



Social Skills

How to Help Children Develop Social Skills

Dealing with Bullying/Teasing

1. Talk with your child about teasing and acknowledge their **feelings**. Never minimize or negate the way they **feel**; children are entitled to feel whatever the feeling is. **Validate their feelings, i.e., "teasing can be very hurtful, how can we work this out?"** In a safe setting, talk to your child about what has happened. **Accept what your child is saying as valuable information, especially the specific things the teaser has said.**
2. **Discuss your own experiences and others who have been teased.** This will reassure the child that close friends and family have been teased and have survived the ordeal. **Explain** how you felt and what you did to try to stop the teasing. Talk about the difference between **mean, hurtful** teasing and **fun, friendly** teasing.
3. **Begin to create a plan. A few examples of different ways to handle teasing are:**
 - Body Language: Stand up straight and look the teaser in the eye. One of the most effective ways to deal with teasing is to look confident and self-assured. Speak clearly and directly.
 - Agreeing with the teaser, i.e., "You're right, whatever you say."
 - Use humour with the teaser, i.e., "I do have freckles, I'm so glad you noticed."
 - Tell someone you trust and ask for help

Act out these situations with your child. They will need practice; re-assure them that it takes time to feel confident.

4. **Work with the school immediately to make sure your child is safe.**

If the bullying is happening on the way to and from school, arrange for the child to get to school with older supportive children or take him/her until other interventions take place.

5. **Gradually introduce your child into various group situations.**

Start out slowly with 1:1 activities and when he/she is feeling more confident, introduce small positive social groups which are of interest to him/her.

Teaching How to Be a Follower or a Leader

1. Children learn by watching your behaviour in relationships with others. **The best teaching strategy is modeling the behaviour yourself.** Find opportunities for your child to be a leader and a follower. Don't give them more than they can handle. Talk about the qualities and importance of being both a leader and a follower. Ask the child to recall someone whom they admire and respect, and discuss the good qualities of that person.
2. **Practice situations where the roles of follower and leader are acted out.** Take turns being the follower/leader. Simon Says is an excellent game to teach the role of follower and leader and once this concept is grasped, other activities such as working on a simple project together will be beneficial.
3. **Watch your child's behaviour when they are playing with friends or family.** Let the child know that you noticed him/her being a leader and/or a follower. Make it into a game by asking him/her if they can guess when those times occurred. Children aren't always aware of their behaviour, and this is an opportunity for the child to see that he/she is capable of being a leader and a follower.

Listening/Conversation Skills

- 1. When talking with your child make sure that they are looking you in the eye and are pronouncing words fully and correctly.**

You can make it easier for your child by moving down to their eye level and asking them to speak slower and fuller. Also maintain an arm's length of space between you and your child. Gently remind your children about everyone's individual space and how we have to respect that.

Modeling listening skills for your child is important. When they are talking to you, give them your undivided attention; stop what you are doing and look them in the eye.

- 2. Act out conversations with your child where the child is either the listener or the speaker. Use the telephone to practice these skills or a watch a television show where a good conversation is taking place and discuss this with your child.**

Encourage and reinforce your child whenever they smile, nod, look or speak appropriately. This will enhance their self-esteem and confidence and coach them on how they can do this with other individuals such as peers, teachers etc.

Following Instructions/Rules

- 1. Identify what kind of instructions/rules your child has difficulty following. One way to approach this discussion in a non-threatening way is to say to your child "I have something I would like to talk to you about, when would be a good time?"** Children are more willing to be a part of a discussion when they are ready versus when the parent wants the discussion to take place. Often, emotions are high and the child feels defensive.

- 2. Discuss with your child how you can work together as a team and come up with a plan of action.**
 - **what** needs to be done
 - **who** is going to do it
 - **when** does it need to be done

- 3. Talk about household rules and expectations** (bedtime, curfew, etc.). Include your child in developing the rules. **They are more likely to follow the rules if they have been part of the planning. Discuss the consequences of not following the rules and make sure your child feels the consequences are fair.** Post a list of rules where everyone in the family can view them. Be a model for your children and follow the "family rules". Challenge yourself to notice at least 2 times a day when your child is following the rules and tell him/her, e.g., "John, I noticed you put your backpack away. That's great, I appreciate your helpful attitude." This is called positive reinforcement.

- 4. Some children require more tangible rewards such as a sticker chart that has a list of expectations and the child receives a sticker every time they follow through.** Remember to verbally praise the child in addition to giving the sticker. You could have a goal for the child to get 5 stickers in a week and they can choose something special, e.g., going to the park with you to play ball, a special bedtime story, a later bedtime on the weekend.

How to Problem-Solve

1. Problems will get bigger when emotions are "HOT"; this is not the time to problem-solve! Remove yourself from the situation temporarily and discuss the problem when everyone is calmer.

2. Steps to Problem-Solving

P - identify the problem

A - come up with alternatives

S - decide on a solution

T - try one of the solutions

E - Evaluate - did it work or do you need to try another solution

Problem-solving is about working together.

Do

listen

allow your child to speak openly

put yourself in the child's shoes

express your feelings

focus on solutions to the problem

Don't

interrupt

blame

name-call

put down

"Working together to solve problems builds trust, respect and confidence."

Sharing and Sportsmanship:

- **Taking turns** allows everyone to win
- **Compromising:** Both give up something and both get something.
- **Humour:** A good sense of humour does wonders and remind them to laugh at the problem NOT the person.
- **Apologize:** Teach them that "I'm sorry" does not imply that "I'm wrong", rather it lets the other person know that you are sorry about the situation.
- **Get help** from people who can be counted on for making a fair decision such as parents or teachers.
- **Avoid:** Teach your child that sometimes it is not even worth getting into an argument over some things.
- **Share:** Talk about how people's feelings become more important than material things and to share their belongings.
- **Chance:** Let luck decide who wins, whether it be by flipping a coin or playing a game such as "paper-rock-scissors".

Teaching How to Express Feelings/Knowing One's Feelings

1. Everyone's feelings are their own. There are no right or wrong feelings. We all need to express our feelings. Children quite often express their feelings through their behaviour. That's their way of letting us know how they are feeling. Feelings that often trigger a response in children are embarrassment, disappointment, frustration, sadness, anger and being scared.

2. Ways to help your child express and explore their feelings are:

- **Step 1** - Help them recognize and accept the feelings that you are having. **Admitting** your feelings to yourself means you **accept** them as real for you. It means that you are not hiding your feelings from yourself. It does not mean that you are giving in to them or letting them control you.
- **Step 2** - Relax for a moment. Take a break from these feelings.
- **Step 3** - Think about ways to help yourself, such as talking to someone, or doing something such as writing a letter.
- **Step 4** - Do something to help yourself. Express your feelings (let them out).

**Some suggestions for practicing non-threatening communication skills are as follows:

When someone. . .

Try saying . . .

Name calls or puts you down →

"I don't like it when you call me a name. Do you want to tell me what is wrong or really bothering you?"

Calls your mother a name →

"I feel angry when you call my mother a name. If I did something to you please tell me about it."

Pushes you →

"I don't like being pushed, please stop."

Blames you for no reason →

"I'm sorry that you feel that way. Is there anything we can do to work this out?"

Tells a lie about you →

"I feel bad when you say things about me that aren't true. Please tell me why you are angry."

Remind your child that proper posture, tone of voice, confidence and sincerity will allow them to express their feelings more effectively.

3. When you are watching television, and you see people expressing their feelings to each other, point it out to your child or even ask them how they think they are feeling. **Act/role-play with your child.** This will enable the child to feel what it is like being at both ends of the spectrum, receiving and giving and it will also introduce them to other feelings that they may not usually feel.

Strategies On How to Introduce Yourself/Join In

1. Talk to your child about how it feels to introduce yourself/join in such as the anxiety and fear of not being accepted. Also discuss situations where you or another family friend found it hard to introduce yourself or join in a game or activity. This will let the child feel comfortable discussing this with you and decrease the feelings of isolation.

2. Develop a plan with your child to increase their self-confidence so it will be easier for them to introduce themselves or join in. An example of a plan could be as follows:

- Make eye contact with the person you wish to introduce yourself to/play with.
- Smile at the person and make some movement towards the person (either by a hand gesture or physically moving closer).
- Once you are at about arm's length to the person you want to talk to, say "Hi!"
- Wait for a response and then continue by saying "My name is _____, and I was wondering if I could play ball with you guys".

Let the child go at their own pace. Your job as a coach is to encourage, support and reinforce his/her behaviour.

3. Role-play hypothetical situations with your child in order to prepare them for the "real world". Point out to your child when you introduce yourself to someone or ask to join in, thereby **modeling the skills yourself**. Also **point out these skills when watching television** and talk about the feelings the person may have been feeling and how they took a risk and it all worked out.

Strategies To Teach Your Child Manners

- 1. Discuss with your child what manners are and the meaning of sharing.** Ask them what they think it is and elaborate/add to their definition. Incorporate this definition into your plan and make it into the foundation of your goal.

- 2. Talk about the feelings associated with using your manners and sharing and** how using your manners makes others feel appreciated, respected and happy. Talk about treating others the way you want to be treated and **role-play** some scenarios where you would use your manners such as at the dinner table. **Model the behaviour** yourself and point it out to the child every time you do use your manners or share something, and also point it out when watching television or other people.

- 3. Develop a plan** with your child on how you will increase the use of manners and sharing. **An example of a plan** is to immediately reinforce them when they use their manners by praise. You could also have them work up to a goal where they achieve a prize, such as every time they use their manners, they get ten cents to put into a bank; at the end of the week, they can cash in their money and purchase whatever they please.

Strategies on How to Give a Compliment and Accept a Compliment

1. Discuss with your child the importance of giving and accepting compliments. Ask questions like **“Why does it feel good to have someone give you a compliment?”** This will lead into a discussion about the feelings associated with this, e.g., it makes you feel good about yourself, it emphasizes the good things that you do and you feel special for getting recognition for it.

“Do you think it would be hard or easy to give compliments to others and do you think that some people do not like to be complimented or admired?” This will allow you to explore some of the anxieties associated with giving and receiving compliments. You could talk about being shy and not wanting to be recognized, or they are good at so many things and you don't know what to compliment them on or if you don't know the person very well.

Another question that you could ask in your discussion could be **“If someone does something that you admire, how could you let them know without embarrassing them or calling a lot of attention to them if they were shy?”** This will lead into the development of your plan, and the same question could be reversed by saying that the person you admire is you and if someone is trying to compliment you, how would you handle it. You can give your child ideas such as complimenting the person quietly, finding the right time and place to do it and being sincere about it.

- 2. Develop and write down your plan.** An example of a plan is to work with your child to think of compliments for people he/she already knows and think of ways he/she can give these people a compliment. Receiving a compliment or accepting feedback could be done through role-play and examples from television.
- 3. Reinforce and support** your child every time he/she gives a compliment or accepts one positively. **Always encourage them and continually praise** them and point out that you are giving them a compliment and they are accepting the praise.

Strategies to Stay Out of Fights

1. **Teach your child techniques for controlling their anger.** Talk to them about how everyone gets angry but everyone handles it differently. Let them know the ways you handle your anger. Possible techniques could be:
 - a) Removing yourself from the situation temporarily and discussing the problem when everyone is calmer.
 - b) Counting backwards from 100 to calm yourself down and consequently not react impulsively.
 - c) Thinking of pleasant imagery to reduce the anger within.
2. Teach them that when we are angry we often see the other person as an enemy or opponent. It becomes a struggle like tug-of-war where we only think of winning.

Explain to them that “both” of you have the problem and it is not “me against you”, rather it is both of you tied up together with a common problem that has to be worked out. An example of how you could discuss this with your child is as follows:

Step 1: Talk to your child about how both of them have feelings and it is difficult to communicate when you feel angry, hurt, frightened and sad.

Step 2: Remind them that they both have the same problem and both must work together to resolve it.

Step 3: Stress the point that they both have a point of view and neither of you is 100% right or wrong.

Step 4: Inform them that no-one is out to get them and to solve problems as a friend and not an enemy.

3. **Develop some rules/plan with your child on how you could fight fairly or in other words negotiate/problem-solve.** An example of a plan could be as follows:
 - Identify the problem.
 - Focus on the problem.
 - Attack the **problem**, not the person.
 - Listen with an **open mind**.
 - Treat the other person’s feelings with respect.
 - Take responsibility for your actions.

Remember the goal of fighting fairly is to make everyone a winner!

The above plan will allow for a better understanding between the two parties, and feelings will be brought out into the open. Everyone will respect each other more, and there will be a feeling of trust. At the end, everyone will feel good about the solution and no-one will be hurt physically or emotionally. Everyone will be a winner.