

Improving Social Skills in Kids With Special Needs

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The start of each school year means new classmates, changes of classrooms, and sometimes even different schools for children, which often leads to anxiety. This unease may last for a few months as the child makes friends and gets used to their new environment.

However, each academic year also offers another chance to find a special friend, be a special friend, and make meaningful connections with others.

Feeling accepted socially not only makes children feel happy, valued and secure, but has been shown to improve academic skills related to group work, class participation, problem solving, reading comprehension and creative writing.

Many children develop social skills instinctively while others need explicit teaching to improve communication. This is especially true for students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism, auditory processing disorder, hearing impairment, nonverbal learning disorder and language impairments.

Social language skills groups, such as those we offer at the Kaufman Children's Center, provide inclusive environments where children can increase their confidence by practicing communicating with their peers.

Targeted skills include listening and accepting different ideas and perspectives; understanding slang, figurative language and idioms in conversation; self-regulation and emotional control; giving and receiving compliments; contributing to a conversation,



staying on topic, taking turns speaking and recognizing when a chat is completed; and many other social facets.

Parents can help to reduce interpersonal anxiety by reinforcing these social skills:

- Remind your child of situations where they enjoyed being friendly.
- Point out their successes.
- Practice welcoming a familiar person or a new student, or asking a friend to sit with them, walk together, or to play at recess.
- Practice actual topics to talk about with a friend.
- Practice talking and being with others through play dates or involvement in sports, clubs, classes and charities.
- Talk to teachers and other professionals about supporting your child's engagement with others.

All students benefit from social engagement for academic and interpersonal satisfaction. Special needs students have the same need to engage and socialize with others. As skills increase, confidence will increase as well.



◀ Kids with Challenges Become Champions ▶