

Five Social Skills Activities

1. Social skills activities for Active Listening

Active listeners show speakers that they are **paying attention**. They do this through **body language** (offering appropriate eye contact, orienting the body in the direction of the speaker, remaining quiet) and **verbal feedback** (restating, in their own words, what the speaker is trying to communicate).

One of the most popular methods of teaching active listening assigns people to one of three roles: A speaker, a listener, and an observer. The speaker is instructed to talk for a few minutes about something important to him. The listener attends quietly, providing cues to the speaker that she is paying attention. When the speaker is finished talking, the listener also repeats back, in her own words, the speaker's points.

The observer's job is to evaluate the speaker and listener. Did the speaker stay on topic? How did the listener indicate that she was paying attention?

After the observer shares his observations with the others, the players switch roles and try again.

2. Political Posters

Assign students to study a political or moral issue, generated by the teacher and with the class input on topics. Have students analyze two or more opposing points of view. To fully understand these points of view, students are encouraged to interview real people. They might also read editorials on the subject. Next, have students take turns advocating each of these viewpoints. For each position, students create a poster illustrating the key points. Make sure that they understand their purpose: They are *not* supposed to explain what *they* think about the issue. Rather, they are supposed to provide a fair and balanced account of what other people believe.

3. Mock Job Interviews-Employer

The goals of these social skills activities are (1) to get teens thinking about the employer's perspective and (2) to have teens apply their insights on making a good impression at a mock interview.

To begin, help teens choose from a short list of entry level jobs. They will be applying for the job they choose, but they will also take turns serving as employers. So when you offer your list, include only those jobs that students can understand from the employer's perspective. Good examples are domestic service jobs, like:

Housekeeper/Custodial

Gas pump attendant

Waitress

Tutor/Babysitter

Personal fitness trainer

Fast food/Restaurant

What does it mean, “understand from the employer’s perspective?” Although your teens may have never had a housekeeper, tutor, or personal fitness trainer, they can imagine what might be important to an employer. Is the housekeeper (who will see your personal surroundings and have access to all your belongings) trustworthy? Is the tutor patient and good with explanations? Does the personal fitness trainer know how to keep people motivated? Are these people reliable?

Perspective-taking: Thinking like an employer

Once teens have chosen their preferred jobs, ask them to think like employers. If they were hiring for this position, what kind of person would they want? Have teens work together on an advertisement for the position. And help them come up with a short list of questions to ask in the interview.

4. The Job Interview-Employee

Ask for volunteers to serve as job applicants. Let them fill out application forms and collect their thoughts. Then call them before your interview panel, which should consist of several peer “employers” who will take turns asking questions of the applicant. The rest of the group will watch (and analyze) the interview. The applicants are free to make up an identity (including an appropriate job history). But they should be consistent about their story and make an earnest effort to get hired.

Group discussion: What works?

After the interviews, thank the volunteers and start a group discussion. Ask applicants to share their feelings. What made them nervous? Which questions were the hardest to answer? Then ask everyone to consider what worked well and what didn’t. Based on these experiences, create a list of interview “dos” and “don’ts.”

5. The Blindfold Walk

To play this game, create an obstacle course. Then assign players to one of two roles. Blinded players will wear blindfolds. Others are leaders. Leaders will take blinded players by the hand and attempt to lead them through the course. Talking is encouraged, and, when they are finished, players should reverse their roles. This extends the importance of listening skills, and trusting another person.
