

## Helping Children Develop Social Skills

School classrooms are busy places where young children learn all sorts of things, including social and emotional skills such as how to express feelings and how to work together with friends on a project. Here are some suggestions for helping your child develop social skills at home.



**Puppets.** Teachers sometimes talk with children about conflicts and help them think about solutions while using puppets and families can try this technique at home. Puppets are a great way to introduce children to feeling words like *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, and children will sometimes talk to puppets about their feelings. Puppets can also help in discussions about challenging topics, like getting to bed on time.

**Think out loud.** When your child hears your thinking process, it helps her understand how to cope with frustration and solve problems: “Whoops. My favorite shopping bag has a hole in it. I’d better take another one with me to the grocery store.”

**Read bedtime stories.** There is something magical about this end-of-the-day routine that makes it the ideal time for talking about feelings. Discuss the characters and events in the story. Invite your child to share her thoughts and feelings by asking questions: “What do you think he should do? How do you think she feels? What would you do if you were this character?”

**Do a job together.** Instead of asking your child to do a chore alone, do it with her. The two of you might fold laundry, set the table, rake leaves, or paint a wall. Help your child join in by shortening the handle of a broom to make it child-size or providing a small paintbrush or roller.

**Play games.** Card and board games and outdoor games such as tag or hop-scotch offer built-in opportunities for helping children learn to take turns, cooperate, handle frustration, and more. While playing games together, focus on fun instead of winning or losing.



**Prevent potential problems.** Before a friend comes to play, help your child put away toys he does not want to share. Before taking a bus to the zoo, provide a step-by-step explanation of what you will do: “We will wait at the bus stop for 5 minutes, then get on the bus and sit together and watch the sights go by. Then we will walk three blocks to the zoo and tour the lion house before anything else!” During the trip, remind your preschooler of what will happen next.

**Provide a schedule** for your daily routines and indicate on the schedule if there will be changes during specific days or weeks. Let your child know ahead of time that a regular activity might not occur on a certain day, or that a non-preferred activity, such as an appointment is coming up at a certain time.

**Source:** Adapted from the Message in a Backpack, Teaching Young Children 4 (4): 12  
Reference: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/>