Building Your Child’s Social Skills Can Give Learning a Big Boost

Students learn much more at school than reading, writing, math and other academic subjects. In every class, they practice an important skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning. Without social skills, it’s hard to succeed in school or in life.

Activities that reinforce social skills at home include:

**Role modeling.** Children notice how parents interact with others. Do you introduce yourself to new people? Get together with friends? Support people you care about? Let your child see you being a good friend.

**Reading stories.** There are countless books about friendship. Ask the librarian to help you find some that match your child’s age and interests, such as *Lost and Found*, by Oliver Jeffers. After reading, talk about the story.

**Role playing.** Kids need help practicing manners. Before going to the park, for example, you and your child might pretend you’re meeting new people. “Hi, I’m Jacob. Nice to meet you!” Also focus on sharing and kindness.

**Socializing.** Give your child opportunities to spend time with kids. Invite friends to play. Go to story time at the library. Visit busy playgrounds. Sign your child up for kids’ programs at community centers, museums and elsewhere.

**Relaxing.** Children don’t need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with your child’s teacher and work together on solutions.

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**Turn Writing Into a Game for Your Children With ‘Quick Writes’.**

Writing can be hard work. But a *quick write* is a fun and easy way to encourage your children to get their ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—writing that people do in short periods of time. Usually, a quick write is based on a question or an idea. You ask a challenging question and set the timer for five minutes. Then you and your children write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Once the quick write is finished, compare what each of you has written. The next time, let your children choose the quick-write topic.

Here are some quick-write ideas:

**Would it be a good or bad idea if dogs could talk? Why?**

**The best birthday I can imagine would be… .**

**If I were invisible, I would….**

**It was a stormy day, so I decided I would….**

**Zebras have stripes because….**

**Ten years from now, I will be….**

**I invented the most amazing machine. It does….**

**When I woke up this morning, I was a different person. I was….**

Even kids who usually stare into space when it’s time for a writing assignment may like a quick write. They are often surprised to discover just how much they know or have to say about a particular subject. Your children will gain confidence when they see how much they can write in just a few minutes.
**Q & A**

**Q:** My son wants a cell phone. Most of his friends have them. And to be honest, there are times when I’d really like to be able to reach him. How can I tell if he is old enough to have a phone? What advice do you have for parents before they get a phone for their child?

**A:** You are the only one who can decide whether your son is old enough to handle a phone. If he is generally responsible about his belonging, he is likely to be able to keep track of a phone. And if he usually follows your rules on other issues, he’ll probably be agreeable to limits you set on his cell phone.

And that’s exactly what you need to do. Before you give your child a phone, set up a clear code of what — and will not — be acceptable. Below are just a few of the things your child should be aware of:

- **They love having you** on the sidelines—except when you go too far. Your children want you to be supportive of their *entire* team, not just them. They don’t want you to yell at the referee. And they don’t want you to yell at the parents of the kids on the other team!
- **They want you to recognize** that the coach is in charge. Most youth coaches are volunteers. Most of them are trying to give children a chance to play a game. Even if you think you could do a better job (and then why aren’t you the coach?), your children would like you to respect the coach’s authority.
- **They want you to be happy** when their team wins. But they don’t want winning to become so important that they don’t enjoy just playing the game. It’s fine to talk about the game when it’s over. But don’t go on and on about it for days.
- **They want you to be realistic.** If no one in your family is taller than 5’6”, you are probably not raising a basketball star. Help your children learn to enjoy sports and find the one that’s right for them.

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**Do You Find Ways to Encourage Your Children to Read?**

Sometimes, kids who *can* read just don’t. Luckily, there are some things parents can do to encourage those nonreaders to pick up a book.

Are you doing all you can to encourage your children to enjoy reading? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

1. **Do you read aloud** to your children, even if they can read by themselves?
2. **Do you encourage your children** to try books in a series? If they like one, they might enjoy the others.
3. **Do you encourage your children** to turn off the TV? Do you keep the TV out of their bedrooms?
4. **Do you let your children read** comic books? Do you sometimes read comic books to them?
5. **Do you look for books** or magazines about the things that interest your children?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are finding ways to help your children become kids who will love reading. For *no* answers, try those ideas.