

Building Social Skills



Social skills are crucial for children to succeed in life. These skills enable a child to understand their own emotions and relate to other people and the world around them.

For some children developing these skills can be challenging, particularly for children who experience an autistic spectrum disorder or who have limited social interaction with the world around them.

Children may experience difficulties with one or more areas. For any child, it is important to encourage activities that support the development of these skills.

To access further information and resources on disabilities, strategies to support children and young people and resources, please visit our online information and resources platform Realize More: www.realizebelize.org

Building Social Skills

Social skills can be divided into three areas; social conventions, intra-personal skills/ managing ones own emotions and interpersonal skills.

Social conventions are the society's accepted norms of behaviour such as appropriate greetings depending on relationships, appropriate and polite ways to make requests ("please") and express gratitude ("thank you"), addressing adults, shaking hands, taking turns, sharing, giving positive feedback (praise) to peers, no put downs and cooperation.

Intrapersonal skills are those that enable a child to manage their own emotional state. A child who experiences difficulties with these skills may express frustration through aggression or having a "tantrum".

Interpersonal skills- These are the skills that enable a child to understand other's emotions which lead to a child having the ability to make appropriate interactions and, understand and build relationships.

It is important to understand what skills your child finds challenging so you can identify activities that support their skills development.

Fun Social Skills activities to try at home



Developing your child's understanding of social conventions

Cartoon strip – Create a cartoon strip of a social interaction. Leave the speech bubbles blank and encourage your child to think about what might be said and fill in the bubbles.



Role-playing – This will give your child a safe space to practice. Give a scenario such as going to a shop, visiting grandma and grandpa. You could even set up some props such as a pretend shop.

Role modelling – Encourage your child to watch you in situations. To make it more fun, depending on your child's abilities and interests for example you could give them a camera to take photos of the key interactions and make a book or poster, draw what has happened or record it. After the interaction make cue cards with your child. Then, when you feel they are confident they could try out using the cue cards, initially with yourself then a trusted friend or family member.

Puppet show- Using puppets (or make some from socks) to role play social situations with your child. As they feel more confident encourage your child to use one of the puppets.

Developing your child's intrapersonal skills

How do I feel? Finding ways to support your child to share how they are feeling will enable you and them prepare strategies to cope with different feelings. Using an emotions chart each day or if your child's mood changes can be really useful. You can make this more fun by attaching emotion faces to lolly pop sticks.

Multi-sensory activities – If your child is unclear about what different emotions and feelings are, you can support them to discover and learn feelings by using multi-sensory activities for example make four square pieces of card, attach different textiles such as sand paper, cotton wool and ask your child to feel them and describe what they are like. Feeling the textiles should allow your child to feel different emotions, watch their facial expression and listen to how it makes them feel then agree feelings to each textile based on their responses.

Team challenges - Activities that encourage children to work together will give your child the opportunity to observe other children and practice their social skills. Using lego or blocks (even items around the house that can be stacked safely) to build something together.

Team junk modelling- Create a sculpture, vehicle together.

Coping with emotions – Come up with a plan with your child to help them cope with difficult situations. You can make three picture cards, the first saying "Take 5 breaths", then "Move away from the problem", then "I need", whatever helps your child to calm down. Calm down kits can be helpful when your child is first learning to manage emotions

Developing your child's interpersonal skills

Space invaders – (Pre-school) Have your child colour a cartoon alien (you do one, too!), cut out and stick to the popsicle stick. Explain to your child why respecting another's personal space is important, and introduce concepts like "gentle hands" and phrases "Excuse me" to get someone's attention instead of shouting or hitting.

Explain to them that the aliens you've made together are you and your child's "space invaders". Model for your child that when you put your "space invader" up, that means you need to stop and think. Explain the concept of giving people their own "bubble" of space to play in.

Role Playing (Lower Primary) - Pretend to be a family of animals or chefs making a cake, use the scenarios to practice taking turns, listening to each other, following instructions. You can use your child's toys and objects around the house.

Charades- (Lower and Upper primary) - Make a pack of different emotion cards. Take it in turns to act out an emotion from a card with your child, take it in turns to guess the emotion. You can play this game with more players and involve the whole family.

Kindness explorer game – Help your child to think of one act of kindness each week. You can introduce a kindness chart and celebrate their achievements..

Further Information

Realize has shared just a few activities that can be used to encourage the development of your child's social skills. There are many, many more.

Realize offers an online platform with further information, strategies and activities ideas.

Websites such as Pinterest also offer lots of creative activity ideas.



To access further information and resources on disabilities, strategies to support children and young people and resources, please visit our online information and resources platform Realize

More: www.realizebelize.org

Registered Belize Not for Profit: 16681