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Social Skills Strategies for Parents and Teachers

All students need to learn appropriate social skills to have a healthy lifestyle as a child, teen, and adult. With appropriate social skills, students can make and keep friends, give and get respect from peers and adults, self-advocate, and gain needed self-respect, self-confidence, and independence. Growing up with these skills can help a child be an independent, well-rounded, socially acceptable individual who can make his own decisions and plan his own future. Below are strategies for both parents and teachers.

Social Problem	Parent Strategies	Teacher Strategies
Poor peer relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Have the child participate in non-threatening social experiences such as classes, sports, or other outside of school activities or volunteering.▪ If social problems are caused due to family issues—divorce, new sibling in home, death in the family, etc, give time and support, and let the child develop skills at their own pace as long as it's healthy for the child to do so.▪ Give the child time to share peer-related concerns one-on-one or as a family.▪ Let the child know that it is okay if he is not liked by everyone all the time, and that what is more important is that he has a few quality friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Create non-threatening social experiences such as smaller group sizes or having older children mentor younger (non-threatening) students to build up self-confidence in social settings.▪ Include formal social skills training in class setting or individually.▪ Cooperative classroom projects can help children who need to improve their social reputations. This gives them time to work on developing the small group cooperative skills, while getting to know classmates in a safe environment.▪ Give children opportunities to share peer-related concerns, one-on-one, in small groups or as a whole.
Feels like they have no friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ If the child does not have any friends—or feels that he doesn't—the main priority is to help the child to identify their friends. Help the child to think back on when he needed help, or was lonely, or not feeling good. Who was there? Who helped him? Who comes over to play? Who calls? Who lets the child know when things happen in his favorite class, or sports, or on the playground? Eventually the child will see a pattern of who his friends really are!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Before talking with a child about this subject, observe him for a day or two at least. See whom he plays with or hangs out with. Who does the child choose to go stand by? This will give the teacher an indication as to who this student sees as his friends and companions. It will also give teaching staff an idea if this child is being harassed, bullied or victimized in any way. Also see the parent sections.

Social Problem	Parent Strategies	Teacher Strategies
Dealing with a student who torments others in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If parents know that a certain student always harasses their child, the teacher needs to know. One of the children might be able to be moved to another class so that both students can have a more productive year. ▪ If moving to another class isn't possible, the teacher can at a minimum, make sure the students are not seated near each other, or ever work in groups together. ▪ Parents might request that their child and the other student participate in the peer mediation program, if available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Find something that the child who does the harassing likes. Create an activity "as an incentive" for that child to behave. For example, Billy is the harasser and he loves animals. The class has a pet turtle. If Billy can control himself and not bully others, he gets to take care of the class turtle. ▪ Praise students for their positive actions. ▪ Teachers may be surprised to eventually see them exhibit more positive behaviors than negative behaviors, because they are still getting attention—but now it is positive instead of negative.
Dealing with new situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents can arrange to take their child or have him go with a friend to the new classroom or school to understand the layout of the campus or classroom. Have the child walk to each class, as he will on any given day once school starts. ▪ If entering high school, have the child take a summer class at the high school. This will give the student time to feel like he fits in, with fewer students to deal with. Then when the school years starts with all 2000 students on campus, the student will automatically know his way around and won't get confused or frustrated as easily by the layout of the campus. ▪ Parents can inform others who will be new to the child's routine about any issues that need to be addressed. These people might be the gym coach, music teacher, art teacher, bus driver, cafeteria workers, school nurse, school secretary, or volunteers on the playground. Parents might consider going into the classroom and discussing their child's special needs with his new classmates. ▪ Parents need to encourage their child to get involved with clubs and activities to have more opportunities to socialize with their peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This can be debilitating, especially to older, less mature students who feel they are socially expected to be able to handle new situations as a young adult. ▪ If a teacher suspects a student is apprehensive about a change in placement, on campus or in moving to a new campus or school, talk to him about his feelings. ▪ Find out why the student feels that way—many times these fears can be easily relieved by identifying the root of their concerns. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * It may be that the student has heard rumors that aren't true. * It maybe that the student had a sibling or friend who had a bad experience. * It may be that the student is afraid of getting lost on a new campus. * It may be that the student is afraid of having to make new friends, deal with a new teacher, or even administrators. * It maybe that the student is afraid of having to change buses—or walk a different route. * It may be that the student's disability presents limitations to accessibility around the campus and they are worried about getting to class.

Social Problem	Parent Strategies	Teacher Strategies
Dealing with sarcasm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with the child to learn how to maintain his composure and stay calm. Sarcasm can be very hurtful without the other student realizing it. Children need to learn how to handle it by letting it bounce off and moving on. If a child tries to come back with his own sarcastic remarks, many times it can lead to anger on both sides and ultimately into fights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with the child one on one to teach him/her coping skills. This can be used as a group project as well by role-playing. Use case situations where both students continue to make sarcastic remarks (verbal ping-pong). The role-play where one of the two students successfully deter the remarks. Also see parent section.
Dealing with social norms	<p>Social norms are those things most of us take for granted such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * doing chores daily without being told; * eating with silverware, not his hands; * drinking from a cup, not the carton; * cleaning up the toothpaste from the bathroom sink before he leaves; and * asking permission before leaving with friends. <p>Before confronting their child for not following norms or for inappropriate behavior, a parent needs to be sure the child understands the difference between acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior. If a child drinks out of the carton, make sure he understands that it is not appropriate—and why. Let the child know how germs are spread before correcting him for not cleaning up the sink. Make sure adults and siblings in the family are role models for appropriate behavior.</p> <p>Many social norms can be handled through leading by example and talking to the child about the reasons for choosing “appropriate behavior” vs. “inappropriate behavior.”</p>	<p>Social norms are those things most of us take for granted such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * picking up a soda can from the floor and putting it in the garbage; * holding the door open for the person behind him; * saying the ABCs, not burping them; * knocking on the closed bathroom door instead of bursting in; and * raising his hand to ask permission, not just getting up in the middle of class to get a drink. <p>Some of these norms can be worked on at the first of the year, and then refreshers given throughout the year. For some children, it may be a daily battle. Patience must be taken with these students. Realize that consistency is the key. Teachers may wish to enlist the assistance of the parent or older sibling to help model the desired behavior at home.</p>
Interfacing with teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As a new school year approaches, parents need to start talking with their child, as well as the child’s teachers and any others that might have an educational interest in their son or daughter. What type of teacher is best for him? If able, try to select a teacher that can meet all the child’s needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observe and assess the INDIVIDUAL child. What are his abilities for understanding the process, for physically completing the process or activity, and his interest in the process or project? ▪ Give approval and praise on a regular basis. ▪ Encourage children to pursue activities that build on their own skill, interests and abilities. This will

Interfacing with teacher <i>cont.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When parents have meetings with the new teacher, they need to try to keep things positive. ▪ Share the great things the child can do, and put a positive spin on his limitations. For example: "When my child reads a book, he has trouble with reading comprehension, but he is a whiz at recalling details, if he can watch or listen to it." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increase motivation and self-esteem. ▪ Help the child learn from his mistakes, rather than get frustrated or upset. Help the child to turn statements like, "I can't do anything right" into those with a positive theme such as "I can do lots of things right, I just had a hard time with this project."
Independent thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give the child opportunities to choose (as long as safety, morals, or school policies are not waived): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * what to read; * what to wear to school (within dress codes); * what to play with; * where to go; * when to come home; * who to go with; and * how to decorate his own room. <p>Individuality helps to define a child's independence and increases self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give the student opportunities to choose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * types of books to report on; * types of reports (written, oral, project, or group work); * types of activities (centers or physical, written/oral); * types of exercises in Physical Education; * types of music to study in music class; and * types of class volunteer activities.

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