

Social Resilience

Helping your children navigate their way through friendship

Presentation Mc Millan House March 2017

Social development

- ▶ Relationships everything....need to get it right before roller coaster of adolescence!
- ▶ Social development is the process by which children develop and learn skills in how to interact with others
- ▶ The ability to develop and sustain positive relationships with peers takes time and develops over the first 8-12 years of life
- ▶ As social beings we are born with the desire to connect and interact with our environment, but we are not born with the complex skills required to reflect positive social interaction

Relationships- the fourth R (the four pillars of learning)

- ▶ Social issues-largest group of presenting problems
- ▶ Importance of social development in children
- ▶ Social relationships contribute to social and cognitive development-social IQ as predictor of adult adaptability
- ▶ Socially “incompetent” (unskilled) children at risk-psychological, emotional and behavioural problems
- ▶ Happiness research abundantly clear: it is the quality of our relationships that most effects how happy we are
- ▶ Given importance and life long consequences:
relationships=first of the four Rs of education

Good relationships require good social skills

- ▶ Positive relationships with a range of people vital to positive mental health
- ▶ To develop relationships, children need to learn the social skills that fit with the groups and communities in which they live
- ▶ Social competence falls along developmental continuum-some children mature faster than others in their ability to deal with relationships
- ▶ Social skills not always acquired just through observation: for some this may be true...others not
- ▶ Social skills can be taught-important because if you fall behind it is difficult to catch up
- ▶ As children mature the repertoire of social skills required to establish and maintain friendships more sophisticated

What are social skills?

- ▶ Social skills made up of a number of important skills
 1. *Basic communication skills*: using appropriate language, listening, smiling, eye contact, reading emotions, interpreting body language, understanding cultural norms (personal space, forms of address etc)
 2. *Entry skills*: how to join a group, when to stand back and when to enter
 3. *Being part of a group*: how to share, take turns, follow rules, co-operate, manage conflict and help others
 4. *How to be a friend*: how to support peers, be helpful, show affection, involve others in decision making and being willing to follow requests

- ▶ **Goal as parents to help our children understand what constitutes good social skills**
- ▶ **Complex range of skills for children to learn: they won't get it right all the time**
- ▶ **Children with higher “EQ”, those who are tuned into the feelings of self and others likely to develop these skills more easily**

Resilience

- ▶ Importance of resilience and need for children to develop it.
- ▶ Definition : ability to bounce back and cope with adverse life situations.
Learn lifelong strategies to respond to future adversity
- ▶ Feeling alone and disconnected from peers distressing experience for child
- ▶ Evidence from resilience research clear: we cannot wrap our children up in cotton wool to protect them from uncomfortable situations
- ▶ Children need to learn problem solving and how to deal with difficult situations developmentally

- ▶ By learning these skills developmentally along the way children learn to face adverse situations (including friendship issues) with confidence and an expectation that they can cope...and deal with it.
- ▶ Risk of hypervigilance: “helicopter” parents deprive children of the most important lesson- LIFE.
- ▶ Two most significant environmental protective factors promoting resilience-feeling connected to peers, and family.
- ▶ Children with close peer relationships cope well with a wide range of stressors- peer group acceptance at school is a powerful protective factor.

- ▶ Children who can tolerate frustration (not getting everything they want or not getting it NOW) develop resilience skills that set them up for life.
- ▶ The ability to tolerate frustration , not fixed- can be taught. Children need to experience a degree of “discomfort” to develop mental “braking”.
- ▶ Children who practise limiting their reactions to frustrating events develop important connections in their brains.

The Marshmallow Study

- ▶ https://youtu.be/B_aaj6tea-Y

Early social development

- ▶ Infants and toddlers require adult interaction, relationships and play as primary source of socialisation. Don't need lot of interaction with other children
- ▶ Preschool years: Children begin to show more interest in other children. Interactions characterised by associative or parallel play. Still egocentric- friendships come and go

Friendships for 6-12 year olds

- ▶ 6-12 year olds increasingly interested in being part of a group, concerned about what the group thinks of them and will try to keep their place in the group. Worry that “no-one likes them”
- ▶ During early primary children are still closest to their parents: as they move toward adolescence they are more influenced by their peers.
- ▶ As they get better at reasoning, friendships take on a more lasting quality
- ▶ Gradually becoming less egocentric and more aware of others

6-9 year olds

- ▶ Egocentric still; think a good friend is someone who does what they want. They don't always understand give and take (you may have to explain it)
- ▶ Still display elements of parallel play
- ▶ Don't understand give and take fully
- ▶ You may have to point out the other person's point of view and help them problem solve

8-12 year olds

- ▶ Children begin to see their friends point of view-empathy developing
- ▶ Friendships become deeper, more lasting and can be possessive.
- ▶ Realisation they need to do things for each other: problem solve together
- ▶ Share feelings, secrets, agreements, plans....
- ▶ Very concerned about how their friends see them: their appearance becomes important to them
- ▶ Mostly relate to their own sex
- ▶ Girls more likely to get status from the group they belong to: boys from sporting participation

Parenting Styles and Social Competence

- ▶ Quality of everyday experiences between parents and children fundamental to children's developing social skills
- ▶ Parental responsiveness and nurturance key factors in development of child's social confidence
- ▶ Loving and responsive parents help children to see the world in a positive way and expect that relationships will be rewarding: optimism
- ▶ Optimism a personality trait that can be taught. Being optimistic contributes to resilience
- ▶ Research in social skill development identifies 3 styles of parenting: authoritarian, permissive and authoritative
- ▶ Differ on 2 parenting dimensions: amount of nurturing in interactions and amount of parental control over activities and behaviour
- ▶ High nurturance and moderate control facilitate socially competent children

Vitamin N

- ▶ 5:1 ratio. Research suggests 96% of interactions with our children are negative!
- ▶ <https://youtu.be/j3cgUhtRUbE>


Bullying vs Negative Social Situations

- ▶ St. Leonard's College DOES NOT tolerate or accept bullying
- ▶ Bullying: repeated, *deliberate*, targeted behaviour with intention to harm physically or emotionally
- ▶ Important to report to teacher immediately if you think your child being bullied
- ▶ Be careful not to label all negative social situations as bullying. Some social situations contain similar elements to bullying. Can be fine line
- ▶ Bullying is not the same as conflict or difference of opinion
- ▶ Conflict: both parties distressed and there is an issue at core of disagreement
- ▶ Bullying is not social isolation and rejection (unless it is targeted and intended to hurt). Children can chose who they play with-they can and do change friends


How Parents Can Help

- ▶ Listen, listen and listen! Tune into your child's feelings. "Emotion coach" if your child experiencing strong emotion.
- ▶ Remember: children have different personalities and different friendship needs
- ▶ Model good social skills-share, talk, listen, co-operate. Expect your child to copy you and reflect your values
- ▶ Provide and encourage opportunities for your children to play with friends- no substitute for experience gained mixing with other children. Observe and provide sensitive feedback
- ▶ Play with your child- just for the sake of having fun! At such times don't teach, compete with or criticise-children who play with their parents have more advanced social skills from those who don't

- ▶ Talk with your children about relationships and values- normal daily conversations show you care and provide platform for genuine problem solving.
- ▶ Take a problem solving approach to difficulties they bring up-we don't need to have all the answers. Encourage them to consider the problem for themselves and generate solutions
- ▶ STOP, THINK, DO model effective framework to consider social problems
- ▶ When problem solving encourage your child to consider various solutions and perspectives. Reflect on potential consequences, share your own experiences. Role play possible scenarios
- ▶ Endorse friendly and pro social solutions: encourage compromise and negotiation as ways to solve problems

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- ▶ Reflect a resilient, positive and *optimistic* attitude towards social setbacks. Provide interpretations of social events that are constructive
 - ▶ Children present us with their version of reality-with their filters and reasoning applied. Still egocentric and “always right”. Be mindful some children may be having difficulties relating for reasons beyond their control: remember all of us want to have friends and be liked. Teach and model tolerance and compassion. Avoid the temptation to talk about other children’s behaviour.

- ▶ **NEVER INTERFERE.** No-one likes to see their child unhappy, hurt or disappointed
Crucial to help our children deal with upsets, but not to intercede on their behalf
risk : children will come to rely on parents to solve all their problems
- ▶ Teaching problem solving skills=teaching self responsibility. Your child is the driver you are the navigator!
- ▶ Inappropriate for a parent to speak with someone else's child about a social situation-address all concerns through the classroom teacher: objective , professional perspective
- ▶ Avoid the temptation to talk about other children's behaviour
- ▶ Talk with your child's teacher for context, advice and strategies. Children are often very different at home and school-normal. Can't assume because your child behaves in a certain way at home that they are the same at school



“You can’t stop the
waves, but you can learn
to surf.”

– Jon Kabat-Zinn

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