Social problem solving
- Peer negotiation
- Conflict management
- Peer resistance skills
- Active listening
- Effective communication
- Increased acceptance and tolerance of diverse groups

In isolation, social skills are not sufficient to ensure school safety; interventions should not be limited to student instruction and training. Change in the school culture should be facilitated by infusing social skills tra

his hand to speak in class, and does so much of the time, he will sometimes blurt out a comment without raising his hand.

***To a sufficient degree or level of strength*** (fluency deficits), e.g., the child knows how to perform skill and is motivated to perform, but demonstrates inadequate performance due to lack of practice or adequate feedback. For example, a student has learned what to say and do when confronted with bullying behavior, but her responses are not yet strong enough to be successful.

***Due to competing skill deficits or behaviors***, e.g., internal or external factors interfere with the child demonstrating a learned skill appropriately. For example, depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, or negative motivation can interfere with demonstration of appropriate conflict resolution skills, even though the skills have been taught and learned.

## **Social Skills Interventions**

Effective social skills programs are comprised of two essential elements: a teaching process that uses a behavioral/social learning approach and a universal language or set of steps that facilitates the learning of new behavior. Interventions can be implemented at a school-wide, specific setting, classroom, or individual level, but at all levels the emphasis is on teaching the desired skill, not punishing negative behaviors.

***Facilitate learning through normal activities.*** Teachers and parents must take advantage of incidental learning, in which naturally occurring behaviors or events are used to teach and reinforce appropriate social behavior. Adults can reinforce demonstrated positive social skills by praising children when they behave correctly, or offer alternatives to poor decisions to teach the more appropriate behavior. It may be necessary when working with children who have particular difficulty to intentionally “catch” them doing the right thing or devise situations in which they can make a good choice.

***Address environmental factors.*** The school or home environment can affect a child’s ability to learn and perform good social skills. If a child is experiencing difficulty demonstrating a particular skill, it is best to first evaluate the environment to determine what might interfere with the child’s appropriate acquisition of that skill. For instance, a student may be unruly at the beginning of the day because the teacher needs to establish more specific routines for coming into class, hanging up coats, checking in, etc. Addressing environmental obstacles like this also will benefit all children in that environment.

***Address individual factors.*** Some children need more intensive, personalized training because of individual factors, such as a disability. These interventions might be aimed at children experiencing a specific difficulty or those who have previously been identified as at risk for behavior problems. For example, studies have shown that children with mild disabilities tend to exhibit deficient social skills and excess problem behaviors more than students without such disabilities. Interventions aimed at at-risk students are based on individual assessment of the particular child’s skills and deficits. Selected interventions aim to prevent existing behavior problems from developing into more serious ones.

### ***Social skills training should:***

Focus on facilitating the desirable behavior as well as eliminating the undesirable behavior.

Emphasize the learning, performance, generalization, and maintenance of

appropriate behaviors through modeling, coaching, and role-playing. It is also crucial to provide students with immediate performance feedback.

Employ primarily positive strategies and add punitive strategies only if the

reducing prejudice. It is designed for use with middle school and high school students but can be adapted for use with younger students.

<http://www.researchpress.com/scripts/product.asp?item=5063>

***The ACCEPTS Program*** (Walker et al) Offers a complete curriculum for teaching effective social skills to students at middle and high school levels. The program teaches peer-to-peer skills, skills for relating to adults, and self-management skills. [http://www.proedinc.com/store/index.php?mode=product\\_detail&id=0365](http://www.proedinc.com/store/index.php?mode=product_detail&id=0365)