

Teaching Social Skills to Youth

4th
Edition

An Easy-to-Follow Guide to Teaching
196 Basic to Complex Life Skills

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Boys Town, Nebraska

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Introduction to Social Skills Teaching

Shay never wanted to hear the word no! And before she learned the skill of “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer,” most of the adults around her never wanted to get stuck telling her no. The 11-year-old had learned, from years of experience, to get what she wanted by giving a look that sent the message: “I REALLY will scream and fight right here if you say no!” Unfortunately, her parents, teachers, and others buckled under the threat.

What they didn’t understand, however, was how much that was hurting Shay. Her relationships with her peers and other adults suffered. Whenever she heard no, screaming, crying, and arguing quickly followed. Her behavior continued to escalate until more trouble ensued.

Shay’s education in how to appropriately accept no started in school when her teacher taught the skill as part of a classroom lesson. The teacher also sent the students home with posters that described the steps of “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer”:

- * Look at the person.*
- * Say, “Okay.”*
- * Stay calm (avoid arguing or complaining).*
- * If you disagree, ask later.*

Shay’s parents started working with her on learning the steps of the skill. After weeks of practice and the use of appropriate consequences, Shay had the steps down, and her behavior began to improve. Now when someone tells her no, she isn’t always happy about it but she does a much better job accepting no than she ever has before. Shay also gets along better with her parents and teacher, and they are proud of her progress. For this child, one simple, basic skill made a huge difference in her behavior, her personality, and the way she gets along with others.

Social skills, such as “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer,” are nothing new – except to the children (and adults) who don’t have them or know how to use them. The earlier children and adolescents (and even adults) learn and know how to use social skills, the more successful they can be.

Everyone needs social skills. Social skills are the tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask questions, ask for help, get their needs met in appropriate ways, get along with others, make friends and develop healthy relationships, protect themselves, and generally be able to interact with anyone and everyone they meet in their journey through life.

While the long-term goals of social skill instruction are generalization (using the right skill at the right time in the right situation) and internalization (making skills a natural part of one’s everyday life), the short-term benefits to teaching children skills cannot be overstated. In fact, when children learn foundational skills, such as “Following Instructions,” “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer,” and “Disagreeing Appropriately,” it enables whoever is teaching to continue teaching and sets the stage for instruction in more advanced and complex skills. In other words, if a child knows how to appropriately follow instructions, they can be directed to adopt and use a variety of prosocial behaviors that make up other beneficial skills. It is the repertoire of skills a child develops over time that shapes how they function in society.

According to Dr. Stephen Greenspan (2012), who has studied and written about the importance of social competence for more than 30 years, social incompetence contributes to a range of challenges—from gullibility to an inability to accept corrective feedback to violence—that undermine children (and adults). Because of the preva-

lence of and risks associated with social incompetence, when discussing achievement and teacher success, Greenspan believes such social and emotional factors as classroom harmony to be even more important than achievement test scores.

A child who does not learn social skills and the basics of social interactions is at tremendous risk for failure in the classroom, juvenile delinquency, being ostracized by positive peers, or being adversely influenced by negative peers. Children who are never taught social skills develop their own habits and devices for getting their needs met, habits and devices that often conflict with what society views as acceptable behavior. The result can be an adolescent and adult life punctuated by violence, drug and alcohol abuse, failed relationships, incarceration, and the frustration of never realizing one’s goals.

Boys Town’s Approach to Teaching Skills

Social skill instruction and achieving skill competency are so important to the success of young people and adults that they are an integral part of every program Boys Town offers. Boys Town has been caring for children since 1917, and while times and children’s problems have radically changed over the years, our approach of combining the “head” – child care technology, research, and innovation – and the “heart” – compassion, caring, and loving guidance – has remained constant. All kids – especially those who are at risk or in danger of becoming at risk – need the kind of attention and help that brings about positive, lasting changes in their way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Social skills hold the key to unlocking the potential for

good that every child possesses.

Boys Town's mission is to change the way America cares for children and families. Accomplishing that mission on a day-to-day basis is difficult, requiring commitment, sacrifice, and skilled caregivers. In addition to our long-range goals, Boys Town first provides a safe environment for young people where they can put their lives in order and, in many cases, begin healing wounds that run very deep.

Our Continuum of Care is unique to Boys Town and provides a tightly linked spectrum of research-proven services based on the Boys Town Model®. Children and families can begin services at any point along the continuum and move to other levels, depending on their progress or needs. This unique approach enables us to help more children and families in more ways, with the same expectations for positive results. For children, this means being successful in school, at home, and on the job while growing into productive citizens. For families, it means having a safe home, being able to solve problems, and staying together. For communities, it means stronger, empowered families and citizens who contribute to the good of society.

The famed Village of Boys Town, Nebraska, remains the national headquarters for Boys Town and is the research, program development, and administrative center of the organization. Boys Town's outreach is national in scope, with sites across the country providing life-changing care. Even more children and families receive benefits through our community support services and programs.

Boys Town youth care and health care services meet each child and family exactly where they are so they get the right kind of care, at the right time, in the right

way. Whether caring for a child in crisis, treating complex health care conditions, or helping families find the parenting resources they need, we deliver expert, compassionate care and have a proven track record of helping children and families heal and grow in mind, body, and spirit.

Residential Treatment Center

The Boys Town Residential Treatment Center is changing the lives of children ages 5 to 18 who have severe behavioral and mental health problems through a proven, medically directed treatment program. Our goal is to help children gain the self-assurance and academic and social skills needed to succeed in life.

The Residential Treatment Center at Boys Town National Research Hospital® is licensed by the Nebraska Department of Health and accredited by The Joint Commission. The Center is licensed by the Nebraska Department of Health and accredited by The Joint Commission.

Facility Secure – Our treatment program is specifically designed to offer medically directed care for more seriously troubled youth who require supervision, safety, and therapy but do not require inpatient psychiatric care. The program offers around-the-clock supervision, locked facilities, and numerous other safety and program features.

Intervention and Assessment Services

Boys Town Intervention and Assessment Services® provide emergency, short-term, 24-hour care in a residential setting for boys and girls ages 10 to 18. Many have been abused and/or neglected, are runaways, or have come through the juvenile justice system. When youth enter these services, professionally trained staff mem-

bers begin assessing their safety, health, and service needs in order to determine and plan for the best permanent care arrangement.

The primary goals at this level of service are to remove youth from dangerous situations and/or provide temporary care. Every child receives an immediate behavioral intervention. Youth may also receive additional clinical assessments based on their needs and the desire of the referral source. Staff members also teach youth social skills, ensure that they continue to go to school, and work with youth (and when possible, their families) to develop individualized, skill-focused service plans that address behavior problem areas. Whenever possible, staff members help youth work toward reunification with their family.

Family Home Program

At this service level, youth with serious behavioral or emotional problems live in a family-style home and receive teaching and care from professionally trained married couples called Family-Teachers®. Six to eight boys or girls, usually ages 10 to 18, live in each home. The couple and a full-time Assistant Family-Teacher® are responsible for providing structured supervision for youth in their daily living and care activities. This includes meeting the educational, medical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral needs of the youth in care. A major focus of this program is teaching youth social, independent-living, and educational skills, and helping them build healthy relationships with others. With a focus on reunification, the Family-Teaching staff works with families to achieve permanency, safety, and child well-being.

Foster Family Services

Boys Town Foster Family Services® is a community-based program where professionally trained Foster Parents provide care and support to children of all ages, infancy through adolescence. Foster parents help meet the behavioral, emotional, and educational needs of the children in their care. Service intensity ranges from highly intensive to less intensive, based upon the needs of the child. With a focus on reunification, Foster Family Services utilize a strength-based, team approach to work with families to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being. Foster Parents receive 24/7 support from Boys Town professionals.

In-Home Family Services

Boys Town values families and believes that children who can be safe at home belong at home. The main goal of In-Home Family Services is to prevent children from being placed outside of the home and/or to reunify them with their family if outside placement is necessary.

One of our fastest-growing programs, Boys Town In-Home Family Services® is a family-centered, skill-based intervention for families that are in or near a crisis situation, and are at risk for having a child removed from the home. Intervention duration ranges from short term to long term, and service intensity ranges from highly intensive to less intensive, depending on a family's needs. Boys Town Family Consultants are available 24/7 and work with families in their homes to help caregivers build on their strengths, improve their parenting skills, and identify community resources and supports. Services focus on the entire family. Consultants also help families learn how to solve problems that may

threaten their stability or their children's safety after the intervention ends.

Community Support Services

Boys Town Community Support Services provide resources and valuable information to parents, families, and professionals across the United States, and direct care for children and families in certain affiliate site communities. The main goal of programs at this service level is to help people help themselves by providing tools, training, resources, and other techniques based on Boys Town's research-proven approach to the care and education of children and families.

CARE COORDINATION SERVICES

Care Coordination Services provides case-management services to children and families facing significant challenges, such as involvement in the child welfare system or raising a child with behavioral or mental health issues. The family may be intact or, in some cases, one or more children may be placed outside of the home. Boys Town's trained Consultants work with families to help them identify and access the right services at the right time, build and maintain family stability, and develop quality parenting skills. Boys Town Consultants are available to families 24 hours a day, seven days a week for crisis support

OUTPATIENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Outpatient Behavioral Health therapists work with children from infancy to early adulthood and their families to assess and treat youth issues. With the involvement of parents, therapists develop service plans for youth with difficult problems like Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anger management, bedtime

and sleep disorders, out-of-control behaviors, learning challenges, and depression. Psychologists and therapists work with families, physicians, teachers, and others to extend care beyond the "therapy hour" to ensure long-term success.

SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

Boys Town views schools as an integral part of the community and provides a variety of programs that can support or enhance the educational environment. Boys Town's education training and consultation programs teach school staff how to implement classroom management methods intended to promote a safe and effective learning environment. These programs use the Boys Town Education Model®, which focuses on skills teaching, relationship building, and effective discipline procedures. Boys Town also has other school-based programs that supplement existing curricula with instruction on issues such as connecting parents to school, character building, and adolescent reading, or provide behavioral assessments for youth and support to education staff.

BOYS TOWN SCHOOLS®

School programs operated by Boys Town help students with learning or behavioral problems so they can be successful in the classroom. This includes students who are being served by Boys Town programs or have struggled or failed in mainstream schools. Specially trained Boys Town teachers and administrators provide instruction to help meet children's unique behavioral, emotional, and educational needs. School staff members base their instruction for students on the principles of the Boys Town Education Model, which include skills teaching, relationship building, and effective discipline procedures.

BOYS TOWN NATIONAL HOTLINE® (800.448.3000)

The **Boys Town National Hotline** is a free resource and counseling service that assists callers 24/7, 365 days a year, nationwide. Open to everyone, but with an emphasis on helping children and parents, the Hotline has trained professional counselors who provide emergency or direct assistance, or refer callers to community resources. Since opening in 1989, the Hotline has handled more than eight million calls and has helped prevent thousands of suicides nationwide.

The Hotline also provides a website created especially for teens – **www.YourLifeYourVoice.org**. Teens can share information with other teens, ask questions and get answers to the challenges they are facing, and access assistance from trained counselors in emergency or crisis situations. The site enables and encourages teens to share their problems, concerns, and challenges in positive, creative ways in a safe online environment.

BOYSTOWN.ORG/PARENTING

Boystown.org/parenting is a free online resource for parents that offers tips, advice, resources, and guidance. This website contains practical, skill-based materials and information for parents and caregivers of children of all ages. All of the practical, helpful content is based on Boys Town's positive approach to parenting and research-proven caregiver strategies.

COMMON SENSE PARENTING®

Common Sense Parenting provides parents and other caregivers with proven techniques that can help them build good family relationships, prevent and correct misbehavior, use consequences to improve

behavior, teach self-control, and remain calm. This instruction is generally provided in the community and schools in both formal and informal settings.

BOYS TOWN PRESS®

The **Boys Town Press** publishes books, posters, multi-media products, and other resources to assist children, parents, caregivers, educators, and professionals who work with youth and families. Publications are based on the proven youth care, parenting, and educational techniques developed and used in Boys Town programs across the country.

All of our programs and materials are rooted in the Boys Town Model.

BOYS TOWN RESEARCH

Research is critical to our mission and plays an important role in the development and delivery of our youth care and health care services to families, children, and patients. Boys Town is internationally recognized as a research leader in hearing, language and related communication disorders, and pediatric neuroscience. Through each of our research centers, we translate findings directly into the care we provide for children, families, and patients.

ADVOCATES FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

Children should be treated as children, not adults, especially when they violate the law and enter the juvenile justice system. We believe in rehabilitation and redemption, not arbitrary, discriminatory, or punitive intervention. We advocate for a fair and just system that takes into consideration a child's age, psychosocial development, and cognitive abilities. Given the right interventions and support, no child is beyond hope.

The Boys Town Model

To understand the concept of helping children learn new skills and behaviors so they can competently use them in society, one must first realize that we are in the “business” of bringing healing and hope to children and families. Everything we do is rooted in the human experience – the successes, the failures, the progress, the obstacles. Children are human beings, not products on an assembly line. Boys Town’s caregivers are not robots programmed to perform the same task, the same way, every day. It is true that technology and theory (the head) are necessary, but so is genuine compassion and concern (the heart) and treating each youth as an individual with unique problems. Technology without compassion is pure manipulation; love and compassion without good science is pure sentimentality.

While the Boys Town Model has its basis in learning theory, it has not adopted a “mechanistic” view of how a child learns, as have other models that take this approach. In the Boys Town Model, the child is an active participant in the teaching and learning that occurs. The child isn’t merely told how to behave; they learn positive behaviors and how to choose to use them in many different situations. This “empowerment,” or self-help, approach combines the active participation of the child with the active teaching of the parent, caretaker, or teachers. The strength of this approach is that it teaches children prosocial skills and helps them build healthy relationships with others.

The goal of this approach is not to control children, but to help them take control of their own lives. This is an ongoing learning process. Boys Town’s teaching methods utilize behavioral principles, while allow-

ing children to integrate their thoughts and feelings into this learning process. And, unlike many other learning theory models, Boys Town effectively uses external reinforcement, where appropriate, to promote and maintain skill-learning and relationship development. This allows children to change intrinsically. Inadequate thought patterns change, negative feelings diminish, and inappropriate behaviors are replaced by positive behaviors for the youth and others.

In addition to teaching skills, other hallmarks of the Boys Town Model include:

- Safety, permanency, and well-being
- Family engagement
- People closest to children and families are the primary change agents
- Behavioral orientation
- Individualized skill acquisition
- Replicable, outcome-driven programs
- Internal and external collaboration

Together, these hallmarks comprise a proven, research-based, outcomes-oriented, and effective approach to helping children and families. In our programs, we expect kids to get better, and they do.

While all of the elements of our Model share equal importance, teaching skills is what helps kids learn new ways of thinking, new ways of feeling good, and new ways of behaving. Through teaching, we give kids the skills they need to take control of their lives and be successful. Whether it’s a parent who wants to teach his daughter the skill of problem-solving, a staff member in a youth shelter trying to help a boy learn anger control strategies, or a teacher looking to equip a student with the skill of staying on task or following instructions, teach-

ing skills is the key to healthy child development and replacing problem behaviors with positive alternative behaviors.

ADDRESSING Sociocultural Influences

ADDRESSING is an acronym that stands for Age and generational influences, Developmental and acquired Disabilities, Religion and spiritual orientation, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic status, Sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, National origin, and Gender.

The ADDRESSING Model is a tool caregivers can use to help formulate culturally responsive treatment methods that better serve children and families by recognizing and respecting their individual identities. The model encourages caregivers to broaden their interpretation of cultural identity beyond ethnicity and race to see and understand the significant role cultural groups, traditions, and influences play in a youth's development.

ADDRESSING, as the acronym implies, is designed to prevent caregivers from making inaccurate or sweeping generalizations based on surface-level characteristics and internalized beliefs. Using this framework or approach can broaden the caregivers' perspective by calling attention to how an individual's multicultural background influences knowledge, skills, and attitudes about their external and internal worlds. It's a model for understanding the way cultural influences affect one's worldview in addition to recognizing the various cultural influences that help shape and explain a person's identity. Caregivers who lack cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills may view certain populations or people through a flawed, distorted, or unfair lens. There-

fore, it is essential that caregivers develop their cultural responsiveness by continually learning about other cultures and beliefs, identifying biases, and assessing their own cultural perspectives (Hays, 2008).

Culturally Responsive Social Skill Instruction

When social skill instruction is part of an individualized treatment plan, cultural and ethnic factors will influence what skills are targeted, how those skills are taught, and what skill components are included. For example, many cultures consider it a sign of disrespect for a youth to make direct eye contact with an adult. However, almost all of the social skills taught in the Boys Town Model include the component, "Look at the person." Therefore, when teaching this specific behavior to a youth who may have been taught to avoid eye contact, a caregiver may need to modify or target the behavior for extra teaching and shape it over a longer period of time. The caregiver also should teach discrimination skills to the youth, helping them to understand that it is acceptable to look at their classroom teacher or a boss at work, but it may not be appropriate to make eye contact with elders who are from or share their culture. Other behavioral areas that may require modified goals because of culture-specific factors or influences (family, home life, economic class, ethnicity, etc.) include the following:

- Body and facial gestures
- Social coolness versus warmth
- Following directions (as opposed to seeing it as a request or an option)
- Tone and volume
- Personal space
- Displays of emotion

- Patterns of communication in various situations
- Manners
- Courtesy
- Roles (student, teacher, male, female, age, etc.)
- Sense of fairness and justice

Support and understanding are key when teaching children skills that may step outside their comfort level or defy the cultural expectations taught within their households. Caregivers should appreciate how a youth's culture has influenced their beliefs, behaviors, and values. Moreover, caregivers should demonstrate respect for the youth's culture and avoid undermining norms instilled at home while simultaneously supporting the development of these new skills. This can be done in a variety of ways, including...

- Acknowledging the importance of their current social norm within specific contexts.
- Discussing the value of their social or cultural norm in specific contexts.
- Brainstorming together situations/ settings where the new skill would be valuable and more fitting.
- Using observational data to demonstrate or model to them the value of this new skill within certain contexts.
- Getting the family involved by asking for their support and knowledge to help the youth understand when the new skill is appropriate and when the cultural norm is appropriate. Gaining their insight and working with them can ensure the youth learns the new skill while staying true to their cultural norms.

As stated earlier, caregivers should be comfortable with understanding their own cultural identities, values, and biases so they can be more proactive and effective with the youth they serve. Additionally, caregivers should be willing to practice ongoing and consistent critical self-reflection in order to ensure that cultural differences do not lead to care and treatment goals that do not align with the youth's needs. Caregivers should begin by recognizing their own identities within the ADDRESSING framework and how those identities shape their viewpoints and interactions. Once this understanding of self is in place, it may be easier to ask reflective questions when addressing youth needs, such as:

- Do I have any preconceived notions about this youth?
- Do my expectations align with the youth's previous experiences, background, and household norms, or do I need to readjust to meet the youth where they currently are?
- Am I educated enough about the youth's cultural background (household culture and communal culture)? Where or from whom can I gather more information to make informed decisions about the youth's social skills goals?

When teaching new social skills, it is essential that caregivers evaluate how learning a new set of skills will affect youth self-identity, both inside and outside the treatment setting. Those who feel accepted and develop a sense of belonging may begin to culturally identify and connect deeply with caregivers and other youth within the treatment setting. This deep sense of connection and belonging can foster a stronger confidence and security in self, thus lead-

ing to more healthy risk-taking behaviors (participation, engagement, friendship-seeking, etc.). Conversely, those who feel they are being forced to acculturate into the traditional American mainstream or feel less accepted by their peers may resist treatment or possibly adopt counterproductive behaviors as a response (meltdowns or tantrums, disengagement, shutting down, emotional reactivity, etc.). Careful and consistent evaluation, frequent check-ins with the youth, and adapting goals accordingly will result in more positive outcomes.

Finally, culturally competent caregivers should be aware that culture, race, and ethnicity are not to be used interchangeably as each has a distinct meaning. Culture has shared elements, including language, history, and geographic location, but there is no biological link. It can be broadly defined as the learned characteristics and way of life of a group of people, including social norms, traditions, and values. Many individuals identify as multicultural, as they belong to a variety of cultural groups. These groups could include heritage, social groups, and ethnic groups, to name a few.

Race is based on geography and physical characteristics, such as skin color or facial features, that tend to be genetically related. Race often is an aspect of an individual's self-identification, but it offers little information about the person. For example, race may identify one's social heritage but it clarifies little in terms of an individual's educational level, cultural context, or current environment. When formulating a treatment plan, knowledge of a child's race can help caregivers determine whether that youth considers themselves to be part of the dominant or minority culture and the impact that will have on treatment goals.

Ethnicity tends to tie into nationality. It includes heritage, ancestry, history, and

culture (norms, beliefs, dialect, cuisine, arts, etc.). Ethnicity also formulates many labels and perceptions that are not necessarily true for all members who may belong to the same ethnic group (Hays, 2008). Therefore, it is vital that treatment providers actively reflect on their own cultural biases, stereotypes, or underlying assumptions, and actively seek information to understand the youth as a whole person before determining plans for treatment.

It is also important to note that many youth identify within multiple races, ethnic affiliations, and/or cultures. In addition, unique household norms and recent cultural and societal shifts mean race, ethnicity, and cultural identification should serve as a "penciled in" blueprint rather than a "permanent marker" final product. Caregivers must avoid adopting fixed ideas of cultures, races, and ethnicities. Instead, they must be comfortable asking questions, researching, and gaining an understanding of the individual.

Including All Children's Unique Needs

Boys Town has always promoted individualized, appropriate, relevant, and sensitive treatment for all children, regardless of race, gender, faith, religion, or physical, mental, and intellectual ability. Each child has an individualized treatment plan with social skills that are tailored to fit their unique background and specific needs.

In this updated edition of *Teaching Social Skills to Youth*, several new social skills expand the boundaries of inclusion, ensuring the needs of all children are adequately met. Only in this way can fair and effective care be achieved. To be inclusive and meet the unique needs of all children, caregivers should add these two important questions to their care, treatment, and social skills planning activities:

- Considering the child’s culture, gender, faith or religion, and ability, are there any special teaching strategies or social skills I need to explore and utilize?
- Am I teaching sufficient skill variations that will lead to success in the child’s own culture, environment, and society at large?

As explained previously, many of the social skills include the step “Look at the person.” Children of varying intellectual, developmental, or physical abilities may or may not be capable of fulfilling this step (or others). These skills are adaptable, and caregivers are encouraged to modify the skill steps to support the individual needs and abilities of a specific youth.

For example, if eye contact is challenging for a neurodivergent child, it may not be important that the child looks directly at you. Instead, some type of acknowledgment that they are listening is what you are targeting. In this case, praising approximations of the behavior is a positive way to support the child’s social skill development. “Shea, nice job lifting your head when I was speaking to you!” If a child is unable to see, instead of encouraging them to “Look at the person,” you might teach them to turn their body to “Face the direction of the person’s voice.”

Knowledge of different cultures, genders, faiths, religions, and physical, mental, and intellectual abilities is essential for effective care and treatment. Caregivers need to become aware of the experiences, values, and lifestyles inherent to all these critical areas unique to each child. Only in this way can we expect to have a positive impact on the care and development of all children.

What This Manual Offers

This manual reflects and focuses on the importance of teaching social skills to youth of all ages, the elements of social behavior (task and behavior analysis), individual and group teaching techniques, generalization of skills, the role of skill-based interventions for difficult youth problems, and the Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum itself.

Our Social Skills Curriculum features 196 skills or behaviors that are positive alternatives to many of the maladaptive and self-defeating behavior patterns in which a young person might engage. It is intended to serve as an effective resource and tool for anyone who works with children and adolescents. This includes teachers, staff members in long-term residential youth programs and youth shelters, foster parents, counselors, therapists, and others.

All 196 skills and their steps are presented in Chapter 7. In addition to being task-analyzed into their specific behaviors, the skills are also paired with specific skill types that intersect with multiple executive functions – social, emotional management, academic, ethical/moral, and independent living – and are categorized according to behaviors and situations in which they can be used to address problems or enhance a child’s abilities. (See Appendices A, B, C, and D.) Use the provided code to download these appendices and the entire Social Skills Curriculum. Individual skills and their steps can be downloaded and printed.

NOTE: For ease of reading, we use the term “social skills” throughout this book when referring to all of the Curriculum skills in general. The specific skill types support ongoing development of the five competencies of social and emotional learning

– self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Social and emotional learning and its competencies will be defined and outlined beginning on page 13.

In addition to social and emotional competence, the skills overlap multiple processes of executive function and are used to better define the link between individual skills and behavior areas. Definitions of the five skill types as well as executive function begin on page 14.

Skills open the door to success for youth, no matter the setting in which they are taught. We hope these tools can contribute to and enhance your work as you bring about lasting change, instill hope, and prepare young people for the future that awaits them.

Skill Types and Social and Emotional Learning

According to Goleman (2005), there are more ways to measure success and intelligence than simply using traditional academic testing. Goleman’s work outlined a multi-faceted approach to measuring competence in critical domains of life and in measuring success in school beyond academics.

Experts in “whole child” education and child development have advocated that more attention and focus be given to the social and emotional competencies of children. In the classroom, for example, educators face more difficult and challenging behaviors. Many of these challenges could be resolved (or at least minimized) if the social and emotional competence of students was adequately addressed.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines

social and emotional learning (SEL) as the process “through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2014, p. 5).

SEL is fundamental to character development, and it is important to children’s “health, ethical development, citizenship, academic learning, and motivation to achieve” (Elias et al., 2008, p. 253). In fact, research is expanding beyond this to measure the positive effects of the systematic implementation of social and emotional development strategies.

Evidence suggests that disruptive student behaviors negatively affect the academic learning of all members of a class. Not only is academic learning affected, but the lack of social and emotional competence by youth in schools contributes to harmful and risky behaviors, hopelessness, and a lack of safety.

For example, biennially, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts a Youth Risk Behavior Survey among high school students, studying four primary areas: sexual behavior, high-risk substance abuse, experiencing violence, and mental health and suicide. This data is trended across 10 years. Recent survey data revealed the following (CDC, 2019):

- Nationally, 8.7 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 were truant or did not attend school on one or more of the 30 days prior to the survey because they felt unsafe at school, on their way to school, or on their way home from school.
- Nationally, 19.5 percent of high school students reported being bullied on school property during the 12 months

prior to the survey, and 15.7 percent of students reported being electronically bullied (texts, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media platforms) during the past year.

- Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness affected 36.6 percent of high school students. Those students reported having had those feelings almost every day for two weeks or more in a row for the past 12 months – so much so that these students stopped doing some usual activities.
- Alarming, 15.7 percent reported not only suicide ideation but actually having made a plan to attempt suicide during this period.

All of these numbers are trending upward, which is cause for great concern. This data supports the need for ongoing development of children’s social and emotional competence.

Further, a series of meta-analyses cited by CASEL demonstrate that social-emotional learning leads to beneficial outcomes related to: social and emotional skills; attitudes about self, school, and civic engagement; social behaviors; conduct or behavioral disorders; emotional distress; and academic performance. What’s more, these beneficial outcomes spanned multiple cultures, age groups, and ethnicities. The studies cited also demonstrated that early social and emotional skills development had positive, lasting effects on children and families, citing reduced costs required for public assistance, public housing, police involvement, and detention (CASEL, 2022).

The following pages describe the five competencies for social and emotional learning as defined by CASEL (2014, 2020).

Five Competencies for Social and Emotional Learning

Self-Awareness: *The ability to...*

- Recognize and label your emotions.
- Identify what triggers those emotions.
- Analyze emotions and how they affect others.
- Accurately recognize your strengths and limitations.
- Identify your own needs and values.
- Possess self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Youth who are more self-aware tend to exhibit self-confidence and a hopeful sense of the future.

Self-Management: *The ability to...*

- Set plans and work toward goals.
- Overcome obstacles.
- Manage stress.
- Seek help.
- Regulate impulses and emotions.
- Maintain attention.
- Exhibit motivation and hope.
- Persevere.

The ability to manage oneself and regulate impulses leads to fewer risky behaviors and greater achievement of goals.

Social Awareness: *The ability to...*

- Identify social cues (a particular challenge for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder).

- Predict others' feelings and reactions.
- Evaluate others' reactions.
- Show respect for others.
- Understand other points of view or perspectives.
- Appreciate diversity.
- Identify and use resources in one's family, school, and community.

The ability to exhibit empathy and identify and rely on available resources in the environment (family, school, and community) increases the likelihood that a child will develop positive relationships.

Relationship Skills: *The ability to...*

- Make friends.
- Learn cooperatively and work toward group goals.
- Communicate with others.
- Provide help to those who need it.
- Manage and express emotions in relationships while respecting diverse viewpoints.
- Resist inappropriate social pressures.

The risky behaviors identified in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey are less likely to occur when youth develop strong relationship skills.

Responsible Decision-Making: *The ability to...*

- Reflect on how current choices affect the future.
- Make decisions based on moral, personal, and ethical standards.
- Identify problems when making decisions and generate alternative options.
- Negotiate fairly.

- Become self-reflective and self-evaluative.

Ultimately, it is the goal of most parents, educators, and youth-serving professionals to ensure that the children in their care are able to develop positive, responsible decision-making skills.

Developing competencies in each of these social and emotional domains allows an individual a better opportunity to attain lifelong success in a variety of areas.

(In Appendix A, each of the five domains for social and emotional learning are paired with social skills that can be used to teach and reinforce the specific competency.)

Skill Types and Executive Function

In addition to the importance of developing social and emotional competence, recent research on the development of the whole child has identified a set of essential life skills. These skills, which center on a child's ability to plan, organize, and manage complex tasks, impact a child's ability to achieve in school, to prepare and be ready for the future workforce, and to avoid a host of other problems. While children aren't born with these skills, they are born with the capacity to develop these skills. These skills develop throughout childhood, into their teen years, and even early adulthood. The quality of their interactions with adults, peers, and the community greatly influences whether these skills are developed fully, or are diminished (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011).

The cognitive processes referred to here are commonly known as "executive function." Incorporation of the term "executive"

in referencing these skills is attributed to Karl Pribram (1973, 1976). A deficit in these skills is labeled as executive dysfunction or executive function deficit. These deficits are considered to have neurocognitive as well as behavioral symptoms (Baddeley, 1986; Wilson, Evans, Alderman, Burgess, & Emslie, 1997; Barkley, 2012). Examples of executive functions include impulse control, emotional control, flexibility, working memory, self-monitoring, planning and prioritizing, task initiation, and organization (Morin, 2014).

Here are the categories and descriptions of skill types that cross multiple executive function processes.

Social Skills

Skills in this category are related to most situations in which a person interacts with another person or other people. These situations might range from having a private, one-on-one conversation with a friend, to asking directions from a stranger, to being with a small group of people in a doctor's waiting room, to being part of a large crowd at a party. Social skills enable a person to appropriately communicate with, respond to, make a request from, and get along with other people.

Emotional Management Skills

Emotional management skills enable a person to find and maintain a balance between not feeling anything and letting one's feelings control their behavior. These skills also help a person maintain self-control, stay calm in exciting, stressful, or frustrating situations, and make good choices under pressure. One major area where this is important is anger control. People who know which skills to use to prevent or control their anger and not become

physically or verbally aggressive are able to stay out of trouble and solve problems or overcome obstacles in appropriate ways.

Academic Skills

Completing homework and turning it in on time, studying, taking tests, reading, doing learning activities, and taking notes during lectures are just a few of the areas where having good academic skills are necessary. And while we usually associate academics only with school, these skills are useful in any learning situation, whether it is with a teacher in a classroom or reading a book or working on a computer to expand one's knowledge.

Ethical/Moral Skills

Skills that help a person learn positive ethics and morals contribute to building character and developing a conscience. A person's ability to use ethical/moral skills provides the "moral compass" that helps them know right from wrong, good from bad, and prosocial from antisocial. Good character stems from knowing the right thing to do and following through.

Independent-Living Skills

People are able to perform the activities of life – cooking, shopping, keeping up an apartment or house, managing finances, balancing a checkbook, looking for a job, buying a car and making payments, and many others – because they have learned how to take care of themselves. Independent-living skills prepare people to be on their own and to contribute to society as a wage earner, a good neighbor, a productive citizen, and an independent person.

For decades, Boys Town has emphasized the development of the whole child, including building social competence, so

Teaching Social Skills to Youth

children are empowered to be lifelong self-managers and problem-solvers. Teaching social skills is an effective way of fostering children's social competence.

(In Appendix B, specific Curriculum skills are grouped according to these five skill types.)

Pages 17-317 are not included in this excerpt.

Expanded and revised, this definitive guide to social skills instruction now features thirteen more skills!

13 NEW SOCIAL SKILLS

- Agreeing to Disagree
- Asking for Permission
- Being Prepared for an Interaction with Law Enforcement
- Gaining Consent
- Giving Consent
- Recognizing Your Own Personal Biases or Opinions
- Responding to Law Enforcement/Police Interactions
- Responding to Persons of Authority
- Sharing Something
- Sticking Up for Others
- Sticking Up for Yourself
- Switching from One Task to Another
- Working with Others

The **196 social and life skills** showcased in this updated fourth edition will empower young people to have greater success in school, at home, on the job, and in their relationships. Many of the new skills target behaviors related to personal autonomy, inclusion, collaboration, and interactions with persons of authority.

The manual reflects and focuses on the importance of teaching social skills to youth of all ages, the elements of social behavior (task and behavior analysis), individual and group teaching techniques, generalization of skills, the role of skill-based interventions for difficult youth problems, and the Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum itself. In addition, the appendices group skills by behavior problem areas, common situations or circumstances, social and emotional learning competencies, and skill type.

Teaching Social Skills to Youth is ideal for classrooms, individual and group therapy, and job training programs. Educators, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals can use this guide to increase the skill competency of children, help improve student behavior in school, and develop individualized service plans for troubled or at-risk youth.

Other updates include...

1 Valuable new insights on how to provide culturally responsive treatment that respects individual identity.

2 Fresh perspectives on how to recognize, understand, and address sociocultural influences.

3 Special emphasis on how educators, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals can develop their cultural competence.



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