

“To teach is to touch a life forever.” -Unknown

Visit any school in the country and it would be unusual to *not* see this posted somewhere in the building. These words are a reminder of the effects teachers have – effects they may never have the opportunity to actually see.

And, while teachers understand the importance of the academic skills their students need to master, the importance of social and emotional competencies is becoming increasingly evident. To fulfill this need, many educators are becoming acutely aware of the need for teaching and practicing social skills as part of the school day. This new awareness may be attributed to seeing a lack of social skills in the students they work with or coming across more research indicating that strong social and emotional skills may be a more accurate indicator of future success than IQ or academic success.

In theory, this is all well and good. However, as a classroom teacher, where do you start when trying to incorporate social or life skill instruction? One option is to choose a handful of meaningful, generalizable social skills to teach and reinforce, and then build on those over time. Here are five examples of social skills that can be easily blended in an already full academic day. These skills provide a strong foundation for success in the classroom and beyond, and will make learning future social skills easier.

1. Following Instructions

Students are expected to follow instructions dozens, perhaps hundreds, of times daily. Why not help them be more successful by letting them know exactly how to do it? In a perfect world, all students would come to class having mastered this skill. But in reality, we can't assume they already know how. "Following Instructions" should be one of the first skills you teach your students. This is a skill students will use often, so you will have many opportunities for students to practice this skill throughout the day. Almost as important as their practice of this skill is making sure to praise their efforts. Building competence and confidence with this skill will provide the motivation and enthusiasm for students to build from as you teach more skills.

Once you have taught the skill, use this fun activity to help students improve. ([link to following instructions lesson plans](#))

2. Staying on Task

Many times adults expect students to have the ability to stay on task when following an instruction or completing an assignment. Though some children naturally figure out that it is in their best interest to keep working until they are finished, others may need more support knowing how and why to do so. Teaching "Staying on Task" is another important skill to address right away, and is a natural follow-up to "Following Instructions." Think of all the times your students are expected to stay focused and work quietly during a typical school day: when completing an assignment, when you are working with individual students, during group work time, reading rotations, and don't forget district or state testing! Mastering the skill of "Staying on Task" can give students the foundation they need to focus on the academic content at-hand. Don't forget to remind students that staying on task helps work get completed more quickly, and may speed up their chance to get to some of the more fun activities! Use this fun video to help introduce the skill. For more help on teaching kids to stay on task get *I Just Want to do it My Way* by author Julia Cook from Boys Town Press.

3. Getting the Teacher's Attention

"Getting the Teacher's Attention" correctly not only helps students become more successful, but has the added benefit of helping your classroom run more smoothly. Think of all the times students struggle – a question, a bathroom need, or just wanting to make a statement. Without this skill, students tend interrupt the flow of a lesson or the help another student was receiving so they can have their needs met immediately. By articulating your expectation for getting your attention and being consistent with your tolerances for the appropriate behavior, you are teaching students patience, perseverance and consideration for others.

4. Asking for Help

Similar to appropriately getting your attention it is important to teach your students how to ask for help. This is a skill that can be hard for many students. For some it may be a cultural difference they have picked up outside of class, or they may be embarrassed or scared. Being proactive and letting students know that there will be times when they will need to ask for help, you provide students the freedom to take appropriate risks and communicate their needs. When students understand that perfection is not expected when learning something new or difficult, it helps them to focus their energy on the process of learning and mastering academic content. For more help on teaching kids they don't have to be perfect get Priscilla and the Perfect Storm from Boys Town Press.

5. Greeting Others

"Greeting Others" is a skill kids will need throughout life but also has the added benefit of improving classroom relationships and culture. Each morning as your students enter your classroom, meet them at the classroom door and greet them with something individualized and personal. This not only teaches and models for them the important skill of "Greeting Others," but gives you the daily opportunity to make a personal connection with each one. Go a step further by greeting each student when returning from lunch and then adapting the skill to saying goodbye at the end of each day. These individual interactions with each student will go a long way in developing positive, trusting relationships.

Once you have modeled this behavior to your students help them practice by taking a turn each morning as the classroom greeter. Not only will they master the skill but your classroom culture will improve as the students practice together. Here is a free poster to help you teach the steps of "Greeting Others" to students.

Making a positive difference in the lives of students is what makes teaching most rewarding. While helping students become academically strong is a top priority, helping them become socially and emotionally strong is just as important. By implementing these 5 social skills, you can give your students a head start on the road to success.