

The WHY of Social Skills

Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. Social skills help us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. Good social skills in young people 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.

Most students gain positive social skills through everyday interactions with adults and peers. It is important that teachers and parents reinforce the casual learning. Schools have relied on families to teach their children interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, **increased negative influences and demands on family life make it important for schools to partner with parents to teach social skills.**

Good Social Skills: Outcomes

With a full variety of social skills, students can make social choices that will strengthen their interpersonal relationships and facilitate success in school. Outcomes of good social skills include:

- Positive school environment.
- Resiliency in the face of future crises or other stressful life events.
- Appropriate avenues for aggression and frustration.
- Student leaders who are motivated to promote school safety.

Poor Social Skills: Outcomes

Students with poor social skills frequently:

- Experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and peers.
- Provoke others into highly negative responses, followed by high levels of peer rejection. Peer rejection has been linked with school violence.
- Show signs of depression, aggression and anxiety.
- Have poor academic performance.
- Have a higher incidence of involvement in the criminal justice system as adults.

Schools are frequently seeking ways to help students develop positive social skills, both in school and in the community. Social skills related to the school environment 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 enough to ensure school safety. Change in the school culture can happen by social skills training as part of a system of school safety and discipline policies, emphasizing **relationship-building between students and faculty (teachers and administrators) and between schools and families**, and providing effective behavior management and academic instruction.

Defining Types of Social Skills

While there are hundreds of important social skills for students to learn, we can organize them into skill areas to make it easier to identify and determine appropriate interventions.

1. **Survival skills** (listening, following directions, ignoring distractions, using nice or brave talk, rewarding yourself)
2. **Interpersonal skills** (sharing, asking for permission, joining an activity, waiting your turn)
3. **Problem-solving skills** (asking for help, apologizing, accepting consequences, deciding what to do)
4. **Conflict resolution skills** (dealing with teasing, losing, accusations, being left out, peer pressure)

Identifying Social Skills Deficits

Assessing a student's social skill deficits in order to create the most appropriate intervention is important.

Social skills training tips:

- Focus on teaching the desirable behavior, as well as eliminating the undesirable behavior.
- Emphasize the learning, performance, and maintenance of appropriate behaviors through modeling, coaching, and role-playing. It is crucial to provide students with immediate performance feedback.
- Use positive teaching strategies. Use punitive teaching strategies if behavior is serious or dangerous.
- Provide many training and practice opportunities in a wide range of settings with different groups and individuals. This practice encourages students to apply new skills to real life situations.
- Improve social skills by increasing the frequency of an appropriate behavior in a particular situation. This should take place in "normal" environments.