

Social Skill Building

A Resource for Adolescents

What are social skills?

Social skills are the skills we use everyday to communicate with others. They include verbal and non-verbal communication such as, speech, gestures, facial expressions and body language. People aren't born with good social skills, like any other skill, they are learned through repeated practice and trial and error!

Important social skills include:



These can be broken down into three main categories:

1. Nonverbal communication
2. Conversation skills
3. Assertiveness

(childdevelopment.com, 2022)

Why are social skills important? And why we shouldn't avoid them..

Social skills are important in allowing you to have positive interactions with others. Many of these skills are important in making and keeping friendships. Social skills develop over the lifetime and good relationships with others can significantly reduce stress and anxiety in your life. In general, improving your social support is linked to better mental health, since having good friends can act as a "buffer" for feelings of low mood and anxiety.

Social skills help you take care of your own needs/wants while also being respectful of the needs of others.

Consequences of avoiding social situations is that you don't get the opportunity to:

1. **Build up your confidence** interacting with others, or
2. **Develop strong communication skills** that would increase the likelihood for successful and positive relationships

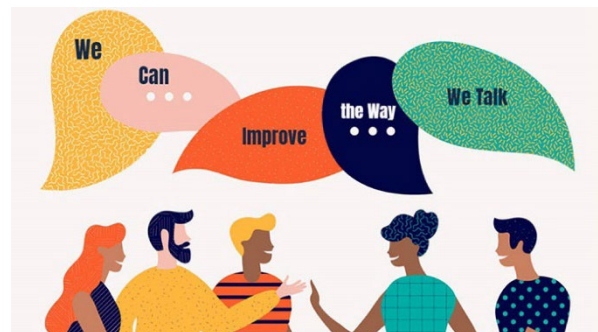
Communication categories and their importance:

Nonverbal Communication: What you say to others' with your eyes and body language is just as powerful as what you say with your words. Your body language and tone of voice communicate powerful messages to others about your:

- Emotional state (examples include nervousness, fear, patience)
- Attitude towards the listener
- Knowledge of the topic
- Honesty

For example, if you are avoiding eye contact and standing far away from someone while speaking to them, the other person may think you're communicating "Don't talk to me!". Chances are this is not the message you want to send them!

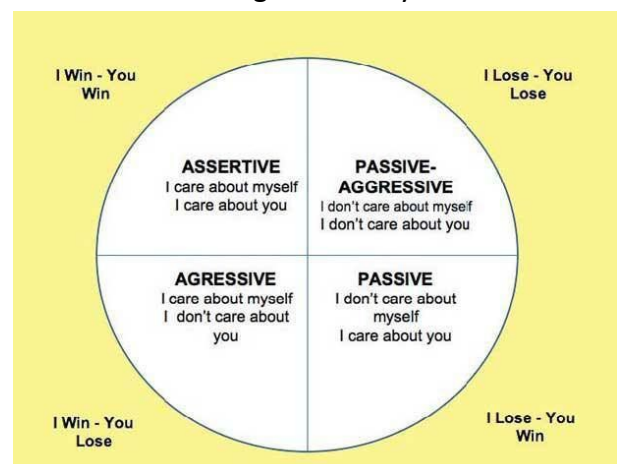
Conversation skills: Starting conversations and keeping them going can be challenging, it is not always easy to think of things to say and this can cause anxiety and nervousness. Knowing these skills are important because it helps develop positive interactions and relationships.



For example, sometimes when we are anxious we can talk too much, and this can lead to a negative impression on others.

Assertiveness: Assertive communication is the expression of one's own wants, needs, and feelings, while respecting those of the other person as well. Communicating assertively means your manner is non-threatening and non-judgmental, and you take responsibility for your own actions. These skills can be difficult to learn, especially since being assertive can be different from the way you would normally do things.

The 3 common styles of communication are **assertive**, **passive**, and **aggressive**. Assertive communication is the healthier most beneficial option when it comes to



styles, it allows you to relate to others more genuinely, with less anxiety, and less resentment. See the diagram for more information.

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Too scared to say what you think	Expresses self clearly and confidently	Expresses self with aggression and irritation/anger
Avoids eye contact	Maintains eye contact	Stares in a judgmental way
Speaks softly or weakly	Speaks firmly	Speaks loudly (e.g., shouting)
Reduces own self-esteem	Increases own self-esteem	Reduces others' self-esteem
Makes body smaller (e.g., slouching)	Firm yet welcoming posture	Closed posture (e.g., making body bigger)
Others' needs are put first	Self and others' needs are taken into account	Own needs are put first
Can't say 'no' to others' requests or demands	Is able to say no in a calm and direct way	Says no in an aggressive and reactive way
Aims to please others	Aims to express needs	Aims to win

(The Berkeley well-being institute, 2021 & Anxiety Canada, 2021)

How to build social skills?

Building nonverbal Communication:

- Identify your trouble spots:** ask yourself a few questions
 - Do you have trouble maintaining eye contact?
 - What is my tone of voice?
 - What is my body saying? Do I cross my arms and legs? Am I closed off?
 - Do I smile too much or too little?
 - How am I showing them I am listening?
- Experiment/practice:**
 - Practice one skill at a time, to make sure you mastered it.
 - Ask a trusted friend/family member to give you feedback on your non-verbal behavior, insight is important, as we often don't realize how we appear to others.
 - Practice in front of a mirror

Non-Verbal Communication



HubSpot

- d. Practice *active listening*: put away distractions, react to emotional content, eye contact, don't be focused on what you are going to say next, stay present in the conversation.

Building Conversation Skills:

1. Identify trouble spots:

- a. Do I have trouble starting a conversation and/or keeping it going?
- b. Do I run out of things to say quickly?
- c. Do I talk too much when im nervous or too much about myself?
- d. Am I reluctant to talk about myself?

2. Learn the tips & Practice them:

<u>Starting a Conversation:</u> • Say something general (for example about the weather or homework) • Pay a compliment ("I love that sweater")- practice giving 2 compliments a day • Make an observation ("I noticed you have a pokemon sticker on your backpack, do you collect the cards?") • Be sincere and genuine, you don't need to say anything witty • Find a common interest to start the conversation (e.g. "this teacher is very difficult or that homework was tough last night")	<u>Keeping a conversation Going:</u> • Remember it's a two-way street- don't talk too little or too much • Disclose personal information about yourself (your weekend activities, your favorite hobby, you favorite hockey team) • Ask questions about the other person (people LOVE to talk about themselves) • Ask open-ended questions, questions that cant be answered by just a yes or no • Remember: "who, what, where, when, why?" to help keep conversations flowing	<u>Ending a conversation:</u> • Remember all convos end at some point- don't feel rejected or anxious about it ending • Think of a graceful way to end the conversation. For example, you can say you need to refill your drink at the water fountain or you have to get to your next class • Give an opportunity for the conversation to continue at another time- give them your phone number if you enjoyed the conversation ("hey, here's my number if you want to hang out some time?") this leaves the ball in their court.
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Building Assertiveness skills :

1. Identify trouble areas:

- a. Do I struggle to ask for what I want?
- b. Is it difficult to state my opinion?
- c. Do I have trouble saying “no”?

2. Learn the tips & Practice assertive skills:

- a. Respect yourself- know your values, your wants, your needs. And know that its fine to express these in a respectful manner
- b. Express your thoughts and feelings calmly- try starting sentences with “I feel...”
- c. Plan what you are going to say- know your wants and needs, and how you can express them before entering into the conversation (write these down if it is easier)
- d. Say “no” when you need to- you can’t make everyone happy all the time. You can say “no” without lying about the reasons, and maybe offer to help find another solution.



(Therapistaid.com, 2023, anxiety Canada, 2021, & Choosing therapy, 2023)

Additional Resources (Websites/Workshops/Books/Apps)

Parent Recommendations:

- “8 Keys to End Bullying: Strategies for Parents and Schools” by Signe Whitson
- “The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School- How Parents and Teachers can Help Break the Cycle” By Barbara Coloroso
- “The emotional Lives of Teenagers: Raising Connected, Capable, and Compassionate Adolescents” by Lisa Damour, PhD
- “How to Talk so Teens will Listen and Listen so Teens will Talk” by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Adolescent Recommendations

- “The essential social skills handbook for teens” by Richard Meadows, 2021
- “Social Skills for Teens with Social Anxiety” by Grace Cohen
- “The Teens Guide to Social Skills: Practical Advice for Building Empathy, Self-esteem, and Confidence” by Kate Gladdin
- “How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends” By Don Gabor