

# Introduction

Age-appropriate social skills are essential for students to get along well with their peers and to foster strong self-esteem. Social skills are rarely taught directly as a school subject, and most students gradually master social skills without formal instruction. Those who fail to infer expectations and “rules” from personal interactions with others are at risk for being criticized by their peers or, worse, ignored. Students on the autism spectrum are particularly at risk for poor social skills due to the nature of the disorder; many students with language and/or learning disabilities are also at risk.

The activities in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary* highlight specific aspects of social skills and include strategies of direct instruction, modeling, observation, discussion, role-playing, and other guided practice in contexts of everyday interaction. These activities can be presented to individual students or small groups of students. Small groups are preferred because they expose students to their peers’ perspectives and offer a safe setting for practicing social skills.

For an overview of a student’s social skills functioning, administer the *Social Language Development Test, Elementary* (Bowers, Huisingsh, & LoGiudice, 2008). Use the Pretest/Posttest (page 6) to check the student’s awareness and functioning in the appropriate area addressed by one of the six books in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary*:

- Nonverbal Language
- Emotions
- Making Friends
- Making Social Inferences
- Conversations
- Predicting Consequences

An important two-word phrase eludes most students with social skills deficits: “What if?” Due to their inability to anticipate consequences, they often make decisions that result in negative outcomes and fail to take action in situations that would result in very positive ones. Before leaping into action, these students fail to take the step to ask themselves, “What will happen if I do this?” or even, “What will happen if I don’t do this?” Predicting consequences is only part of the equation: weighing the pros and cons of multiple consequences is essential to both successful problem solving and social interaction. The activities and instruction in *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary: Predicting Consequences* attempt to address a wide range of prediction goals, including these:

- predict what will happen next in a situation
- understand and follow rules in different settings
- predict multiple outcomes
- make decisions based on predicted outcomes
- understand indirect requests
- use different communication styles depending on your audience
- evaluate predictions
- consider how actions affect others
- predict consequences in narratives

Here are some tips and activities to improve your students' abilities to predict consequences:

- Understanding basic cause and effect is essential to making accurate predictions. Ask your students basic questions to activate their own experience with cause and effect ("Why do we brush our teeth? Why do we go to school? Why do we look both ways before crossing the street?") Then have them make predictions using the same situations: "What might happen if we don't brush our teeth? What might happen if we don't go to school? What might happen if we don't look both ways before crossing the street?"
- Many students are not only unable to predict the consequences of their actions, they are unprepared to face them when they occur. Make sure students are aware of the resources they have available to them when their safety is in question. Talk about hypothetical situations and what students should do if they find themselves lost in the city, if they are injured on the playground, if someone is damaging their property at school, etc.
- Often when we talk about predicting consequences in the social realm, we focus on avoiding negative outcomes. Unfortunately, students with social deficits and their classroom teachers often have strained relationships. If you observe a student in such a situation, talk about how appropriate actions can result in more positive consequences, such as praise, classroom privileges, and a better relationship with the teacher. Brainstorm behaviors with your students that will result in more positive outcomes in the classroom. Encourage your students to think about and practice "teacher-pleasing" behaviors such as asking questions only when it is your turn, following directions on assignments carefully, observing other students for behavioral cues, and using appropriate loudness when talking in various settings.
- Predictions are not always accurate. When your student has begun to anticipate possible outcomes, he will find that even though he has put into practice a strategy for predicting outcomes, things may turn out completely differently. Be ready to review your students' thought processing for any flawed reasoning that might be avoided in the future. Also, reassure your student that no one predicts accurately all the time, even an adult.

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Social Skills, Elementary: Predicting Consequences*.

Carolyn and Paul