



Social Skills & Developmental Relationships Training

Our success in life is greatly determined by our social skills. We often take these skills for granted. Sometimes we are not even aware of these skills. It is easier to spot the absence of these skills, than to detect the presence of them. These skills are usually learned by observation. Many people with intellectual disabilities (ID), have underdeveloped social skills. This is because the development of social skills relies heavily on certain intellectual abilities.

Social skills enable people to function well in any social situation. This includes work, school, and interpersonal relationships. Some examples of good social skills include:

- Understanding and honoring the standards of dress and decorum at different social occasions;
- The acceptable forms of social interaction for different social occasions;
- Knowing when to make eye contact and when to avert the eyes;
- Determining when physical contact is acceptable and what type (e.g. a handshake versus a hug);
- Being able to politely start and stop conversations;
- Being able to make small talk;
- Understanding how to notice and respond to non-verbal body language;
- Appreciating social nuance such as sarcasm and humor;
- Understanding the differences between literal and figurative speech;
- Being able to express feelings and respond to the feelings of others.

Social skills are closely linked with language and communications skills. Effective communication involves the accurate use and interpretation of both verbal and nonverbal communication. It includes the ability to understand non-literal, figurative speech. For example, the weather is a popular way to make small talk. Suppose someone steps into an elevator and says, "It's raining cats and dogs out there." People might begin to nod or laugh with amusement. However, someone with an ID might become horrified. They might begin crying imagining cats and dogs dropping from the sky. They do not understand this non-literal figure of speech.

Good social skills also require behavioral management skills. For example, impulses must be kept under control across a wide variety of social situations. Self-care and grooming skills must be demonstrated. People with IDs often need to be explicitly taught behavioral management skills. For instance, they must learn to refrain from talking out of turn. They also need to speak at the appropriate volume when conversing. When provided direction, they learn to follow rules and social conventions. For example, with proper coaching, they know it is correct to wait in line to purchase a ticket.

Social skills are taught in a kinesthetic manner. This means that individuals learn by doing. They repeatedly practice proper social interactions in a step-by-step manner. The process of repetition helps solidify social skills.

Social skills must be learned in a social environment. First, instructors and coaches introduce a social skill. Then, they demonstrate the skill through a role-play activity. Students are provided familiar examples. This helps students connect the learning to their own everyday experiences. It provides a reference point.

The role-playing and rehearsal process is usually the most difficult part. It requires students to demonstrate the skills that the instructors have modeled. The instructors guide the students during rehearsal. Students are provided immediate feedback. This helps students gain confidence in their abilities.

Instructor feedback is typically positive in nature. They praise and reward the students' efforts. The instructors do not criticize students who have difficulty with a skill. Instead, they correctly model the desired skill again. With repetition, practice, and support the students' gain mastery and confidence.

Building and Generalizing Skills

Individuals with disabilities have problems both with acquiring and applying social skills. They need lots of practice. Successful ways to learn and generalize social skills include:

- **Modeling:** The teacher and an aide or another teacher enact the social interactions you want students to learn.
- **Video self-modeling:** You videotape the student performing the social skill with lots of prompting and edit out the prompting to create a more seamless digital recording. This video, paired with rehearsal, will support the student's effort to generalize the social skill.
- **Role-playing:** Practice is essential for maintaining social skills. Role-playing is a great way to give students an opportunity not only to practice the skills they are learning but also to teach students to evaluate each other's or their own performance of skills.

5 Tips for Success

1. **Teach Baby Steps** - This term is intended to encourage teachers to break down their lessons into simple, easier-to-manage steps. This will keep frustration levels down and enable learning to take place. Wait until the student masters the baby step before moving onto the next one.
2. **Concrete Learning Experiences**- Introduce new ideas in a physical, hands-on approach. Use manipulatives when teaching math. Take field trips to the grocery store or post office to give students a meaningful experience. When students are able to make real connections to the world around them, or physically explore a concept, the knowledge will stick with them.
3. **Immediate and Positive Feedback** - Positive feedback will encourage the student to keep on trying. If a student masters a concept or meets a goal it is important to reward or applaud the student immediately.
4. **Sing a Song**- Music is a wonderful motivator among all children and particularly ones with intellectual disabilities. Making a simple, catchy song to go along with a concept is a fun way to engage the student and help them remember information.
5. **Patience**-Students with certain disabilities can be unpredictable in what they can learn and what might set off a certain behavior. What might appear to be a temper tantrum is often the student's way of telling you, "This is too hard. I am frustrated," or "I am tired. I need a break." Take the time to learn the individual child's needs and who they are. If you are feeling overwhelmed and cannot relate to the student, it is OK to stop the lesson and resume when both student and teacher can handle the lesson.

pace. It may take a while for students to make some progress, but if you are patient it will be priceless when they do.

Developing Relationships

We can look at the depth and quality of relationships.

Apart from family, there are five categories of relationships:

- **Customer relationships** — some service people may be friendly toward an individual
- **Acquaintances** — For example, someone you see on the street, at church or in a class, that you say hi to, or know their name
- **Places of community** — being a regular at a community place
- **Places of community membership and belonging** — having a sense of belonging, like a community organization or group
- **Friends** — people you do things with, for fun, people from whom you get support

One way we get to know others is through shared interests and contributing our gifts, talents and abilities.

- Interests express the meaning in a person's life —»What do you find most meaningful? Baseball? Sewing? Children?
- Once you identify interests, you can look for: where are others who SHARE these interests
- You can identify memberships and associations around particular interests
»There are clubs and groups around all types of interests: hockey, pigs, scrapbooking, etc.
- What are the person's gifts, skills, and/or talents — things the person does well that can be contributed to others? »Example: Jason was a man with some mental health issues who liked to make up stories. Some people called them lies, some called them hallucinations. Where would this gift be valued? His supporters found a group for him to belong to: A local group of people who got together to do improvisation, just for fun. They really valued his gift for story telling!
- What are the gifts which a person with a disability label contributes to you, which community members would also appreciate receiving?
- Interests may not be easy to define — sometimes they are discovered and developed in action »Perhaps someone has led a life where they have not had a chance to try many things — you can assist them in having new experiences and finding new interests.

Strategies that are useful to support relationships with community members.

(Some strategies will be more useful than others for any particular individual. They are all useful for brainstorming ideas).

There are two different “groups” in the seven strategies: one-to-one connections and relationships, and increasing community membership-

1. Group one: **One-to-one connections and relationships**
 - Identify who the person already knows and where the relationship can be strengthened and deepened
 - Identify who would appreciate this person's gifts
 - Identify where you can find an interested person
2. Group two: **Increasing membership**

- Associations and clubs
- Community places where people engage in one of the person's interests
- Community places that are hospitable and welcoming
- Community places where the person can fit in just the way they are

Formal Groups:

- Artistic organizations: choral, theatrical, writing
- Business organizations: Chamber of commerce, neighborhood business associations, trade groups
- Charitable groups: Red Cross, Cancer Society, United Way
- Church groups: service, prayer, maintenance, stewardship, acolytes, men's women's, youth, seniors
- Civic events; July 4th, art fair, Halloween
- Collectors' groups: stamp collectors, flower dryers, antiques
- Community support groups: "friends" of the library, nursing home, hospital
- Elderly Groups: Senior citizens
- Ethnic associations: Sons of Norway, Black Heritage Club, Hibernians
- Health and fitness groups: bicycling, jogging, exercise
- Interest groups: poodle owners, old car owners
- Local government: town, townships, electoral units, fire department, emergency units
- Local media: radio, newsletter, local access cable TV
- Men's groups: cultural, political, social, educational, vocational
- Self-help groups: Alcoholics Anonymous, Epilepsy self-help, La Leche League
- Neighborhood or block clubs: crime watch, beautification, Christmas decorations
- Outdoor groups: garden clubs, Audubon Society, Conservation clubs
- Political organizations: Democrats, Republicans, caucuses
- School Groups: printing club, PTA, child care
- Service clubs: Kiwanis, Rotary, American Association of University Women
- Social Cause groups: peace, rights, advocacy, service
- Sports Leagues: bowling, swimming, baseball, volleyball
- Study groups: literary clubs, bible study groups
- Veteran's groups, American Legion, Amvets, Veterans of Foreign Wars, their auxiliaries
- Women's groups: 4H, Future Farmers, Scouts, YMCA

What do people who don't work do during the day?

Personal business	Leisure/recreation	Hobbies	Volunteerism
Grocery stores	Fast food shops	Art appreciation	Hospitals
Drug stores	Cafeterias	Fishing	Universities
Shopping malls	Restaurants	Crafts	Public library
Nursery stores	Dairy and yogurt bars	Photography/scrapbooks	Public admin
Department stores	City, county, state parks	Nature walks	Elected officials' offices
Specialty stores	Nature trails	Elected official's offices	Hardware stores
Hardware stores	Cinemas, theaters	Collecting (cards, etc)	Animal Shelters
Outdoor markets	Ballet, symphony, concert	Pets (Pet store, shelter)	Free stores
Craft supply stores	Fairs and Seasonal event		Churches
Yard sales	Tours, trips (train, bus)		
Laundromat	Sporting events /games	Club/organization Activities	Continuing education

Gas Station	Museums, conservatories	Senior citizens	Personal Development
Post office	Zoos, farms	Sororities	Fitness (swimming/walking)
Bank	Miniature golf	Fraternities	Art class
Beauty/barber shop	Video arcade	Church	Craft classes
	Bowling	Political organizations	Make-up classes
		Service/social organizations	

Final Tips for Success

- See the person as their interests and gifts
- Seek out relationships rather than activities-who can the person get to know there?
- Introduce one-to-one
- Become an “asker”-“It never hurts to ask”
- Apply the rule: one person, one environment

Sourced from https://www.gulfbend.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=10366&cn=208

<https://therapytravelers.com/strategies-teaching-students-intellectual-disabilities/>

https://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Friends_Connecting_people_with_disabilities_and_community_members.pdf