



Social Skills

Often children with ASD have difficulty understanding social interactions and seeing things from another person's perspective. They tend to try and understand the social world intellectually as opposed to intuitively, this can lead to anxiety or stress. Some children may really want to play with another child but may not know how and some may prefer to be alone at times, which is ok.

Skills important for social interactions include:

- sharing
- taking turns
- waiting
- following directions
- asking for help
- joining with others
- greeting others
- requesting appropriately
- gaining attention appropriately
- using appropriate eye contact
- maintaining appropriate personal space
- managing emotions
- negotiating
- transitioning (moving from one activity to another)

Parents can use the following strategies to practice social skills at home and in other environments, for example the supermarket, playground, or a friend's house. Practicing routine interactions and social skills can better prepare your child for how to act/react in different situations. Try to encourage adults and other children spending time with your child to model good social skills as well.

Strategies:

- Comment on social responses in yourself and others during everyday activities so your child can become aware of cause and effect in social situations, for example, "I feel happy when you share your toys" or "Sam feels sad when you take his toy away".
- Set aside time to play simple games (appropriate to your child's developmental age) with your child without distractions such as television or other technology. For example, hide and seek, tiggi, statues, board games. Don't focus on too many skills at once during a game because this can be overwhelming and the experience should be fun.
- Use visual resources to support the learning of new social skills, for example when practising turn-taking hold an object to indicate when it is your turn then pass it to the next person when your turn is finished. Combine this with specific language (at a level appropriate for your child), for example "mummy's turn finished, now Katie's turn" (while passing the object to Katie). A visual timer can be very useful if your child has difficulty moving on from an activity they enjoy so if this creates problems with turn-taking you could use the visual timer for everybody's turn. Visual schedules or pictures to illustrate skills or sequencing of events assist in lessening anxiety in children and make transitions easier.



Strategies to assist with social skill development.....

- Invite friends or relatives over to practice social skills through playing games and having conversations.
- Give lots of specific praise when your child demonstrates the social skill you are practising, for example “great sharing Tom” or “good looking at mummy”
- Organise play dates with other children and encourage friendships where possible. It does not matter if the child is a boy or a girl, younger or older. Support the social interaction where necessary and take note of particular difficulties your child experiences so you can practice those skills at another time.
- Join clubs and other local activities, such as scouts, music groups or play gyms. Not only are these great opportunities to practice social skills but they are also good for developing interests. Prepare your child before their first visit as much as possible by showing pictures or photos of the building and staff or writing a social script/story.
- Social Stories (Carol Gray) are a great tool for explaining the social information behind a specific situation, skill, or concept in a reassuring manner that is easily understood. They also describe common and appropriate responses, which may lead to improved responses from the child. For more information, please visit <http://thegraycenter.org/>