

# 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

Since peer relationships are the most important to the majority of adolescents, this training resource contains content mostly targeted to adolescent concerns and peer relationships. Each activity sheet affords a chance to highlight a specific skill and to facilitate discussing that skill with your students. The more you personalize the activities with examples from the students' particular situations, the more effective your training will be.

*Spotlight on Social Skills, Adolescent: Interpersonal Negotiation* teaches your students to manage everyday conflicts successfully. Negotiation skills emerge and develop through adolescence and are usually first successful in peer relationships. The same skills later generalize to interpersonal negotiation with adults, coworkers and others. These skills are required in order to manage interpersonal negotiation as well:

- Identify and state the problem from each party's perspective or a mutual perspective
- Discuss the problem with the other party; explain personal perspective and listen well to the other party's expressed and implied preferences
- Mutually determine appropriate solutions to satisfy both parties
- Accept compromises and negative outcomes graciously; be a good sport

Research suggests developmental levels of interpersonal negotiation.\* Young children don't negotiate; they use physical or verbal action to get what they want or they avoid a conflict

\*Selman, R.L. & Schultz, L.H. (1989). Children's strategies for interpersonal negotiation with peers: An interpretive/empirical approach to the study of social development. In T.J. Berndt, & G.W. Ladd, eds., *Peer relationships in child development*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

altogether. Next they choose one-sided, all-or-nothing, win/lose solutions to conflicts; they control the other person or submit to what the other person wants. At a cooperative level, students consciously seek solutions by making requests, giving suggestions, bribing, compromising, or accommodating another person's wishes. During adolescence, interpersonal negotiation skills are refined via experience and maturation. Students learn to discuss a conflict situation with the other party, working together to seek mutual goals. The primary goal at this level is to maintain a solid, long-term relationship with a friend vs. to settle a disagreement just for the immediate moment.

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you present the activities in this book to your students.

- Taking another person's perspective is a prerequisite skill for mutual problem solving. Students with weak skills in taking someone else's point of view may benefit from direct training in making general inferences as well as making multiple interpretations about situations. Such training should emphasize that people can and do feel differently about similar situations due to their life experiences, preferences, etc. As part of the training, teach your students to ask appropriate questions to learn what someone else thinks or wants.
- Some adolescents cling to the less mature notion that fairness means "everyone gets the same" vs. the more mature concept: "Fairness means that everyone gets what he or she needs."\* As your students seek options to solve problems, especially in situations involving unequal strengths or circumstances, encourage them to think about what would be fair, which is not necessarily equal.
- Many students with language or social disorders lack confidence in expressing their opinions and suggestions to others. Teach your students the importance of expressing their own perspectives clearly to avoid being ignored or overpowered in interpersonal negotiations. Help them role-play interpersonal negotiations to build their confidence, especially for current personal situations they are trying to resolve.
- Some problem solutions would work well for the immediate problem, but would not help to maintain a friendship or long-term relationship. Talk with your students about the value of prioritizing long-term relationships above immediate peace or satisfaction.
- For more in-depth background and teaching activities, see *Room 28: A Social Language Program* (LinguiSystems, 2004).

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

Carolyn and Paul

\*"Fair" Isn't Always Equal. <http://www.ricklavoie.com/fairnessart.html>.