

Social Skills

What are social skills?

Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language, and our personal appearance.

A person has strong social skills if they have the knowledge of how to behave in social situations and understand both written and implied rules when communicating with others.

Children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Asperger's have difficulties with social skills.

Why are social skills so important?

Social skills are crucial to maintain positive relationships with others. Social interactions do not always run smoothly especially when children need to implement appropriate strategies for example resolving conflicts with their peers. It is also very important for children to understand and show empathy, as it allows them to respond in a caring way and to understand how others are feeling.

Examples of social skills:

- **Communication**

Communication is vital whether it is verbal or non-verbal, children need to be able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others.

- **Co-operating**

Children need to be able to play and work cooperatively so that they are able to get along and empathise with others.

- **Listening**

Listening skills are important and sometimes very difficult to master especially in the early years. Listening is not just about staying quiet it is really listening to what the person is saying and communicating back.

- **Sharing**

Children need to share so that they can make friends, play cooperatively, and take turns. Sharing teaches children about compromise and fairness.

- **Following directions**

Following instructions in life is important as it shows cooperation and understanding which is a skill needed in life.

- **Respecting personal space**

Understanding and keeping good personal space helps children engage more successfully in everyday interactions and keeps them safe too.

- **Manners**

Good manners are about not only respecting others but also yourself. Children with good manners make positive impressions on others, which in turn make people, feel more comfortable.

- **Eye contact**

Eye contact is a type of body language during communication and conversation. Keeping eye contact shows that you are actively listening and paying attention. Some children who have ASD/Asperger's find eye contact difficult so is important to keep this in mind.

- **Empathy**

Empathy is important, as children need to understand how others are feeling so that they can respond appropriately.



Activities to help with social skills

1. Use books

Books are a fantastic source for discussion. As you read stories you can discuss how the characters are feeling?, what emotions are they showing?, what could they do?, what would you do in that situation?

2. Learn to read facial expressions and emotions

Find different emotions in books, on TV, online etc... See if your child can recognise these emotions. Take turns in making different facial expressions, see if you can guess each other's emotions. Talk about what makes them feel worried, happy, angry...

3. Play games

Games are a great way to practice turn taking, waiting, negotiation, and sportsmanship. There are also games available where you can work together cooperatively in teams. Whilst playing games encourage communication and listening skills. A great communication game, which can be played anywhere, is "would you rather?" For example, would you rather be able to fly or become invisible? Would you rather sew all your own clothes or grow all your own food?

4. Eye contact games

Encourage your child to talk about different topics, looking at the person whilst speaking. Then get them to do the same but this time get the person who was listening to look away whilst the child is now speaking. How does that make them feel? Did they prefer someone looking at them whilst they spoke?

5. Gestures

Gestures play an important role in communication. Many people use their hands to emphasise what they are saying. For example, clapping or giving

“thumbs up” shows your approval. Even though we usually pay more attention to the words people are saying, it is important to recognise what signals and gestures mean so that we can communicate effectively. Find some pictures of different gestures e.g. folding arms with a cross face, putting hand out to shake someone’s hand. What do these gestures mean?

6. Listening game

Google some sounds on your phone/tablet of everyday noises e.g. washing machine, Hoover, dog barking, baby crying etc...Make the sounds easier for younger children or more complex for older children. Ask your child to guess the sounds. They get 1 point for every sound they guess correctly. The winner is the child with the most points.

7. Jigsaw puzzles

Ask your child to work with a friend or sibling to complete a puzzle together, encourage communication and listening skills whilst they complete this task.

8. Blindfold obstacle course

Children often love exploring an obstacle course, but you can put a twist on it by blindfolding one child and then get their friend/sibling to guide them through the course. (You may want to make a simple course to begin with). This will enhance their communication, trust, listening, cooperative skills, and following instructions.

9. Picture partner

This game is similar to the blindfold obstacle where it relies on communication and following instructions. With this game, you have one child being the instructor and one the artist. The instructor draws a simple picture like a house on his paper and then instructs the artist how to draw it without saying what the picture is e.g. draw a square, draw a triangle on top of the square etc...

10. Kindness cards

Simply brainstorm with your children ways to be kind. Inspire ideas such as smiling at someone, giving a hug, or sitting with someone new at lunch.

Children play this game by selecting a card or idea from the list and completing the task. Encourage them to complete as many tasks as possible each day.

Links to more social skill games

[Teaching Social Skills at Home | Child Mind Institute](#)

[Between Sessions | Social Skills](#)

[Activities | Scouts](#)

[Free Printable List of 50 Social Skills for Kids | And Next Comes L - Hyperlexia Resources](#)

[12 Basic Social Skills Kids Need - The Pathway 2 Success](#)