Teaching Social Skills-
Because No One Lives in Isolation

By: Lucinda Thelen M.Ed., CAPE

Social Skills

* For many of our sons or daughters with disabilities they will not learn these skills just by watching.
* They also may not be able to adjust their interactions based on person and location.
* Additionally they may not have social maturity and may function from 1/3 to 2/3rds of their chronological age.

Despite all of this….

* Start as soon as possible to work on social skills.
* Keep practicing, learning takes time.
* They will learn as they grow and mature.
* Even if they don’t become social experts- they will still learn essential skills necessary to function in this world.

What we really are doing is Social Learning- Teaching how to interpret and respond to people in different settings

This includes…

* Constantly interpreting surroundings
* Figuring out the expectations of others
* Gauging your own emotional response
* Adapting your behavior based on what you want to achieve

Remember…..

* Most of your children have the desire to interact but they may not be sure how to figure out the situation that they are in and how to respond
* This takes work and can be draining to focus so intensely
* They are not necessarily being difficult purposefully.

How do you even start?

* Observe
	+ Watch your child in different situations. This includes environments and people
	+ Watch their actions plus what how others respond to them.
	+ Recruit someone impartial to help with this and allow them to be honest with you about what they observe

Next step

* Listen
	+ Listen to what other people say about your child’s social abilities, such as family members and teachers.
	+ Listen when your child describes situations they find difficult.
	+ Listen to me when I’m telling you not to take your child’s difficulties personally!!!

Evaluate

* If the school has done an assessment, really look at all areas of it.
* Complete a simple assessment yourself.
* [do2learn JobTIPS Determining Interests & Social Skills Assessments](http://do2learn.com/JobTIPS/DeterminingInterests/SocialSkillsAssessments/Assessments.html)
* Make a list of areas or situations that they need to work on.

Most importantly……

* Most of the time there is not a standard measurement.
* Subjectivity will always be present
* Most social expectations are always changing and adjustments have to be made.

Choose a skill or category to start working on:

* + Motivation
	+ Unwritten Rules
	+ Perspective Taking
	+ Initiative
	+ Face to Face Time

Emphasize

* We are part of a social world and we all need people
	+ We don’t eat, play games, or learn without others
	+ You have strengths and that’s what you want to show others
	+ Focus on how you want to be treated. Are you treating others the same?

Motivation

* Some may not care or want to put in the effort to work on social learning.
* This is when you need to find their motivation or currency:
	+ Friends
	+ Jobs- school, home, community
	+ Being treated better
	+ Outside motivator

Unwritten Rules- Every environment has unwritten rules such as:

* Store
	+ Don’t cut in line
	+ Be ready to pay
	+ Put items back where they belong
	+ Close the dressing room door
	+ [Understood.org 5 unwritten social rules](https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/common-challenges/following-social-rules/5-unwritten-social-rules)

Teach them directly

Expected vs Unexpected Behaviors

* Expected helps you be seen positively
* Unexpected causes you to be perceived as different or difficult
* Make lists of expected behaviors and how they make others feel
* Explain consequences of unexpected behaviors and how they make you feel about themselves

Expected Home behavior

* Put your dishes in the dishwasher
* This makes mom and dad very happy
* Consequence is that they don’t nag or fuss at you and you get time to play your video game
* This makes you happy!

Unexpected Home Behavior

* You left your plate on the table after eating
* Mom and dad are angry because now there is a plate with food stuck to it and they are having to find you
* Consequence- parents fuss at you and make you leave your activity to clean your plate
* You’re upset because you can’t finish playing your game and your parents spoke to you firmly

Perspective Taking

* + Being able to think about your own ideas and thoughts and recognizing that others have their own thoughts and ideas
	+ Others are thinking of you while you are thinking of them
	+ Your thoughts and ideas may not be the same and that is okay!!

Activity Ideas

* Mind reader- What are they thinking?
* Sandwich- Make one for someone else
* Gift giving- What does mom want?
* Compliment- What will make them happy?

Initiative

* Being able to start something. This includes tasks and conversation such as:
	+ Asking for help or asking to find out more information
	+ Introductions
	+ Making “small talk” or “big” talk
	+ Calling someone on the phone
	+ Answering the phone

Activity Ideas

* Bumper sticker- What would you talk to them about?
* Errands-Delivery or doing a task that involves another
* Deliver messages-Verbal with and without responses needed
* Follow asking for help rules
* Phone calls- staged and code word
	+ Added note use scripting to begin if necessary

Face to Face Time

* Being able to concentrate on what others are saying and by showing your interest by
	+ Turn taking
	+ Body language
	+ Using appropriate language
	+ Proper closure

Activity Ideas

* Toolkit- known facts and starters
* Teach and practice appropriate social greetings- formal & social
* Stoplight turn taking- green (30) yellow (30) red-switch
* TV detective- Johnny Bravo & Tool Time
* People watching- read their body language & make up stories
* How was your day?
* Video modeling

Social/Emotional Reactions

* Others will react to how your social behavior makes them feel which in turn affects how they respond to you.
* In time or severe instances, this creates a lasting impression or image they have of you.
* This in turn affects our own thoughts, feelings and actions.
* Circle of People- Family, Friendship, Acquaintance, Community Helpers, Strangers
	+ Appropriate responses to each
	+ Actions allowed
	+ Role or importance in life
	+ How you want to be treated by each

More Ideas

* Code word for self-monitoring
* Practice by:
	+ Role playing ( what if cards)
	+ Living out loud in family situations and sharing your own social mistakes
	+ Social stories- describe social situations and define appropriate responses
	+ Scripting- plan response ahead of time

Choose a category

* Focus on that skill or component to work on.
* Practice in different settings and with different people.
* Use social stories and/or scripting
* Praise results!!!

IEP Goals & Objectives

* Social learning goals are crucial but the difficulty is taking something abstract and subjective and then turning it into concrete measurements.
* The objectives should be measurable and specific.
* The objective should begin where your child’s baseline measurement is and represent a critical skill.
* They should be written clear enough that the same conclusion would be reached if several people were measuring the criteria.

Which is clearer and more measurable?

* For 36 instructional weeks, Chris will converse for 10 minutes with a peer.
* For 36 instructional weeks, during structured class time, using no more than 1 gestural prompt (point or pre-arranged signal), Chris will initiate a conversation with a peer that will last a minimum of 2 verbal exchanges in 3 of 5 weekly trials.

It’s a marathon not a sprint

* [Jill Kuzma's SLP Social & Emotional Skill Sharing Site](https://jillkuzma.wordpress.com/)
* [Carol Gray and Social Stories](http://carolgraysocialstories.com/)
* [Michelle Garcia Winner and Social Thinking](https://www.socialthinking.com/)
* [Scott Bellini Building Social Relationships](http://bellinibsr.com/home.html)