

Child & Family Health Division

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

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What is social skill?

“the ability to interact with others in a given social context in ways that are societally acceptable or valued and at the same time are personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily for other”

Combs and Slaby (1977)



> Social behaviour is culturally defined



What is social development?

- > **Social development** - learning how to behave and 'get on' well with others.
relies on
- > **Emotional development** - learning how to manage feelings so they work for us not against us.



Why is it important?

- > “The single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not IQ, not school grades and not classroom behaviour but rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children...children who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk”.

> Hartup, 1992



Infant ----->Adult
Long Journey

- > Infant - Feels, does not recognise feelings or know what they are, may be overwhelmed by feelings, feelings dominate behaviour, does not separate self from others.
- > Adult - Feels, recognises feelings, names them, accepts them, chooses how to act.
- > Early relationships become the template for the future.



The language of children's feelings is behaviour.

- > Adults teach the language to name and describe feelings.
- > Adults teach acceptance of feelings – own and others
- > Adults teach behavioural boundaries.



Managing Feelings

- > This takes a long time - years
- > First step – holding – being with
- > Second step - naming
- > Acceptance
- > Third step - helping (distraction/delay)
- > Fourth step - teaching

What time out teaches

- > Separation is a way to deal with problems
- > Problems are dealt with individually not together



What “time in” teaches

- > Feelings can be managed
- > Problems don't bring either retribution or drive people away
- > There are helpful ways to express feelings
- > Problems can be solved
- > Adults are there to help you





Social skills

Group joining skills

- > Watch
- > Hover
- > Smile
- > Make a non-self referential overture



Neglected children

- > Watch
- > Hover
- > Do not make overture



Rejected children

- > Spend little time watching/hovering
- > Make aggressive or dominating overture



Children learn

- > Non verbal language - smile, look, approach
- > Verbal language - greeting, joining, talking, questions,
- > Listening - taking turns
- > Sensitivity - how their approach affects others



Children who do well

- > Are friendly and optimistic
- > Have group joining skills
- > Make relevant contributions
- > Are interested in others
- > Have a predictive understanding of others' reaction to them
- > Positive non verbal interaction



Social Difficulties

- > One third of children bring problems from home
- > One third don't understand how to behave differently
- > One third are bored or in inappropriate environment

> Lilian Katz, 2001




Some things to try


- > Address the cause
- > Safe base (adult) near while the child gains confidence
- > Grouping with socially competent
- > Invite a single peer home



What parents can do

- > Clearly say what the child needs to do
- > Allow learning from mistakes without ridicule
- > Give private, respectful consequences
- > Let children help set rules
- > Acknowledge that some children test rules and that they unconsciously do so in order to check out how much people care about them and how much they belong

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- > Practice desired social skills
 - > Coach and support children who find it difficult to join in groups
 - > Label and encourage positive social behaviour
 - > Model what you want to see

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- > Use biblio-therapy to look at different viewpoints
 - > Intervene when necessary - ignored bullying does not disappear
 - > Teach problem solving skills: show and practice problem solving with puppets/role play
 - > Follow up solutions



> **Children live their labels**

Social development - what matters



- > Social development starts at birth
- > The foundations are laid in the early years
- > Social development occurs within relationships
- > Social skills are crucial to success at school and in the world.