

What Is It?

Teaching a social skill is an individualized strategy to increase positive social interactions between young children. Examples of important social skills include sharing, turn taking, greeting, communicating interests and compliments, and play ideas. Positive social skills promote positive relationships, friendships, and social acceptance. In many cases, social skills serve as a functional alternative to challenging behavior.

When to Use It

- When a child demonstrates difficulty interacting with peers (e.g., plays by self, avoids peers).
- When a child uses challenging behavior to gain peer attention.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Assess the child's current social skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Assess the communicative function (i.e., reason) the child engages in challenging behavior toward peers (if applicable).
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Determine what skill(s) to teach using assessment results and input from teachers, family members, and the child themselves as appropriate. Make sure that the social skill you teach is age appropriate, and developmentally and culturally appropriate. The skill should be as easy or easier to engage in relative to the challenging behavior (if applicable; e.g., tapping to replace hitting, using a gesture to replace screaming and grabbing).
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Teach the child the selected social skill(s) using modeling, prompting, and positive descriptive feedback.
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Teach and provide opportunities to practice the skill regularly (e.g., daily).
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Use positive descriptive feedback to reinforce appropriate use of the social skill, even when the skill requires prompting. If necessary, use other forms of reinforcement to increase the likelihood that the child will independently use the social skill (e.g., token system or access to a preferred object).
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Monitor progress of the skill and modify your instruction, as needed.

Example

Kelly is an inclusive preschool classroom teacher. For the last several weeks, she has used universal strategies for promoting positive peer interactions including physically rearranging the classroom furniture to include more space for pretend play and building activities, regularly rotating materials based on children's current interests, and modeling different social skills during circle time.

After a week of intentional modeling, prompting, and reinforcement for getting friends' attention, Teacher Kelly notices that one child, Wesley, still has trouble with this skill. Instead of calmly saying his friends' names when he wants their attention, he engages in challenging behavior such as yelling and pushing. She conducts a functional behavior assessment that confirms the function of his yelling and pushing is peer attention. In addition to the universal instruction, Teacher Kelly creates an individual plan for Wesley that includes visual steps for how to appropriately gain peers' attention, increased opportunities to practice with an adult before centers and free play, and a token system to reinforce successful attempts to gain peers' attention. Teacher Kelly takes data to monitor Wesley's progress and sees a gradual improvement in this social skill. Eventually Teacher Kelly slowly fades out the visual steps and the token system so Wesley can use the skill more independently with his peers. She continues to assess other social skills and provide individualized instruction and support as needed.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Practice the skill with the child before providing opportunities to practice the skill with a peer.
- Use verbal or visual reminders to support the child in using their new skill during naturally occurring opportunities with peers.

Resources

Bovey, T., & Strain, P. [Promoting positive peer social interactions](#). (Issue Brief No. 8). Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

Ostrosky, M. M., & Meadan, H. (2010). [Helping children play and learn together](#). *Young Children*, 65, 104-110.

Strain, P. S., & Kohler, F. W. (1998). [Peer-mediated social intervention for young children with autism](#). *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 19(4), 391-405.