

# The Significance of Social Skills



Mental Health & Children Series

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**W**e can probably all remember the kid who had a hard time fitting in. He always spoke too much or not enough. She could never initiate a friendship or maintain one for long. They were either too aggressive and we called them “bully”, or they were too passive and were bullied. Perhaps, we were that kid that struggled to find their place.

As adults, we know the value of connecting with others. We were created for it. We thrive when we feel wanted by others and part of meaningful relationships. Children and adolescents are the same way.



It can often be hard to navigate as adults around all our social relationships. And it is even that much harder as a child whose social skills are still developing or underdeveloped.

Social skills include using appropriate non-verbal communication, proper use of personal space and touch when interacting with others, initiating and keeping a conversation going, addressing others respectfully, having empathy for others, knowing how to make and keep friends, understanding the harms of bullying and the ways to deal or cope with being bullied.

Studies show that without proper intervention, poor social skills can lead to poor academic and behavioral habits, social phobias, and even depression.

To detect whether your child is fitting in socially or not:

- volunteer in his/her activities to see for yourself how they interact with peers and other authority figures.
- have regular conversation about his/her friends
- notice his/her use of personal space and touch
- contact the child's teacher or coach for their perspective on your child's behavior.
- talk to your child about bullying and assess whether they may be bullying others or the victim of a bully
- assess their level of hygiene with what is common among their peers and consider addressing any of these issues.

In most cases, social skills can be taught if the child does not automatically learn them from experiential social interactions. Sometimes immature social skills are just merely catching up with physical growth and can be improved by involving the child in more social opportunities to develop these skills. Other times these underdeveloped skills need to be addressed more directly in a social skills group or with one-on-one coaching from a school social worker or licensed counselor. In either case, a concerned and loving parent is the most significant advocate for a child or adolescent who wants to fit in, but needs a little help. ■



*Karen Suppes sees clients in our Crete location.*

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