

# Social Skills

## What are social skills?

Social skills are the skills we use every day to interact and communicate with each other; verbally and non-verbally. They are vital to developing and maintaining positive interactions with others. Human beings are social creatures and we have developed various ways to communicate, such as speech, facial expression, gestures and body language. It is important to remember that children's capacity to interpret such cues can be impacted by diagnosis such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

## How we can teach social skills?

We can teach children about social skills through explicit teaching of boundaries, and encouraging them as they develop these important pro-social skills. There are a number of creative ways we can teach these important skills such as;

### Play

Get down to the children's level and play. Role model sharing, turn-taking and appropriate play with toys.

### Peer Interaction

Provide children with adequate opportunities to play with their peers. Children gain valuable experience and learn important social skills when playing with their friends. This is also an ideal situation for children to practise the skills they've already learned.

### Narrating

As adults, it is important for us to provide a running commentary of the important social skills we observe the children demonstrating. This includes prompting, reminding and encouraging them to practice positive social skills in everyday situations. Often we tell children what we don't want them to do, and forget to tell them what we do want them to do. For example, instead of saying "Wait Johnny," Educators could use a playful approach and explicitly verbalise what they are observing, which may support the child to understand what is happening for him. Instead, we could say, "I can see that you are really excited to use the slippery dip and sometimes waiting is really hard, isn't it? It's Sarah's turn now and yours is next."

### Label Emotions

Support children to understand their own emotions by labelling what you see. For example, "Johnny, I can see that you are feeling angry and I know this because you're stomping your feet." This would support the child to build on his emotional literacy, make links between his emotions and physiological state, and eventually build upon his level of empathy. We can then support children to understand and recognise how other people are feeling by explicitly labelling their emotions.

### Social Stories

Social Stories are used to teach or reinforce specific social skills children are finding difficult to understand or struggling to use appropriately. A social story helps a child to understand a situation; it includes information about what to expect and, sometimes, what to do and say in that situation. The goal is to increase the child's understanding by describing and suggesting a socially appropriate response.

### Role Play

Practice specific scenario, such as joining a game, and support the child to practice socially acceptable ways of entering play. It could be as simple as practicing saying, "Hi, my name is Johnny. Can I play too?".

## Visuals

Visuals can be useful to remind children of the social skills they are practicing, and can be particularly useful when supporting children with a diagnosis such as ASD. Examples of which could include a "Wait Card" which supports the child to develop the skill of waiting their turn.

## Sing Songs

Songs such as 'If you're happy and you know it' help teach children about different emotions. There are a number of other songs and nursery rhymes available, specifically for teaching social skills. You can also be creative and incorporate social skills (such as turn taking) in songs you are currently singing.

## Games

Play games with the children, involving skills such as turn taking. Encourage the children to identify and verbalize "Your turn" and "My turn" throughout the game to reinforce the skill. Ensure that everyone has a turn 'winning' and 'losing', where possible. Some children may need additional support to cope with this and will require repetition and role modelling.

Be patient! It will take time for children to develop these skills. Remember, as Educators, we play a vital role in supporting children to develop these important skills and it is our job to encourage and scaffold when the children need support; this includes practicing, prompting and reinforcing when they learn and develop these skills.

It is important to teach one skill at a time and ensure they are confident before introducing another social skill.

