

## Activities to Help your Child Develop Social Competence

### Eye Contact

Good, solid eye contact show others that we are both interested in what they have to say and that we have confidence in our ability to listen.

#### 1. Have a staring contest

Making a contest out of making eye contact with you can challenge some kids (especially if they have a competitive streak).

#### 2. Eyes on the Forehead

When you are hanging out with your child place a sticker of an eye or a pair of eyes on your forehead. Encourage them to look at the stickers. It may not be exactly looking at your eyes but it is training them to look in the right direction in a funny, less threatening way. (Idea from: [Children Succeed](#))

#### 3. Swinging

Try making eye contact as your child swings on a swing. Make a game of it where the child tries to reach you with their feet. The sensory input may be calming and allow them to focus more on you. Compliment them on how nice it was to have them looking at your eyes.

### Idioms

[Idioms](#), even in typical children, are very confusing. For Children with ASD it can drive them crazy (is that an idiom?).

Activities that can help kids with idioms include:

#### 4. Books about Idioms

There are many great books that illustrate and explain idioms. Try [In a Pickle And Other Funny Idioms](#) by Marvin Terban. It gives a funny literal illustration and then explains the history of the phrase. Use such books as a launching pad. Have your child make their own book of idioms that they hear. When you use one regularly such as “That’s a piece of cake” have children make their own page.

### **5. Online**

There are many websites that list idioms or have games to try guessing what the idiom really means. Check out [Idiom Site](#), [Fun Brain](#) or [vocabulary.co.il](#)

### **6. Memory or Matching Game**

write down idioms on one set of cards and their meanings on another. Have the child try to pair them up. You could also add in the literal picture of the idiom to visualize what the idiom that is being used actually looks like.

## **Reading Faces / Interpreting Emotions**

This skill is important at home, in school and on the playground. Many misunderstandings arise from kids misinterpreting the emotions of others. Sometimes kids can be confused by what a particular look means. They may easily mistake a look of disappointment and think someone is angry, or they may mistake a nervous expression for a funny one.

### **7. Emotion Charades**

Instead of using movie titles, animal or other typical words, use emotions. Write down feeling words on pieces of paper – or, print out and cut up the worksheet below. Take turns picking a slip of paper and then acting out the word written on it. You could substitute written words for pictures showing the emotion. If kids prefer, you can draw the emotion rather than act it out like in the game Pictionary. You can make it harder by setting a rule that you cannot draw the emotion using a face. Instead, they have to express the feeling by drawing the body language or aspects of a situation that would lead to that emotion (e.g. for sadness, you can draw a kid sitting alone on a bench, or a rainy day, etc.)

### **8. Face It**

Face games are a way to work on social interaction. Like in an acting class, you can try “mirroring” with an autistic child: Touch your nose or stick out your tongue and have him or her imitate you. Make funny faces that the child can copy. Kids with social skills deficits often have trouble reading expressions and interacting socially, so activities that get them more comfortable with these situations are a great idea.

### **9. Bingo/Matching Game**

You can use the pictures from the [printable emotions game](#) as bingo boards. You can also cut them up and make a matching set of words written or other similar faces and then you can play a matching or memory card game.

## 10. Explaining emotions

In this simple game, players take turns picking a card from the deck and inventing a reason for the facial expression displayed. For example, if the player picks a card with a woman showing disgust, the player might say “She just stepped in cow manure.”

## 11. Imitating and guessing about faces

Facial mimicry isn't just an exercise in theater. Research suggests that it also helps us identify emotions and experience empathy (Sato et al 2013). So try this: Shuffle the cards and put them face down. The first player picks a card, keeps it to herself, and then mimics the expression on the card. The other player(s) have to guess the correct emotion.

## 12. Interpreting Body Language (see handout: Translating Emotions into Written Body Language)

# Staying On Topic

When people have a conversation, they pick a topic to discuss. Each person adds something to the conversation until the conversation has finished or the top has changed. Sometimes it is hard for children to stay on topic and take part of a regular conversation. Here are some activities to help with staying on topic and carrying out a conversation.

## 13. Topic Game

Play a game with the alphabet where every letter has to be the beginning of a word in a theme such as fruit or vegetable: **A**...apple, **B**...banana, **C**...carrot

## 14. Step into Conversation

[Step into Conversation](#) is a learning tool that provides children with autism with the structure and support they need to hold interactive conversations. Cards provide 22 basic, scripted conversations with areas for the child to fill in the blanks. Icons with labels run along the top of each card and remind the child to Stand, Look, Talk and Listen. They are reminded to listen after they make each statement.

## 15. Improvisational Storytelling

To play this game, put pictures of different emotions face down on the table. Then players decide together on some story elements must appear in the story (e.g., an arctic wasteland, a lemur, and a banana). The goal is for the players to take turns making up the narrative, building on each others ideas and (eventually) making use of all the required story elements.

To begin, first player picks a card, and starts the narrative. He can take the story into any direction he likes, but he must incorporate the emotion depicted on the card. After a minute or two, the next player picks a card and continues the narrative. Players continue to take turns until they have used all the required story elements and reached a satisfying conclusion.

## **16. Role-Playing**

One popular method of teaching active listening assigns people to one of three roles: A speaker, a listener, and an observer. The speaker is instructed to talk for a few minutes about something important to him. The listener attends quietly, providing cues to the speaker that she is paying attention. When the speaker is finished talking, the listener also repeats back, in her own words, the speaker's points.

The observer's job is to evaluate the speaker and listener. Did the speaker stay on topic? How did the listener indicate that she was paying attention?

After the observer shares his observations with the others, the players switch roles and try again.

<b>Translate emotions into written body language (Part One)</b>	
<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Possible Body Language</b>
<b>Anticipation</b>	rub hands together, lick lips, unable to sit still, grin
<b>Awe</b>	slack-jawed, unable to move, fixed gaze
<b>Amusement</b>	throw head back, slap thighs, clap hands, shake with laughter
<b>Anger or Aggression</b>	shake fist, point finger, stab finger, slam fist on a table, flushed face, throbbing veins in neck, jutting chin, clench fists, clench jaw, lower eyebrows, squint eyes, bare teeth, a wide stance, tight-lipped smile
<b>Annoyance</b>	press lips together, narrow eyes, roll eyes, exasperated sighs
<b>Anxiety</b>	fidget, twist a ring, chew on a pencil, bite lip, swallow constantly, quickened breathing, hold breath, darting eyes, sweat, clammy palms, high-pitched laughter, hunched posture, pace, stutter, play with hair
<b>Attentiveness</b>	furrowed brow, lean forward, sit up, take notes, mimic body language
<b>Boredom</b>	yawn, avoid eye contact, tap feet, twirl a pen, doodle, fidget, slouch
<b>Confidence</b>	clasp arms behind body, lift head, push chest out, stand tall, make firm and precise movements
<b>Confusion</b>	tilt head, narrow eyes, furrowed brow, shrug
<b>Contempt</b>	lift chin, purse lips, sneer, stretch or turn away, dismissive hand-waving
<b>Cynical</b>	twist lips, half-smile, shake head, press lips with a slight frown, roll eyes
<b>Deception</b>	one sided shoulder shrug, look down, scratch nose/ear/neck, feet kick out or shuffle involuntarily, sudden change in demeanour, hesitation in speech, shifty eye contact, long blinks, shrug, unwarranted smiles or laughter, shake head 'no' while saying 'yes', lick lips, cover/touch mouth
<b>Defensive</b>	cross arms or legs, arms out with palms forward, hands up, place anything in front of body, hands in pockets
<b>Desire</b>	flirtatious behaviour, wink, look up through the lashes, glance over the shoulder, make eye contact, touch hair or clothing, straighten spine, strike a 'cowboy' pose with thumbs in belt, dilated pupils, arch, stretch, women cross and uncross legs
<b>Disbelief</b>	wide-eyed (shock), narrow-eyed (sceptical), twist mouth, crinkle nose, crease brow
<b>Disgust</b>	crinkle nose, curled lip, flinch, turn away, cover nose, gag, squint eyes shut, protect body by turning shoulder (cold shoulder)
<b>Displeasure</b>	fake smile, pout, frown, cross arms
<b>Distress</b>	Stroke/rub nape of neck, wide eyes, shallow rapid breathing, beat walls, huddle in a corner, clasp hands over head, rock, wring hands, run hands through hair, adjust cuffs, men hold hands together in front of crotch
<b>Embarrassment</b>	blush, stammer, cover face with hands, bow head, trouble maintaining eye contact, look down and away, blink back tears
<b>Fatigue</b>	rub eyes, stare into space, yawn and/or stretch, nod off and jerk awake, grit teeth, close eyes, move slowly, slouch
<b>Fear</b>	hunch shoulders, shrink back, mouth open, widen eyes, shake, tremble, freeze, rock from side to side, wrap arms around self, shaking hands
<b>Frustration</b>	shake head, massage temples, clasp wrist in opposite hand or behind back, aggressively run hands through hair, show white knuckles
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<b>Translate emotions into written body language (Part Two)</b>	
<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Possible Body Language</b>
<b>Grief</b>	curl into foetal position, face contorts, slump, cover face or head with hands or arms or pillow, stare, shake with sobs, tremble, turn away, difficulty swallowing
<b>Happiness</b>	smile, laugh, hum a tune, crinkle eyes and nose, swing arms, spin loosely, dance, jump, hug, giggle
<b>Honesty</b>	maintain eye contact, smile with eyes and mouth, look up, palms up, open arms
<b>Impatience</b>	nod quickly, tap fingers, sigh, check the clock, tap feet, increase pitch in voice, look away
<b>Jealousy</b>	tight lips, sour expression, narrow eyes, crossed arms
<b>Overwhelmed</b>	palms to forehead, splayed fingers cover eyes with one hand, eyes wide and staring into space, hands grip onto something
<b>Passion or Eagerness</b>	lean forward, nod, wide eyes, steady eye contact and raised eyebrows, hand on heart, double-handed handshake, feet pointed inwards
<b>Playfulness</b>	wink, waggle eyebrows, nudge, smile, tickle
<b>Pleasure</b>	tilt head back, part lips slightly, eyes wide or closed, languorous movements, stretch, arch neck or back, flush, quick breath and pulse
<b>Possessiveness</b>	handshake with arm clasp, place hands on or around someone's shoulders / neck / waist, place hands on wall near them, stand in personal space with body positioned toward person, run a knuckle down someone's cheek, stare others down if they get too close
<b>Pride or Dominance</b>	chin up, chest out, shoulders back, hard handshake, lean back with hands behind head and feet up, unblinking focused eye contact, hands on hips, straddle chair
<b>Reluctance</b>	cross arms, make fists, drag feet, pinch nose, put hands over ears
<b>Sadness</b>	droopy body, bowed, wrap arms around self, hesitating movements, bottom lip jutting out, lip quivers, cry, sob, shake, drag feet
<b>Secretiveness</b>	tight-lipped smile, hands in pockets, look away, cover face, look down
<b>Shame</b>	slump shoulders, look down and away, bury face in hands, bow head, straight mouth
<b>Shock</b>	hands over mouth, mouth open, gasp, freeze and stare with wide eyes and raised eyebrows, smack palm against forehead, step back
<b>Shyness</b>	blush, avoid eye contact, keep distance from others, back away if others come too close, fold arms, bend head, 'hug' walls
<b>Smugness</b>	slight close-lipped smile, one raised eyebrow, slightly tucked chin, enigmatic smile, raise eyebrows, steeple fingers
<b>Suspicion</b>	narrow eyes, glance sideways, raise eyebrow, rub eyes, shake head, blow out cheeks, frown, tighten lips
<b>Thoughtfulness</b>	steeple fingers, pinch nose, close eyes, tug ear, stroke a real or imaginary beard, furrow brow, narrow eyes, tilt head and press lips together, rest chin on hand, lean back and look up
<b>Triumph</b>	clench hands above head, tilt head back and yell, pump fist in air, jump, roar, whoop
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## **Social Skills:**

- Cooperation
- Being a friend
- Sharing
- Participation
- Being patient
- Helping others
- Following directions
- Staying on task
- Accepting differences
- Listening
- Praising others and not using 'put downs'
- Positive communication and interaction
- Being polite and courteous
- Using good manners when talking, eating or in public
- Respecting ourselves, others and property, and accepting responsibility for what you say or do
- Being respectful of your rights and the rights of others
- Resolving conflicts when you have a problem with someone or they have a problem with you
- Active listening
- Gestures and eye contact
- Listening with understanding and empathy (putting yourself in the place of the other person – “theory of mind”)

- “Social thinking” - thinking about how others are thinking about you
- Thinking before you speak
- Speaking clearly and not shouting
- Having a sense of humor

## **What is Social Skills Training?**

“Social skills training” is a general term for instruction conducted in areas that promote more productive and positive interactions with others. Social skills training is for people who are socially unskilled in order to promote acceptance by others. An example of a social skills training program might include:

- Manners and positive interaction with others
  - approaching others in social acceptable ways
  - asking for permission rather than acting
  - making and keeping friends
  - sharing toys/materials
- Appropriate classroom behavior
  - work habits/academic survival skills
  - listening
  - attending to task
  - following directions
  - seeking attention properly
  - accepting the consequences of one's behavior
- Better ways to handle frustration/anger
  - counting to 10 before reacting
  - distracting oneself to a pleasurable task
  - learning an internal dialog to cool oneself down and reflect upon the best course of action
- Acceptable ways to resolve conflict with others
  - using words instead of physical contact
  - seeking the assistance of the teacher or conflict resolution team