

Promoting Positive Peer Interactions

It's important for children to experience positive peer interactions with friends, classmates and acquaintances. These positive experiences build confidence, increase self-esteem and set the stage for future social/emotional development.

Teaching children social skills may be challenging, but you can make it a fun, positive experience. There are many ways in which parents can provide guidance and support:

- Initiate a conversation with your child about their relationships with friends and classmates. Listen and be patient.
- Ask about problems they are currently experiencing. Help them work through conflicts. Take the time to discuss and understand the situation. Discuss possible reasons for a peer's negative behavior (having a hard day, going through a difficult time, not interested in the activity, etc) and provide your child with positive ways to respond to the problem now and/or in the future.
- Model appropriate behaviors. Show your child how to positively interact with others through your behaviors in daily life. Remember, *your* behavior sets a powerful example for your child.
- Teach through everyday situations. Practice conversing at meal times and during daily activities such as driving, cooking, etc. Use age-appropriate tools such as imaginative play, board games, etc. to facilitate discussion.
- Role-play and practice typical social situations (appropriately greeting someone, initiating a conversation, responding to someone teasing them, etc.)
- Discuss how to handle disappointment, conflict and social setbacks.
- Provide children with structured opportunities to play with peers to help facilitate interactions and monitor their behaviors.
- Acknowledge appropriate behaviors and provide positive feedback (i.e., I noticed how well you were sharing, I'm proud of how you handled yourself, etc.)

By incorporating these exercises into your daily life, you can positively impact your children's social/emotional development and behaviors, and lay the framework for future growth.

Tips provided by Barrington Youth & Family Services (BYFS), a non-profit mental health agency providing services for Barrington area youth and their families residing within the boundaries of Barrington Community Unit School District 220.

BYFS offers comprehensive counseling, youth outreach and prevention programs. For more information, visit www.barringtonyouthandfamilyservices.org or call 847.381.0345.

