

How do I help my socially awkward preteen make friends?

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What do I need? & How do I get it?

What can I do? & How do I do it?


Will it work? & How do I know it's working?


What do I need? KNOWLEDGE

How do I get it?

- ▶ Knowing what's behind your preteen's socially awkward behavior is often one of the most effective ways you can help him or her (e.g. Asperger's Syndrome, Nonverbal Learning Disability, Social Communication Disorder, Social Anxiety, situational event, etc).

- ▶ Knowing what specific *social skills* your preteen needs to develop will help you teach and guide him or her how to use the appropriate social skills when he or she is presented with social situations (i.e. goals & objectives - see handout)

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- ▶ Your preteen's gender and cognitive level will also help determine the goals and objectives that would be appropriate for your child (If applicable, include your preteen in developing his/her own goals and objectives)

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- ▶ Knowing what your preteen's interests and passions are will help you find activities and situations in which he or she can interact with others
 - ▶ More social opportunities -> more self-confidence -> more comfortable in social situations

What can I do? RESEARCH & ACT

How do I do it?


- ▶ Provide a variety of social activities:
YMCA, library, church youth groups,
4-H clubs, scouting organizations,
sports, community parks &
recreation, etc.

- ▶ Consider a social skills coach or SLP
 - ▶ Provide *Social Skills Training* (see handout)
 - ▶ “FriendMaker” (Ipad App - \$0.99)
 - ▶ Teach/review with your preteen the qualities that make a good friend, qualities that don’t, and those that will stop a friendship in its tracks. Define friend.

- ▶ Initiate and practice pro-social behavior at home and/or in safe settings (e.g. role-playing)
 - ▶ Kids learn social skills first from you
 - ▶ Interact with your preteen in a “peer-like” way
 - ▶ Consider role-playing with three roles: speaker, listener, observer

- ▶ Watch role-playing videos (“FriendMaker” App) and discuss the different scenarios with your preteen
- ▶ Teach/review tips for conversation and social behavior DOs and DON’Ts (“FriendMaker” App)
- ▶ Provide social scripts for how to socially behave in various common cultural situations (“FriendMaker” App)

- ▶ Don't label your preteen as “shy” (which starts off as a reinforced habit that can be broken with regular practice)
- ▶ Teach your preteen effective strategies for dealing with “shyness” (e.g. brainstorm how to handle a situation that may make your preteen anxious or nervous)

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- ▶ Help your preteen learn about topics and/or practice games and activities at home that are popular at school
 - ▶ Talk to and observe other preteens who don't struggle with social awkwardness to find out what is “popular” today

- ▶ Teach/review with your preteen the skills he or she needs to develop/improve to have *Social Competence*
- ▶ *Social Competence* is the ability to read facial expressions correctly, understand and interpret body language, decipher tone of voice, and awareness of contextual cues

Activities to Help Your Child Develop Social Competence

Eye Contact

- ▶ 1. Have a staring contest
- ▶ 2. Eyes on the Forehead
- ▶ 3. Swinging

Idioms

- ▶ 4. Books about Idioms (In a Pickle and Other Funny Idioms by Marvin Terban)
- ▶ 5. Online (Idiom Site, Fun Brain, vocabulary.co.il)
- ▶ 6. Memory or Matching Game


Reading Faces/Interpreting Emotions


- ▶ 7. Emotions Charade or Emotions Pictionary
- ▶ 8. Face It
- ▶ 9. Bingo/Matching Game
- ▶ 10. Explaining Emotions
- ▶ 11. Imitating and Guessing about Faces
- ▶ 12. Interpreting Body Language (see handout)

Staying On Topic


- ▶ 13. Topic Game
- ▶ 14. Step Into Conversation (www.childrensucceed.com)
- ▶ 15. Improvisational Storytelling
- ▶ 16. Role-Playing


*See handout for more detailed information regarding each activity

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- ▶ Participate in a social skills group
 - ▶ Example: The KIDnections Group
 - ▶ You can find a comprehensive list of other social skills groups via [Connecting For Kids](#)
 - ▶ Keep in mind your preteen's goals and objectives and his/her interests and passions when choosing a social skills group

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- ▶ Help your preteen find other preteens with similar interests
 - ▶ Sometimes this may include others who are not of the exact same age as your preteen (consider an age range)
 - ▶ Sometimes this may also include others who are not of the same gender as your preteen
 - ▶ The more chances your preteen has to interact with his/her peers, the better

- ▶ Model positive social skills at home
 - ▶ Dr. Laura Markham from *Aha! Parenting* writes, “this involves showing confidence ourselves when we relate to others, being friendly to strangers, offering to help others and also treating our preteens with respect, no matter how much they might be pulling at our last straw.”

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- ▶ Teach your preteen about *Social Thinking* because it is important to have consideration for others (this also includes having proper personal hygiene)
 - ▶ *Social Thinking* is thinking about how other people are thinking about you

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- ▶ “Provide only positive, constructive statements that will encourage your preteen to take an optimistic view of others and themselves as equal peers” (Mize, Pettit, Lindsey, & Laird, 1993)
 - ▶ Remember: Kids learn social skills first from YOU!

Will it work? YES

How do I know?

- ▶ Be patient. Set small reachable goals and focus on skill building. Pay attention to minor details that will demonstrate progress. Re-asses to tweak goals or develop new goals as needed.

- ▶ Do not go “back to school” yourself. As painful as it may be to watch your preteen struggle socially, not allowing your preteen to practice his/her developing or improved social skills on his/her own will never help your preteen LEARN how to make friends independently.

- ▶ You may start to notice a difference (for the better) in your preteen's social behavior around his/her peers. You may also notice a positive change in your preteen's personality and level of confidence.

- ▶ Sometimes parents can find support and motivation among other parents going through similar situations (e.g. blogs, www.circleofmoms.com). This may help parents to continue working with their preteen towards accomplishing his/her social goals and objectives even if (or when) the “going gets tough!”

In Conclusion...

Thank you for being here today & good luck on your journey to “help your socially awkward preteen make friends!”

Recommended Books and Materials

- ▶ Think Social! -Michelle Garcia Winner, MA CCC-SLP
- ▶ Thinking about YOU thinking about ME (2nd Edition)
-Michelle Garcia Winner, MA CCC-SLP
- ▶ Inside Out: What Makes a Person with Social Cognitive Deficits Tick? -Michelle Garcia Winner, MA CCC-SLP

Recommended Books and Materials

- ▶ Social Thinking Thinksheets for Tweens and Teeens: Learning to Read in Between the Social Lines - Michelle Garcia Winner, MA CCC-SLP
- ▶ The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Young Adults - Dr. Elizabeth A. Laugeson
- ▶ Teaching Social Skills to Kids Who Don't Yet Have Them - Thomas McIntyre

References

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- ▶ <http://everydaylife.globalpost.com>
- ▶ www.huffingtonpost.com
- ▶ www.socialthinking.com
- ▶ www.greatschools.org
- ▶ www.friendshipcircle.org

References

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- ▶ www.parentingscience.com/social-skills-activities
- ▶ www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids
- ▶ Learningdisabilities.about.com
- ▶ www.writerswrite.co.za
- ▶ <http://www.ldonline.org>