

Developing social and emotional skills in the early years programme – Case Study

This programme has been trialled in Hillingdon schools and found to be extremely effective in promoting pro-social behaviours in the early years groups. Each of the 20 sessions focuses upon specific skills and these build upon each other with increasing complexity during the course. These skills are taught via scenarios conducted between two puppets – this is an extremely safe way for children to learn social skills as they are not being identified as not having these themselves rather as being taught to observe pro-social skills in others and then begin to understand and incorporate these skills into their own ways of being. The programme is structured in four parts as follows:

Part 1: School Behaviours

Part 2: Our Feelings

Part 3: Friendship Skills

Part 4: Social Skills

Measuring progress and setting targets

Criticisms of such programmes usually are aimed at the fact that pre-imposed measures are not always effectively taken, so as to ensure that progress is measured. It may be useful to make reference to a range of key skills and behaviours when delivering any kind of social skills intervention. These can be grouped into the following:

- School behaviours
- Feelings
- Friendship skills and social skills

The following lists of objectives may be useful when instructing a social skills intervention and measuring progress of the individuals participating:

School Behaviours

- Looks at an adult when called
- Looks at another child when called
- Can maintain eye contact when talking
- Does not interrupt the speaker
- Waits for a turn to talk
- Understands what is being said
- Follows instructions appropriately
- Uses appropriate volume when speaking
- Uses the appropriate vocabulary to express needs, wants and ideas
- Can sit appropriately to listen to a story/teacher's instructions
- Can concentrate on an activity without interrupting others
- Knows what is 'safe' to do in class
- Knows what is 'unsafe' to do in class
- Knows how to play and interact safely in the playground
- Knows when behaviour is unsafe in the playground
- Follows classroom routines and rules to keep safe
- Follows playground routines and rules to keep safe

Feelings

- Can recognise and label how they are feeling
- Can recognise how others are feeling
- Can show empathy towards others
- Can tell an adult when they feel distressed
- Can tell another peer when they feel distressed
- Can distinguish between comfortable and uncomfortable feelings
- Has appropriate emotional vocabulary to express feelings accurately
- Can express anger without physical aggression

Friendship Skills

- Shows interest in other pupils
- Can approach a peer and ask to play with them
- Understands the concept of kindness
- Understands the concept of sharing
- Understands the concept of turn-taking
- Can identify one or more friends in class
- Can identify one or more friends in the home
- Will apologise to a friend when necessary
- Will help out a friend when necessary
- Has shown the ability to sustain a friendship

Social Skills

- Can take turns appropriately in conversation.
- Can take turns appropriately in a game.
- Plays well with one other pupil in a game/turn-taking activity
- Can work well alongside one other pupil on a class base learning task
- Can participate well in a group activity i.e. helping, turn-taking, supporting others in need
- Co-operate with peers and plays effectively in the playground

Activity

What is your mechanism for recording and measuring these skills in your context? What does this look like and how effective is it?

Involving parents

Any social skills intervention will benefit from the involvement of parents and it is strongly advised the parents are provided with adequate information as to what the course entails and how they can also support the development of these skills within the home context. Those delivering any intervention should provide parents with details of any social skills games and activities undertaken in the group. For example, if children are engaged in making use of the 'bag' game (this is a game in which young children pass a bag of objects around the circle and take it in turns to introduce and discuss each object in turn) this will then allow parents to repeat the process in the home context ideally with the family group. This reinforces to the child the importance of developing new skills in a range of contexts and the fact that their social interaction will be more positive if they can begin to develop these skills in all areas of their lives.

Activity

What are the main obstacles to this kind of parental involvement in your context and how do you currently attempt to overcome these?

What additional support and or resource might support you in this task?