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Societal Changes

Social skills used to be learned on the playground or in the neighborhood when it was safe for kids to run off and play with friends. Many kids today are missing out on that experience.

Technology & socialization



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Relationships and Manners




Two key elements of socialization:

- Manners – instill solid manners as early as you can. Bad habits can be difficult to change
- Relationships

- To help children negotiate relationships
 - Never give up – with consistent, caring teaching and coaching, social skills will improve
 - Have realistic expectations
 - Teach empathy, kindness and manners

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Why Doesn't My Child Have Friends?



As parents, this question can cause a great deal of heartache for you and your child.

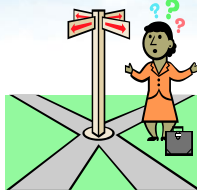
We will explore some of the barriers to friendship and discuss practical ways that parents can help break down those barriers and/or help your child understand and manage how they interact with others.

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Social Interactions Are a 3-Way Street

Parental involvement is critical when children struggle socially.

- Child Interacts with Society
- Society Interacts with Child
- Adult's Role is Social Coach



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Social Interactions Are a 3-Way Street

Make socialization a priority

Schedule time to socialize so it's on the calendar

Share the responsibility – try not to rely on one or two people who coordinate activities



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How Can Adults Help?


Educators and caregivers play a critical role in teaching children how to be good people with one another. They are role models and can actively teach kindness and manners which are at the root of strong social skills.

Not everyone is going to be friends.
Respect cannot be demanded.
Use of manners can.



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Be aware of barriers to friendship



Barriers to friendship include:

- Thinks he's funny when he's not
- Speaks to others with a harsh tone of voice
- Prefers to spend time with adults
- Doesn't seem to want any friends
- Perseverates
- Self talks in public
- Painfully shy
- Bossy
- Aggressive Or impulsive
- Rigid Thinkers
- Unique personality or interests
- Doesn't understand personal space

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Safety: Aggressive friends

Establish safety rules

- It is okay to be mad or disagree. It is not okay to
 - Hurt someone else
 - Hurt yourself
 - Hurt property

If aggression is an issue, seek professional help if school/home strategies are ineffective.


Give kids the tools to handle aggression – throw them a lifeline

Professionals may include guidance counselors, school psychologists, behaviorists, therapists, anger/frustration clinics, etc.



Another perspective...

- Some children have great difficulty seeing another person's point of view
- Softening rigid thinking takes patience and understanding
- Point out where perspectives are different and that it is okay to **respectfully** disagree
- Help the child understand their contribution to the problem
- Teach children "I" statements to express feelings and opinions
- Explaining to kids who have a "better idea" that they have a "different idea"



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Teach kids how to prevent "Friendship Fires"



STOP – responding to the person who is bugging you.


DROP – drop or change the topic altogether.

ROLL – roll with it and move on. Agree to disagree.

It is easier to prevent an argument than have to settle a difference or fight.

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Teach kids to use these words when someone is bothering them:



Talk: use a stick-up-for-yourself sentence.

Walk: move away from the person bothering you.

Ask: an adult to help solve the problem.


There are important differences between tattling and telling.

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What's the Difference Between Tattling and Telling?


Tattling (Tiny Problems)

- Usually used to get someone else in trouble.
- Can be handled by the child or ignored.
- Unimportant.
- Harmless.
- Whatever happened might have been an accident.




Telling (Big Earthquake Problems)

- The purpose is to keep someone safe.
- Help is needed from an adult to solve the problem.
- Important.
- Harmful or dangerous physically or emotionally.
- Whatever is happening is on purpose.



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When a problem arises



Use the method of

- You
- Me
- We

to teach problem-solving skills

"How about we" are powerful words and include everyone's ideas.

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Get every side to the story.



Work backwards to where things might have gone differently.

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Social coaching language...

"How about we...?"

"Are you worried about something?"

"Was it an "oops" or an "on purpose?"

"Who owns the problem?"

"In my opinion..."

"Poking the ogre"

"I'd like to play with you. Tell me what you are doing."

"Sticking out" or "blending in?"

"Observing or interfering?"

"Do you need my attention?"

"Is this a big deal or a little deal?"

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"The Golden Rule"

Nice gets nice
 Treat people the way you want to be treated
 How would you feel if you were in his or her shoes?

Kids won't always act with kindness
 Kids often have their own agendas
 They want their own way
 Kids need to understand that friendship involves

- kindness
- empathy
- willingness to resolve conflicts
- flexibility



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Earning respect begins with listening...

- Children are people too
- Children's feelings are as important to them as ours are to us
- The number one reason children tell us they get angry is because they do not feel listened to and respected
- Children should be seen AND heard, but also understand adults have authority



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Kids want to be heard but sometimes they don't listen:

- Distracted
- Fidgeting while listening
- Walk away while someone is talking
- Thinking about what they are going to say next
- Assuming they already know what is being said
- May finish the other person's thought
- May insert a random thought
- May try to joke about what is being said
- May think of a "better" idea or of flaws in someone else's idea



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Use the 2 x 10 strategy...

Spend 2 minutes, 10 days in a row, talking to a child about anything he or she wants to talk about (especially at-risk kids).



Here's the article:

[The 2x10 strategy: A miraculous solution for behavior issues.](#)

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Treat time at school as community time:



Not everyone is going to be friends at school, but everyone is part of the community and should be included in activities

Encourage the BFF time on playdates outside of school. If you see someone who isn't playing with anyone, help him or her engage.
Create a buddy bench for kids who are feeling a little lonely and want someone to play with.

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Here's what a buddy bench could look like:



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Let's talk a little more about kids who are not ever going to be friends.



- Kids who are not friends are still members of the school community. Always enforce good manners.
- Kids do not have to be friends, but should act in a friendly, tolerant way.
- Encourage kids to forgive - especially if they are sorry - everyone makes mistakes.
- If the same kids are mean to another child over and over then it's time to help that child to find some different kids to play with.
- Some kids just don't get along and that's OK. Don't allow the seeking of revenge or deliberate button-pushing, instigating or ogre-poking.
- Teach kids to be respectful of differences - use the words "in my opinion."

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Prepare for social situations

Create social stories to prepare children for social situations




Sandbox Learning offers downloadable social stories that are customized to meet each child's needs.

Create your own using Powerpoint

My name is Greg and I use my communication device to greet people.

TIP: Take some photos and create a photo album or scrapbook to increase familiarity with situations


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Social Coaching – Parental Role

Coach Your Child Prior to a Social Event - Children who don't understand what is acceptable behavior during a social event may need to be reminded prior to attending. Children need to understand what the **expectation** is so they will know how to interact.

Coach Your Child During a Social Event - Even if appropriate social behavior is discussed in the car on the way, children may need an additional, but gentle, reminder once they arrive somewhere.

Review Social Conduct After a Social Event - Starting with the interactions that went well, praise your child after a social event and give gentle suggestions for next time ("Sandwich" = praise, feedback, praise).



TIP: Practice Social Skills with Family Members - Better to make social mistakes with family members who are likely to be more forgiving than potential friends. Fine-tuning social skills with family members is a great place to start.

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Teach social independence



- **"It's my room and my stuff"**- Yes, how can we help our friend feel welcome in your room?
- **I'm the guest, so I get what I want** – how can you decide together what to do first (rock, paper, scissors)?
- **Is that a friendly thing to do?**
- **Is that a friendly voice?**
- **Check in often** – "everything OK in here?" Be enthusiastic when it is "You guys are being such great friends!"


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Ask a lot of questions and teach kids to eventually ask themselves

- You look interested in what Bobby is doing, how could you ask him if you can play?
- Is what was just said helpful or not helpful for the conversation?
- You look angry, are you feeling angry?
- That sounded... bossy and a little mean, did you mean it that way?
- Would you like to try that again?
- Use tools to assist with social skill building
- **Kids who are reluctant to your coaching** – the value of a heart-to-heart chat "I'm concerned about something and I would like to discuss it with you".

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Social Coaching – Parental Role



Group Interactions vs 1:1

Provide a Structured Activity –Foster independence with list posted in the play room with suggestions (beading, clay, coloring, dress up, dolls, cars, etc.)

Having a hard time playing independently? Bake cookies together or some type of group activity.

Use Hand Signals - if you see your child repeating a common social mistake with a friend, a hand signal can send a message that a mistake is being made without embarrassing your child

TIP: End play date on a good note - Kids will have an overall feeling that the play date went well if the last few minutes were positive.

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Social Coaching – Parental Role

Observe Others Socializing

Watch TV with sound off.

Explain romantic relationships on TV so they understand a long term relationship vs. someone they just met.

Try to Find Others Who Have Social Difficulty

Join clubs/social groups

Volunteerism

TIP: Existing clubs don't fit? Create your own club or group (dance club, Star Wars club, etc.) Ask the school if they will work with you.

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Social Coaching – Parental Role



Participate in school clubs/activities –yoga club, drama, yearbook, student council, etc

Encourage Your Kids to Attend School Dances– If you feel your child should have a social coach or chaperone for a school dance, hire a high school student to be their social coach for the evening

Join or create clubs/social groups

- Book clubs
- Scrapbooking
- Bunco
- Dominoes
- Movie night
- Community service projects
- Safe, online communities



Megan in middle school play 2008

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Social Coaching – adapt as children grow

Understanding social nuances is hard work

as kids grow, the complexity of social situations becomes increasingly difficult

example: "I like you" to a 5 year olds = let's be friends. "I like you" to a 12 year old = I love you

Provide plenty of empathy along the way

"it's not easy being 9 years old, is it?"

Discuss the "Big Picture"

acknowledge that it's hard work but explain why it's worth it.

TIP: Explain that conversations are hard to begin and keep going but it helps people understand who you are and helps you feel closer to your friend.

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Evaluate your own feelings about socializing

- Are you a social adult?
- Forego the typical reciprocation that happens between friends and have the social gathering at your house (over and over if necessary).
- Social gatherings in your home provide opportunities for social coaching
- It's more important that your child have solid friendships than who does the inviting
- Some families may not be reciprocating for reasons other than their child doesn't want to be with your child
- Host BBQ's, game night, or other social events.
- Your child will see *you* socialize and learn.

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Create Social Opportunity – at your house...

- **Kids Can Help:** Kids can pick up toys, dust, vacuum, fill a cooler with ice.
- **Cleaning Your House:** Pretty clean is clean enough.
- **Invite using E-mail**
- **Create a Social ScheduleDinner Clubs:** take turns hosting and making a dinner.
- **Pot Luck Suppers:** no extra cooking
- **Take Out:** take turns buying pizza and serve it on paper plates.
- **Game Night**
- **Make-Your-Own night:** pizzas, tacos, sundaes where each family brings an ingredient and everyone makes their own.
- **Develop a Neighborhood Signal:** some families who have pools and fire pits will create a signal for neighbors that indicate a drive-by invitation.

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Create Social Opportunity

- When doing activities with your kids, include friends
 - Movies
 - Apple picking
 - Bowling
 - Making cookies
 - Making pretzels
 - Shopping
 - A huge Lego project
 - ...whatever!
- Create a group of kids with common interests.

Homemade is nice...



Slice & bake is nice too!



If the group you create isn't getting a sustainable level of participation, try again with a new group until you find success

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Schools can support friendships and social interactions

School Guidance Department

- Guidance counselors are responsible for the social emotional well-being of children in the school. Think of them as the "heart of the school"
- Guidance will not likely approach you unless there is a major problem – ask them for help
- Counselors can set up
 - Lunch bunch
 - Recess club
 - Girls/boys groups
 - Role playing scenarios
 - Whole class discussions
 - Create videos for demonstrations (ex. tone-of-voice)

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Schools can support friendships and social interactions

School Guidance Department

- Seek out children with similar profiles from other schools in town
- Mentoring groups with older kids or peers
- Organize self-esteem building connections (have an older child help a younger child in school)
- Create "Pal" programs
- Observe unstructured time and provide advice (recess)
- Counseling – a comfortable place to go if a child is uncomfortable socially
- Help children understand each other
- Practice conversational skills


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Catch 'em doing something right!

Provide positive behavioral supports.

Reward system for using good social skills


Give coupons for effort and to reward successes




\$100 ♥ award coupon

Choose an item off the list or save coupons for a bonus item!

www.cashforfriends.com





\$3.00 *** BONUS ***** award coupon**


Earn bonus coupons and choose an item off the list

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Social Coaching – Parental Role

Positive Behavioral Support System for good social skills
Give coupons for effort and to reward successes

PRIZE LIST	COUPONS NEEDED
Sleepover	20
Bubble bath with toys	10
5 minutes extra screen time	5
Dinner in front of TV	10
Family out to dinner	30
Game night with the family	10
Friend's over for pizza	8
Trip to dollar store	5
Choose from Secret Prize Vault	10



Rules: **NO ASKING FOR COUPONS – EVER**

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