

# **Social Skills For the Neurodivergent Child**

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# Sweating the Small Stuff

*“Accept Behaviors vs. Except Behaviors”*

## **What behaviors can we accept?**

- Really only bothers us

## **What behaviors are the exceptions?**

- Things that are a problem for a lot of people

**Rule of Thumb:** Will it prevent them from making friends or being socially successful?

# **Before we discuss mistakes = No guilt allowed!**

“People do the best they can with the emotional capacity they have.”

*~ Danny Raede, Asperger Experts*

Parents do the best they can with the life experience and knowledge they have.

*~ Lisa Mortensen, Spectrum Social Club*

**Biggest mistake we make:**

Teaching our kids things we are going to have to un-teach them later.

“You must unlearn what you have learned.”

~ Yoda

# Behaviors at home vs. behaviors in public

## **Code-switching**

“adjusting one’s style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others...”

*~Harvard Business Review*

## Examples:

- Table manners at home vs. elsewhere
- Burping out loud

Consistent behavior expectations  
are easier for our kiddos to understand.

# Social skills & Rules VS. Social Awareness

## **Social skills / Rules**

- Skills are tools, no framework
- Rules are concrete & inflexible
- Don't apply across the board
  - Example: Don't interrupt people
  - Example: It's rude to point
- Create confusion

## **Social Awareness**

- Dynamic & flexible
- Responsive & situational
- Sets the foundation for being able to decide which social skills to employ
- Kids can handle anything



# **If you had to teach an alien from space how to wear shoes, where would you start?**

## *“Shoe-Sole” Skills*

- Knowing how to walk in stilettos
- Knowing how to tie shoe laces

## *“Shoe-Sole” Awareness*

- Knowing the purpose of shoes
- Understanding that there are different types of shoes for different activities
- Being able to determine the best shoes for the current situation

# Why do neurodiverse kiddos struggle with social ability?

## **Executive Function Skills**

- Flexible thinking
- Problem solving
- Emotional regulation
- Self-control
- Memory
- and more...

**Many people with ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, and other neurodiverse identities have Executive Function Challenges (EFCs).**

# So, how can we help our children?

## **NOTICE**

Help your child by pointing out social feedback from an interaction.

*"I notice that Suzy stopped playing with you and walked away."*

## **WONDER**

Help your child consider the reason for the feedback they received.

*"I wonder if Suzy got frustrated because you insisted on doing everything your way."*

## **THINK**

Help your child consider options they have for handling the situation differently in the future.

*"What do you think you could do differently next time you are playing with a friend?"*

# Slowly Remove the Scaffolding

## **STEP 1:** Notice, Wonder, Think

If needed, help them consider options.  
Always use questions, and give several.

## **STEP 2:** Notice & Wonder

If needed, follow the wonder statement with something to spur them to think: "hmmm," or "interesting"

## **STEP 3:** Notice

If needed, follow your observation with something to spur them to think: "hmmm," or "interesting"

# Summary

- Use consistent behavioral expectations for home & public
- Focus on only correcting behaviors that would prevent your child from making friends or becoming social successful
- Build your child's social awareness by helping them recognize, understand, and problem solve social situations that arise.
  - Notice
  - Wonder
  - Think

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