

Introduction

Adolescents who have not acquired appropriate social skills on their own are unlikely to develop those skills without specific instruction. Activities in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent* include explicit teaching, modeling, observation, discussion, role-playing, and other guided practice to spotlight specific social skill areas from different perspectives and with varying everyday situations. These activities can be presented to individual students or small groups of students with similar skill deficits.

Before beginning any social skill training, you should evaluate each student's current performance. Determine whether the student has a performance deficit (has the skills but doesn't use them) or an acquisition deficit (lacks the skills or the discrimination of which behaviors to use in specific situations). The activities in this series are designed for students who need direct instruction and guided practice to acquire and master specific skills. Use the Pretest/Posttest, observation, teacher reports, and/or personal interview to select appropriate lessons to present. These are the books in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent*:

- Nonverbal Language
- Making Social Inferences
- Emotions
- Conversations
- Getting Along
- Interpersonal Negotiation

Getting along with others may be the ultimate goal of social skills instruction. It's a topic that encompasses many things from empathic understanding to gracious acceptance of compliments. Because the self-esteem of adolescents is tied so closely to peer acceptance, the skills needed to acquire intimacy with peers often need to be taught explicitly and practiced repetitively. This book addresses some of the most basic areas of learning to understand and get along with others as well as acquiring some of the "social graces" that can make or break even the most casual interactions. These are the objectives of this book:

- identify others' moods and take their perspectives
- understand your own and others' feelings to build empathic understanding
- recognize how using kind words contributes to getting along
- avoid disagreements by making good conversational choices
- ask appropriate questions to participate in transactional interactions
- recognize similarities in situations that contain superficial differences
- give and receive compliments
- make meaningful apologies
- give constructive criticism and understand the concept of social white lies
- understand and accept the difference between fairness and equality
- answer questions about getting along in story contexts

Here are some tips to improve your students' abilities to get along with their peers:

- Learning to get along in social situations begins with recognizing basic emotional states. When students realize that their actions can affect the emotions of others, they can begin to make good social choices. Use pictures of people in various emotional states. Begin with the basic emotions of fear, happiness, anger, sadness, etc., and ask your students to identify and label each emotion. Then ask your students, "What's something that might have happened to make this person feel this way?" When students are proficient in labeling basic emotions and speculating causes for those feelings, move to more abstract and sophisticated emotions, such as joyful, disappointed, embarrassed, confused, and disgusted.
- Empathic understanding is the key to getting along with peers. One way to build empathy in your students is through unselfish service acts. Get your students involved in a small volunteer project within the school. You might have them read a story to the kindergarten class or volunteer to help younger students with a craft activity. A clean-up project around the school might also be a possibility. After completing each activity, talk about how your students' actions might have affected others. Ask them to think about how their efforts made someone else's life a little better. Have your students talk about how doing the activity made them feel and what other things they could do in their lives that would make them feel the same way.
- Encouraging students to examine the causes of emotional states in their own lives is a powerful way to develop empathy. At the top of a sheet of paper or on the board, write, "A time I felt . . ." Then on the left-hand side, write various emotional states (disappointed, elated, amused, frustrated, embarrassed). Have students think about events in their lives that caused them to feel those emotions. Encourage them to share specific details about each event, such as the people who were involved, what words were said, and what they remember most about the feeling.
- Guilt is a great social instructor. Although often painful, guilt prevents us from making the same mistakes over and over. Have your students talk about situations in which they felt guilty for making someone else feel bad or for a mistake they made. Remind them of the importance of feeling guilty about actions, but also use the opportunity to talk about how to make meaningful apologies, how to atone for mistakes, and how to use social errors as building blocks for strengthening relationships. Tell your students that instead of avoiding someone when you are angry or feeling guilty, they should use the opportunity to talk about how the situation could have been handled differently and how apologizing appropriately might help everyone overcome bad feelings.

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Getting Along!*

Carolyn and Paul