

Encouraging Students to Use Good Social Skills at School and at Home

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In our classrooms, children come from a variety of different social situations and parenting skills in their home—some good, some not so good. Teachers must take every opportunity to encourage appropriate social behaviors. Sometimes, we should encourage students take the lead in setting good examples for each other.

Good social skills and good character do not come naturally. Children with Asperger's, autism, behavioral disorders, and other developmental delays, need constant encouragement, prompting, and verbal cues in order to learn how to behave and engage appropriately with others and what to say in certain social situations.



Social Skills Activities

Here are some activities to involve your students in recognizing, rewarding, and using good social skills and behaviors in the classroom, at school, and at home.

- **Good Job Jar** - Ask students to be on the lookout for other students exhibiting good social behavior. This could be anything from a student helping another find a pencil to comforting a student who has forgotten his homework. When students, teachers, and other adults, observe another student sharing, helping out, or saying an encouraging word, allow them to put a token (button, bead, marble, etc.) in the jar. When the jar is full (or students reach the set goal for the number of tokens), there should be a small celebration or reward (extra recess, homework passes, game time, etc.).
- **Good Character Display** - Create a classroom or hallway bulletin board to display photos of children who are exhibiting good character or social skills. Each week, the teacher chooses a student that is continually showing good character. When recognizing the good character student of the week, the teacher tells the class (by keeping good notes) different examples of good character that this student displayed throughout the week. Include any comments from other teachers or their parents, reminding the students that everyone, not just their teacher, notices their behavior. Make sure that all students have an opportunity to be on the Character Board by rewarding any improvement in behavior.
- **Conflict Resolution Solutions** - Take a few minutes each week to present typical situations students may experience at home or at school (a bully at the bus stop, a friend is mad at them, etc.). Allow the students to role play the situation. Then lead students in a discussion on how they might resolve the conflict. When they arrive at the best resolution, have the students replay the situation with the resolution that they feel is best to resolve the conflict.

- **Secret Character Pal** - Let students draw the name of a classmate, then commit to showing this student random acts of kindness and support. At the end of the week, let students tell what acts of kindness they experienced and then try to guess their Secret Character Pal. Discuss among the class why these acts are important and how it makes them feel when someone shows them support, respect, and kindness.



- **Good Character News** - The teacher can include in the classroom's weekly/monthly newsletter, the names (and photos if possible) of students who are displaying good social skills and character building. Some community newspapers will print your news. Call your local newspaper, tell them about your mission to encourage good character and social skills, and submit news to them according to their instructions. *Be sure you have appropriate permission from parents through your school district to release names/photos to the newspaper. Never publish names or photos without parental consent.*
- **Personal Notes for Good Character** - When a particularly difficult student displays improved behavior or an observable act of kindness, write a short personal note to that student. "Dear John, I am so proud of how you behaved during library time today. Keep up the good work!" Students that do not like to have lots of attention focused on them, for any reason, consider it an honor to have a private and personal contact from their teacher.
- **Character Moments** - Throughout the day, the teacher should always take advantage of a "teachable moment." When any student displays an appropriate or kind gesture towards another, stop the class activity and tell them what you are seeing. "I like the way Tara is helping Matt find his place in the book," "Susie is helping Clint by lending him her extra pencil," or "Thank you all for finding your homework so quickly." Take every opportunity to praise them.
- **Parent/Child Character Report** - Teachers should involve parents in helping to foster good social skills and behaviors at home and school. Send home a Character/Good Behavior Report for parents to communicate good behaviors that their children display at home. For example, Monday—Jimmy is helping his father clean the garage. Tuesday—Jimmy helped his sister put a puzzle together, etc. This activity is particularly helpful for students with autism, Asperger's, and behavioral disorders. Constant reinforcement and accountability is necessary in helping these children develop social skills.

Character education does not begin and end with the school day. Helping children build good character and social skills is a job that parents and teachers must perform 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For teachers, character building should be an ongoing project for the entire school year. Communication between parent and teacher is essential in helping each other teach valuable social skills to children. Teachers pick up where parents leave off, and vice versa. Together, we can build a child who is confident, compassionate, and committed to building good character.

Resource

Watson, Sue. (2007). *Activities to support good social skills in the classroom*. Retrieved January 22, 2008, from <http://special.ed.about.com/od/characterbuilding/p/ss.htm>