



Social Skills

One of the most important life skills is learning how to get along with others. While many students come to class with social skills already in place, there are other students that may learn inappropriate behaviours or lack certain skills. Many students will benefit from direct teaching of social skills such as listening, thinking before acting, establishing and maintaining friendships, dealing with feelings, accepting consequences, and dealing with peer pressure. Social skills enable students to get along with others and be more successful in school and life. These essential skills are the foundation of what students will need to become responsible, global citizens. Consistent modelling, teaching and reinforcement of positive social skills also promotes students' self-esteem, self-control, sense of responsibility, and respect for the rights of others.

Social skills can be grouped into the following categories:

- **classroom survival skills** such as listening to the teacher, following instructions and obeying classroom rules
- **interpersonal skills** such as complimenting others, beginning a conversation, making eye contact, listening and joining in a discussion
- **emotional management skills** such as recognizing another's feelings and recognizing one's own feelings
- **coping or anger management skills** such as self-control and responding appropriately to teasing or insults
- **stress management skills** such as dealing with embarrassment or failure.

Promoting Social Skills

Perhaps the most common and the most important way social skills are taught is through the interactions teachers have with their students each day. When teachers consistently speak politely and respectfully to their students and demonstrate kindness through their interactions, they are modelling good manners and positive behaviour. Teachers can also communicate what is acceptable social behaviour through methods such as displaying a chart of classroom expectations, rules or tips. For example, a list of

[Tips for Working with Partners](#) could be posted on a bulletin board and provided to each student. Finally, positive social behaviours can be taught through direct instruction. Using a variety of strategies will ensure that the message is reinforced and different learning styles are addressed. For example, teachers could follow a discussion of a specific social skill with an interactive game, an art activity, role-playing, or journal writing that supports the skill taught.

Social Skills Training

Direct instruction in social skills provides opportunities for all students to acquire or practise behaviours that improve learning and social interactions. The ultimate goal of social skills training is to have the learned skills used in real-life situations. Social skills instruction can be offered in separate lessons, but is more often incorporated into other lessons as the skills are needed. For a sample lesson, see [Sample Prosocial Skills Lesson Plan for Junior High](#).

Consider the following guidelines for direct teaching of social skills.

- Focus on a limited number of skills a year and build on these.
- Start with a simple skill such as following directions, listening, responding to signals or asking for help, rather than a more complex skill such as responding to aggression.
- Involve students in selecting the skills they want and need to learn. Students can assess their current skills using a checklist such as [Getting Along with Others Inventory](#).
- Communicate the reason for developing the skill (share the objective and purpose).
- Indicate a non-example of the skill, or model a non-example and ask students what you did. Have students identify in their own language what was wrong and what should be done.
- Define the skill or consider what steps are involved in the skill.
- Model several positive examples. Always provide more positive examples than negative ones, and never include students in non-examples.
- Have students role-play situations. To reduce anxiety, begin by role-playing situations with students, then move to guided role-play between students (the teacher structures the situation), and finally to independent role-play (students generate the ideas and come back to the group and debrief).
- Use a specific process to provide feedback:
 - provide feedback to the main actor (did he or she stay in role, make it seem real, use all the steps and use appropriate body language?)
 - provide feedback to co-actors (did they provide realistic details?)
 - provide feedback to the audience (how well did they watch, how well did they pick up non-verbal cues?)
- Provide opportunities throughout the day for feedback and practising the skill.

- Provide opportunities in subsequent lessons to transfer the skill to other situations.

Other Resources

- The Knowledge and Employability Studio contains a variety of students tips and tools for being a successful student, working in groups and problem solving.
- The Alberta Education resource *Make School Work for You* provides strategies and tools that students can use to build self-knowledge, get organized, be more effective in class, get along with others and stay motivated.
- There are Web sites that offer comprehensive advice on teaching prosocial skills. Try using a search engine to search for “social skills training.”

Tips for Working with a Partner

- ✓ Start off on friendly ground. Show that you're ready to work together by moving closer to your partners so you can hear each other and share materials. Acknowledge your partners right away and remind them of your name if there's a chance they don't know it.
 - "Hi Jay, glad to be working with you today."
 - "I'm CJ. I don't think we've worked together before."
- ✓ Get the directions right. Listen carefully to directions so you understand what has to be done and how long you have to complete the task. Clarify the directions with your partners.
 - "So, as I understand it, we need to..."
 - "Is that how you understand this?"
- ✓ Focus. Sit close to your partners and maintain eye contact. Use a quiet voice that your partners can hear but other students cannot. Resist the urge to chat, listen in on other conversations or visit with friends in another part of the room. Do time checks to stay on schedule. If your partners complain about the task, acknowledge their feelings but let them know you're determined to finish the job.
 - "Okay, we have five minutes left to get 10 more ideas."
 - "I'm not crazy about this assignment either but we should be able to get it done pretty fast."
- ✓ Do your share of the work. Break the job into smaller tasks and divide them up. Try to pick the jobs you're most comfortable with, if you can, but don't refuse to do a job. If your partners are doing all the work, speak up and let them know you are willing to do your part.
 - "How about I do two and you do two? You pick the first one."
 - "You're doing a lot of the work here, I better do my part. I'll do the next section."
- ✓ Be a good listener. Take turns talking and try not to interrupt your partner. Show you're listening by nodding your head and keeping eye contact. Encourage your partner to continue or expand on thoughts. Acknowledge and appreciate the other person's position, even if you don't agree with it.
 - "Can you tell me more about that?"
 - "That's a great idea!"
 - "I never thought of that!"
 - "I understand your point of view."
- ✓ Make sure you understand what your partner is saying. If you're unsure, try restating what the other person has been said in the form of a question, or share parts that you understood and ask your partner to rephrase parts that were missed.
 - "Do you mean that ...?"
 - "I understand these things that you said: ... Can you restate parts I might have missed?"
- ✓ Say thanks. When you're finished, let your partners know you appreciate their work.
 - "Thanks, you had a lot of good ideas."
 - "Good to work with you."

Sample Prosocial Skills Lesson Plan for Junior High: Making Good Decisions¹

Set

Discuss with students the kinds of situations that require them to make decisions. Relate the discussion to issues and decisions that students might be facing in their lives, such as the friends they choose and the types of behaviours they exhibit in certain situations. Decisions you may want to draw attention to include: who they choose as friends, what they do in their spare time, should they smoke and should they choose to have sex. The purpose of the discussion is to demonstrate how many decisions students make every day of their lives, and how their decisions can impact on them positively or negatively based on their ability to make appropriate decisions. Once students have their attention focused on decision making and are beginning to see its value, then move on to the decision-making strategies.

Definition

Define the strategies for good decision making. Using the overhead, list the strategies and talk about each of them. The visual representation on the overhead projector is important to enable students to refer to the strategies on an ongoing basis.

Strategies

- Ask yourself if your decision could hurt you either physically or mentally.
- Ask yourself if your decision could hurt others either physically or mentally.
- Ask yourself if your decision could damage anything.

If students suggest alternative strategies, accept them and add them to the list.

Brainstorm

Brainstorm the kinds of decisions students will need to make today. Facilitate discussion by having them think about contexts both in and out of school.

Modelling

Demonstrate a process for making a decision at home or at work, such as deciding whether to complete some unfinished work or to go out for lunch. Demonstrate an example of negative decision making (choosing to ignore the work and go for lunch), and the outcome of this decision. Model an example of positive decision making (choosing to do your work instead of going for lunch) using the above strategies. Use self-talk to demonstrate the decision-making strategies used, so students understand the purpose of self-talk in monitoring behaviour.

Role-play

Ask students to form pairs and decide on a situation they could role-play to demonstrate the process of making an appropriate decision. Move around the room to monitor and guide students in the development of these role-plays. It is important to ensure students represent a situation as realistically as possible.

Performance Feedback

Give pairs the opportunity to share their role plays with the class. Coach the students who are observing the role play to give specific feedback regarding the acting demonstrated in the role play and whether or not the strategies were used appropriately.

Transference

Once a few groups have shared their role plays, tell students you will be asking them to make decisions through the rest of the period. For example, when students are completing a science investigation in groups, ask them to make decisions about who they will work with, who will get the materials and how much work each will do. The purpose is to make students consciously aware of using the strategies and to give them the opportunity to practise the strategies in meaningful situations.

1. Reproduced with permission from Edmonton Public School District No. 7.

Getting Along with Others Inventory²

Name: _____

Date: _____



In Class

	always	usually	sometimes	not yet
• I arrive in class on time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I bring needed books and supplies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I greet other students as I enter the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I answer questions with a few sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• When I start a conversation, I check that the other people appear interested.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I limit small talk to before and after class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I sit up straight.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I remove distracting hoods and hats.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I make eye contact with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I show active listening by nodding my head and turning to the speaker.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I volunteer at least two answers per class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• If I've missed directions, I look to other students for clues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

With Partners in Small Groups

• I am willing to work with a variety of partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I try to make others feel comfortable by making small talk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I show that I'm willing to work with others by moving closer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am polite to people I would rather not work with.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I listen carefully to directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I clarify direction with my partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I make a rough plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. From Alberta Learning, *Make School Work for You: A Resource for Junior and Senior High Students Who Want to be More Successful Learners* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, 2001), pp. 95–96.

Getting Along with Others Inventory (continued)

	always	usually	sometimes	not yet
• I check the deadlines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I use a quiet voice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I stay with my group and focus on the task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I resist complaining about the assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I do my share of the work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I volunteer ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I show good listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I encourage others to contribute their ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I refrain from put-downs of other people's ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am willing to try new roles, even if I'm uncomfortable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I support my partners in group presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Solving Problems

• I use all my skills to build a positive working relationship with partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I let partners know when I think we have a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am willing to make a new plan and start over.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• If necessary, I'll share my concerns with the teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Getting Connected

• I participate in at least one extracurricular activity each term.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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