

SOCIAL SKILLS

Very often people who have attention deficits (ADD) or hyperactivity (ADHD) feel isolated from peers. Both disorders affect socialization by causing intrusiveness or lack of attention. In mild cases people can be taught coping skills. Although medication can decrease aggression and disruptiveness and improve focusing, people may need to learn ways to interact that they missed in their premedication days. The following games and activities are designed for use in classrooms and social skills groups. They can also be adapted for family activities, Sunday school, support groups, or scout meetings and can be redesigned as consequences for undesirable behavior.¹

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

- Practice respecting personal space by playing Run-&-Stop. One person runs towards another who is the “stopper.” The runner must halt before invading the stopper’s “comfort zone.” Make the game more challenging by having people skip or hop and use a stopwatch to combine the ability to be both fast and respectful of personal space. Feedback can be given on how well the runner did. Use yardsticks to measure each person’s personal comfort zone.
- Practice respecting others’ moods by playing Approach-Retreat. One person is “it” and nonverbally expresses an emotion she reads on a card—bored, tired, excited, mad, lonely, mischievous, sad, hostile, or friendly. Each person in the group must decide how many steps to walk towards or away from the person who is it, and what words (or silence) would make the best contact. Both observers and the person who is it can give feedback on which approaches or retreats seemed best.

INTERACTING

- Teach eye contact by playing Laser. Several people sit in a circle. Everyone is given a scrap of paper. The person with an “L” on his or her scrap is the “laser.” Whoever that person makes eye contact with is “wiped-out” and announces, “I’m down.” At any time people who are still in the game can guess who is the laser. If the guess is correct, the round is over, if the guess is wrong, the guesser is out.
- Practice showing interest by playing Bla Bla Bla. Choose a panel of listeners and one speaker. The speaker gives a talk by saying nothing but, “Bla, Bla, Bla . . .” The group votes on which listener appears most interested by making eye contact, leaning forward, or nodding. The group can feed back exactly what each person did to appear interested. The game can be made more challenging by instructing the speaker to be as boring as possible. Use a stopwatch and gradually increase the length of the game.
- Practice conversation starters by playing People Openers. Group members write questions that they would like to know about the person who is “it”—facts, beliefs, opinions, and interests. Encourage people to put their curiosity in charge. Every question is signed but read anonymously. The people who are “it” rate how open or closed each question made them feel on a 0–10 scale. Totally inappropriate questions can be censored. This is a good game for parents who often don’t know how to start conversations with their children.

¹ Topics for activities were taken from *Beyond Ritalin* by Garber, Garber & Spizman (HarperPerennia, 1996)

- Practice conversation keepers with listening circles. One person expresses a feeling or role-plays a comment that bothered him or her. The next person makes a listening response. Speakers (or the group)

give a percentage rating of how well the person was heard. Responses can be scored. To make the game more interesting the speaker can throw a beanbag to the person who will make a listening response that rephrases the thought (1 Pt.), labels the feeling (2 Pts.) or Validate (3 Pts.)—"It sounds like you're saying. . . . Do you feel . . . ? It makes sense that you would feel . . . because. . . ."

- Practice greetings by playing Turn-on/Turn-off. People in the group are given a card with a feeling (perky, bored, superior, inferior, annoyed) or a situation (seeing an old friend, faking it with someone you don't like, or making someone feel special.) They choose a greeting that would express the feeling or situation—Hi, Hello, What's up? How you doing? How are? A spinner is used to choose who will receive the greeting. The recipient and group discuss if the greeting was a turn-on or turn-off without knowing what was on the card. This game can generate humorous, inviting greetings.

HANDLING EMOTIONS

- Practice positive attitudes by asking for a rephrase. Simply say, "I'll need to hear you say that differently before you go to recess, lunch, or get out of your seat." Play Instant Rewind as a group activity. Parents or teachers repeat their comment and whoever responds in the best tone gets a reward.
- Practice expressing feelings without anger with Assertive Language Circles: Place an empty chair in the center of a circle. Each person makes a statement that starts with "You" to someone they imagine sitting in the chair—"You are . . ." "You make me feel . . ." Go around the circle three more times changing the you-statement into one that starts with the words "I" or makes a request—(1) "I feel . . . when you. . ." (2) "Would you . . . , . . . , or. . ." (3) "I will (not) . . . if you. . ."
- Practice handling conflicts by playing Resolution. Have the group write down examples of conflicts they've experienced. Partners role-play resolving the conflict by stating it clearly, considering the other person's ideas, staying focused on the issue and generating at least 3 solutions—"I want . . . and you want. . ." "I know you're concerned about . . . and I think we can get around that by. . ." "Let's get back to. . ." The group rates how well each pair resolved the conflict. Extra points can be given for expressing confidence and using the words "and" and "we"—"You think . . . and I think. . ." "I'm sure we can resolve this."
- Practice dealing with rejections and rudeness by playing Bully Bust. People write an insult, criticism or comment that has or would bother them. Comments are signed but read anonymously. Whoever is "it" makes a "bully bust" that defuses the put-down. Points are taken away if the retort is an attack, defense or withdrawal and points are given if the response makes a bully bust by:²
 1. Treating cruelty as kindness—"Why, thank you. Are you trying to help me. . . ?"
 2. Using humor to distract and confuse—"You say that like it's a bad thing."
 3. Asking questions to find the cause of meanness—"What's really bothering you?"
 4. Setting limits—"I'll talk to you when you're in a better mood."

² See *How to Handle Bullies, Teasers and other Meanies*, a parent-child resource, by Kate Cohen-Posey (Lakeland, FL: Rainbow Books, 1995)