

growing up. social

raising relational kids
in a screen-driven world

drills
for grown-up social success

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drills for grown-up social success

From the comfort and safety of your own home, you can teach your child how to act in social situations. Before you go into a social setting, practice various skills with your child such as giving eye contact and asking questions. Role-play together so your child can gain experience and build confidence.

As you role-play, praise your child for anything he or she is doing well. “One thing I really liked was when you . . .” “It was great how you shook my hand so firmly.”

Also give feedback that is instructive. “Next time, what if you tried to . . .?” “Instead of looking down at the floor, look right into my eyes.”

Make these practice drills fun and don’t forget to laugh (you can always act out what not to do). This is a positive and constructive time with your child.

drill #1: meeting a new adult

Purpose: To instill the value that adults are to be treated with respect and not ignored. The goal is to get your child comfortable with saying greetings, giving high fives or shaking hands, and giving eye contact.

Practice: If you have another adult present or an older child, you can use him/her to be the new adult being introduced. If not, just play both parts.

Parent: (Insert child’s name), I want you to come and meet Mr. Smith.
(Instruct your child to give Mr. Smith eye contact and smile.)

Mr. Smith: It’s nice to meet you, (insert child’s name).

Child: It’s nice to meet you too.
(Instruct your child to shake Mr. Smith’s hand or give him a high five. Remind your child to maintain eye contact and smile)

Mr. Smith: How old are you?

Child: I'm seven. I'm in second grade.

Mr. Smith: That's great. I have a daughter in first grade.

Child: What's her name?

Mr. Smith: Teresa. Well, thanks for coming to say hi to me.

Child: You're welcome.

Principle: Encourage your child to interact with safe adults. When your child is asked a question, your child should answer the question with courtesy. Challenge your child to ask questions because showing interest in others shows that you care. You can suggest/brainstorm questions that would be appropriate such as:

- What do you do for a job?
- Do you have children?
- What is your hobby?
- Do you like sports?

Older children can ask questions like this and engage on a conversational level. For younger children, giving eye contact and answering questions is sufficient.

As your child learns to interact with adults, it will make it much easier for him/her to continue to do so as a teenager and young adult.

drill #2: meeting a new child

Purpose: To help your child become a friendly person who includes others and makes friends readily.

Practice: If you have another adult present or a child, you can use him/her to be the new child being introduced. If not, just play both parts.

Parent: (Insert child's name), I want you to come and meet Molly. She's nine, and her family just moved into town.

(Instruct your child to look at Molly and smile.)

Child: Nice to meet you, Molly. Where did you used to live?

Molly: Indiana.

Child: Do you like it here so far?

Molly: Well, it's okay.

Child: Do you want to play with us outside?

Molly: Sure.

Principle: When your child meets a new child, he/she can ask questions to find out more about him/her. This helps your child learn to be interested and aware of others instead of being self-centered. A child can ask questions like:

- What do you like to play with?
- Do you have brothers or sisters?
- Do you like Legos (or other toys, etc.)?
- What grade are you in?

Not every child your child meets is going to be a good match as a friend. But by being friendly, your child will learn how to care for others and to be kind to newcomers.

drill #3: eating a meal in a restaurant or someone's home

Purpose: For your child to have self-control and good manners at meals; to be able to dine out without distracting others.

Practice: At a family meal at home, pretend you are eating at a restaurant or a friend's house. If you are preparing to attend a formal occasion like a wedding or a fine restaurant, you can add wine glasses and candles, explaining how these objects are to be treated with special care.

Talk about and practice these *Do's*:

- Say "please" and "thank you."
- Compliment the food and anything you like about the setting.
- Place your napkin on your lap.
- Sit up straight.
- Give eye contact to the person who is speaking.
- Play quietly with crayons and paper.
- Eat so you won't leave the table hungry and ask for more food later.
- Talk to the people at the table.
- Thank the cook, or tell the waiter your meal was delicious.
- Say, "Please pass the _____" when you want something.

Talk about and practice these *Don'ts*:

- Don't talk with food in your mouth.
- Don't take the biggest piece of cake.
- Don't say that you don't like something.
- Don't whine about the meal.
- Don't throw anything on the floor.
- Don't scream or raise your voice.
- Don't fight with your sibling.
- Don't leave the table without asking to be excused.

Principle: Dining out or going to a friend's home should be a pleasant experience for you as a parent and for other people dining near your children. Tell your children what kind of behavior you expect when dining away from home. When they behave well, celebrate by ordering their favorite foods. When they don't do well, let them know you won't be taking them out for a while until they improve their dining do's and don'ts.

drill #4: how to treat a party host

Purpose: To express gratitude to the person hosting an event such as a birthday party.

Practice: Pretend you are having lots of fun at a kid's birthday party. There's food, cake, and games. Now it's time to leave. What do you do before leaving? Tell your child you always look for the host to say thank you and you also say goodbye to the birthday person.

Child: Mrs. Nelson, thank you for having me at the party. I had a lot of fun.

Mrs. Nelson: You're welcome! I'm so glad you could come. Make sure you get a goody bag on your way out.

Child: Thank you.

Then have your child look for the birthday boy or girl to say goodbye and happy birthday one last time.

Principle: Parties and special events don't happen automatically. Someone had to plan and pay for the party. It is courteous to say thank you to the host and express appreciation for being invited.

drill #5: giving eye contact

Purpose: To make it second nature for your child to look someone in the eyes when conversing or when listening to someone like a teacher.

Practice #1: When your child is trying to get your attention, stare at his elbow while he talks to you. Most likely your child will ask why you are staring at his elbow. Ask how this makes your child feel. Talk about the importance of eye contact and how it makes the other person feel heard and understood.

Practice #2: Pretend to be a grocery store clerk at the cash register. Have your child buy groceries from you and make eye contact. Talk about how every person your child meets is a person of worth who deserves courtesy. Have your child practice making eye contact the next time he/she is at the grocery store.

Practice #3: Have your child act as a student as you act like the teacher. Have your child sit down in front of you. Instruct your child to look at you and give you eye contact while you present a thirty-second talk. Compliment your child as he/she listens well, giving eye contact. Correct your child if he/she stares down or looks around most of the time.

Practice #4: Have your child watch television or play on the computer. When you walk into the room, tell your child to pause and look up at you. Once your child has given you eye contact and greeted you, he/she may return looking at the screen. Teach your child it is common courtesy to stop what you are doing and greet a person when he or she enters a room.

Principle: Eye contact is a common courtesy. Making eye contact with others will help your child gain favor in a screen-driven society where many kids and teens avoid eye contact. Looking at someone expresses your interest and creates an emotional bond between family members and friends.

drill #6: receiving a gift

Purpose: For your child to express sincere appreciation for gifts.

Practice #1: Put one of your child's toys in a paper bag with tissue paper. Present the bag to your child as a gift.

Parent: This is for you. I hope you like it.

Child: (opening the gift) Oh, I like it. Thank you!

Instruct your child to also hug the giver if he/she is a family member or close friend.

Practice #2: Talk about what your child should do if he opens the gift but does not like it.

Parent: Hope you like the gift.

Child: (opening the gift and finding something he does not like at all) Thank you. That was very kind of you to think of me.

Tell your child that he should never say something like, “I don’t like that” or “I can’t believe I got socks.” Instead instruct your child simply to say “Thank you,” regardless of the gift.

Practice #3: Have your child practice writing a thank-you note. In kindergarten, a child can draw a picture and sign her name. In first or second grade, he/she can write a sentence or two.

Older children can write a letter like this:

Dear Sally,

Thank you for the scrapbook. I really like it. I will enjoy using it.

Love,

Joanie

Principle: Gifts are tangible expressions of someone’s love and friendship. Help your child to develop a grateful heart for every gift and to show appreciation to the giver.