As teachers start out teaching social skills we encourage them to start with a basic set of 16 skills to help students be more successful in school and in life. We may even suggest they keep things simply by starting with five core skills, including skills like Following Instructions, Getting the Teacher’s Attention, and Accepting No. These are great skills… necessary skills, but they certainly aren’t the only skills that students need to navigate school and life. Therefore, a teacher is justified in asking… “Once we teach the basics, where should we go next?”

Our first recommendation would be to note where students frequently struggle and choose skills that help them better handle these situations. For example, imagine if every time you have your students work in groups it is chaos – students are fighting with one another, talking over each other and some students not participating at all. To help students work better together you may choose to teach the skills Contributing to Group Activities or Sharing Attention with Others.

As you learn more about your students, you will learn which skills are needed and will be able to customize your social skills lesson plans to meet the needs of your specific class. Until then, we suggest you start with these five advanced skills to help push your class forward. To help with these lessons, you can download a handout with the skill steps here.

1. **Completing Tasks**
   Staying on Task is a great skill to teach students, but it is only a stepping stone to an even more important skill…Completing Tasks. Simply put, completing a task helps a student be more successful than just staying busy. When teaching this skill it may help be helpful to provide students with a reason or rationale of why it is important to complete tasks. A good rationale would be, “When you complete your homework assignment on time, you get credit for your work and can move on to something else you may like to do.”

2. **Ignoring Distractions by Others**
   Along the same lines, students often struggle to remain on-task when distractions are present in the classroom. Distractions can be small, like a fly landing on a student’s desk, or larger, like a disruptive student in the classroom. No matter the distraction, the skill remains the same. When students grow skilled at ignoring distractions, everyone in the classroom gets more done.

3. **Showing Respect**
   Showing Respect is a skill that adults often list as a “basic” skill. That said, it is usually easier to teach after teaching skills like Getting the Teacher’s Attention or Accepting Criticism/Feedback. Showing Respect builds on these foundational skills and allows students to generalize the skill in more situations. When teaching the skill of Showing Respect it is important that you define exactly what respect looks like. And what respect looks like may vary depending on a number of factors. For example, some adults may expect a student to look them in the eye as a sign of respect. However, in
certain cultures this may not be the norm. Describing exactly what respect looks like and providing opportunities to practice helps students master the skill more quickly.

4. **Choosing Appropriate Words to Say**
   Students come from a variety of home environments, each with unique role models and histories. Students sometimes use words that may be common in their home environment, but are not appropriate for the school environment (e.g., slang, profanity). Students who can adapt their language for the school environment can communicate more effectively and avoid getting in trouble, offending someone or being misunderstood.

   In addition the skill of *Choosing Appropriate Words to Say*, you may want to add a lesson on [code switching](#), or how to adapt social skills to different situations.

5. **Controlling Emotions**
   Every human feels emotions. Some people are more skilled at managing their emotions than others. Students who can control their emotions, whether they are experiencing feelings of anger or giddiness, are generally viewed as more mature and tend to navigate both school and relationships more successfully.

Each of these skills can be found in the book, *Teaching Social Skills to Youth*, available from Boys Town Press, along with 178 additional skills. These skills have been task analyzed to fit most situations, but the great thing about these skills as that you can adapt them to fit specific situations your students are faced with, and you can even develop additional skills to meet the needs of your students. Just remember to keep the skills behaviorally focused, break them down into three-to-five manageable steps (whenever possible), and provide plenty of opportunities to teach and practice the skills.