

Readiness to Learn at School

Social Competence

What is it?

Social competence is cooperation and the ability to get along with others and make friendships. It is also taking responsibility and showing respect, as well as the ability to solve problems and adjust to routines. Socially competent children have positive work habits and are eager to explore new things like books, toys and games.

Why is it important?

Children who get along well with a wide variety of others, and who can adjust to new situations, are children who are prepared to succeed—at school and throughout life.



Play “Hide, Find and Hug”: It’s just like hide-and-seek within a very small area, but with a hug as the reward for finding the “hider.”

Give your baby a chance to be with other babies. For example, participate in a play group at your local Parent Link Centre, library or recreation centre.



What can I do to build my child’s social competence?

Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child’s first and best teacher of social competence. But you don’t need to teach “a lesson”—just look for teachable moments. Start by watching your child. See what he or she is doing, then join in. Children learn by playing, so have fun and be confident that how you are being—respectful, cooperative, and so on—is what they are learning from you, day after day, and this is the best way to ensure your child enjoys school and is successful throughout life. For ideas on strengthening your child’s social competence, try some of the activities on this tip sheet. Although these activities are grouped into three ages (see footprints below) they may be suitable for children of different ages.



INFANT



TODDLER



PRESCHOOLER

Place different objects, such as large balls or toys, inside a box or other container. Watch while your infant removes them one by one—or dumps them all on the floor. Cheer for your baby and talk about what he or she is doing.

Lay down on the floor next to your baby and talk, read a book, or sing.

Play peek-a-boo, with lots of exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, as well as kisses and hugs for rewards.

Go to the library and borrow books. Get a library card for you and your child. If there is a parent-child program that day, then stay, play and have fun.

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Play a game of make-believe with your child. For example, start by saying: “You be the parent and I’ll be the kid.”

Put together a “Me, I’m Special” photo book. With your toddler, look at the photos of family and friends, describing who and what is in the picture.

Play with a large ball. Take turns rolling it to each other. After awhile, include a stuffed toy in the game, just as you would include another child.



When out in the community, point out examples of socially appropriate behaviour: “We need to line up and wait our turn,” or “Let’s hold the door for that mom with the big stroller.” Praise your child for helping.

At bath time, tell your child his or her evening schedule. Be sure and add scoops and pitchers to the tub. Discuss concepts such as “my turn, your turn.”

Provide a large cardboard box and craft materials (e.g., crayons, paint, glue, safety scissors) for a small group of friends to decorate and use.

Have fun laughing while you make silly and obvious mistakes, such as calling your child by the wrong name so that she or he can correct you. Continue the game by calling a dog a pickle, a car a spaceship, and so on.

Read every day with your child. Talk about the pictures and story with your child (e.g., “What do you think he feels?” and “What do you think is going to happen next?”).



Play the “What would you do?” game: Invent different social situations and ask your child what to do. For example, “What would you do if a friend came to your birthday party with socks on her ears?”

When your child invites a friend over, give them a blanket and some cushions and let them make a “house” under a table.

Play the “What if...?” game: Start by asking your child, “What if you went outside in the rain... what would you need?” Continue with other scenarios, either realistic (going to the zoo) or imaginary (going into space).

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