

Visit With The Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists - Reprinted from Northern Connections



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How to Develop Your Child's Social Skills

We had several questions dealing with social skill development. The following was most typical. We welcome email questions and comments (VisitUtays@TotalLearningCenters.com)!

My child is beginning a new school this year and I think I am as nervous as he is. I know how important it is to start off on the right foot socially. How can I help?

The ability to get along with people has more influence on career success than grade point average. So, you are right to do what you can to enhance your child's social development. We know you are mostly concerned with the fact that he is starting a new school, but really any time is a good time to work on shoring up social skills.

The first step is to determine your child's stage of social development. Then you can decide if he is behind (immature and needs time to catch up), he just needs opportunities to play, or he lacks skills that you or a professional can teach him. For example, toddlers play next to each other rather than together. Preschoolers come together for short interactions and separate easily. Kindergarten and first graders seek friends who are convenient and share the same interests. Around age eight children begin understanding that to have a friend you have to be a friend. Usually they stick with same-sex peers and best friends change frequently. Children from age eight until about 11 are very concerned about social fairness.

Caring about how one looks is no longer just an adolescent preoccupation. Children from age eight onward (and sometimes starting younger) feel pressure to fit in terms of clothes, music, hair cut, slang, etc. Knowing what is cool does not always come naturally to kids. If you and your child do not know what is cool, find someone who does and can advise you.

Depending on the age of your child, organize behind-the-scenes as effectively as possible. For a young child, call the school to find someone that lives close that is going to be in the same class. Then call the parent

directly and set up a fun activity. You may have to be the one to drive both ways and even play host or hostess for months until friendships are more solidly established. For older kids signing them up for activities (even when they complain they don't want to and don't know anyone) can help. Contact local churches, community centers, the YMCA, learning centers, etc. for options.

While working on social skills, remind your child that it takes time to feel comfortable and make friends. If you are not certain which skills your child needs, consult book and web site references. Visit the Total Learning Centers web site for a list. If you do not have access to the web, call TLC (724) 940-1090 and we will fax or mail you a list of resources at no charge.

If the main problem is lack of opportunity to practice social skills, then an approach like arranging with a parent of a classmate a time for your children to get together and play may be sufficient. If lack of social skills knowledge is more the issue, counseling or a social skills class might be quite useful. Overly aggressive or shy children often benefit from direct teaching and practice as opposed to simple encouragement or play opportunity. Whatever you do, do it now. It can make the difference between a lonely unhappy child and one who learns how to successfully make and keep friends and in doing so *prepares today for success tomorrow.*