

Introduction

Unlike academic skills acquired via direct instruction in school, social skills develop as children observe and interact with others over time. This personal experience as well as brain maturation are essential to develop effective social interaction skills. Facility with language and nonverbal communication are also critical for getting along well with others.

Some children, for various reasons, are delayed or atypical in developing social skills. Weak or immature social skills compared to peers can make children the butt of teasing or, worse, completely ignored by their peers. We need to help such children “get the picture” of what’s going on and teach them to get along better. The trick is having a frame of reference for which skills to teach and in what order.

We developed and standardized the *Social Language Development Test – Elementary* (Bowers, Huisingsh, & LoGiudice, 2008) to examine the developmental progression of specific social language skills among students aged 6 through 11. Based on the results of this test as well as research and years of practical experience, we developed *Social Language Training – Elementary* to provide therapy materials that help instructors focus students’ attention on specific social skills. Although these specific skills overlap each other in real life and even among the units of this book, drawing attention to the skills independently brings new awareness to students who otherwise might not “get it.”

We arranged the units of this book in order of general skill complexity and development. If a student has difficulty with a higher-level skill, present earlier units to make sure the student has mastered them.

The outcome of social skills training based on this book will be that students will behave in ways that promote positive, effective interactions with others. The indicators for this outcome will be that students:

- Identify, label, and describe facial expressions that show specific emotions
- Recognize, interpret, and use gestures and nonverbal language appropriately
- Perceive and explain other people’s perspectives
- Make appropriate inferences based on visual and/or context clues
- Make multiple, logical interpretations of a given scenario
- Identify and solve problems
- Make and keep friends
- Respect others
- Negotiate conflicts, seeking mutually pleasing resolutions
- Support others, even when that means bending the truth to be kind
- Read between the lines to differentiate the true meaning of a spoken comment vs. the surface meaning of only the words

The activity sheets in this book are intended as fodder for stimulating discussion, modeling as necessary, and sharing related personal experience. The need for writing is minimal; all written activities may be done orally. In some cases, you may want to work through an activity sheet along with your students and then have them complete the sheets independently for reinforcement.

An answer key is provided for your reference. Please note that the answers listed are simply examples; accept other logical answers as correct.

Depending on your students' skill levels, use the scene illustrations within this book or from other sources as the basis for role-playing. Work with your students to create a logical script for them to enact.

The more you talk with your students about people's expressions, thoughts, intentions, and problem-solving, the more they will recognize the value of considering other people's perspectives. That knowledge should yield increased empathy and respect for others. It should also help your students consider the consequences of their actions in terms of other people's opinions as well as their own.

We hope you and your students enjoy this resource as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Linda and Carolyn