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Helping Children Learn Social Skills

With Dr. Bonnie Goldblatt February 5, 2013



Our Guest:



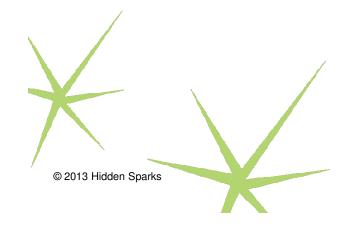
Bonnie Goldblatt, Psy.D. is a clinical child psychologist and learning specialist in private practice in New York City. She specializes in parent counseling and the treatment of students who struggle due to behavioral, emotional, academic or social issues. Dr. Goldblatt worked as a psychologist at the Churchill School, Herbert G. Birch Services, West End Day School and the Aaron School and was Director of Special Services at the 92nd St. YM-YWHA. Dr. Goldblatt is also an Early Childhood Consultant for the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. She received her doctorate from the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology at Yeshiva University and her masters in Learning Disabilities from Teacher's College, Columbia University.



Overview of the Session

Today we will discuss how to better understand why your child may be stumbling socially and what steps you can take to smooth the way for him or her.

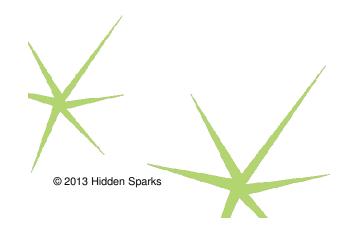
Not having friends can be frustrating, even painful for children. As a parent, you can't make friends for your child but you can do something to make it easier for your child to get along with others.





Session Goals:

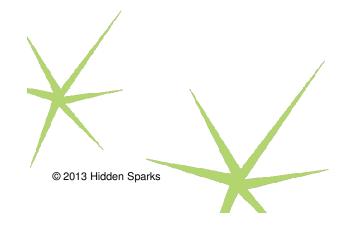
- To gain a better understanding of why some children struggle socially.
- To learn strategies to help a child become more socially successful.





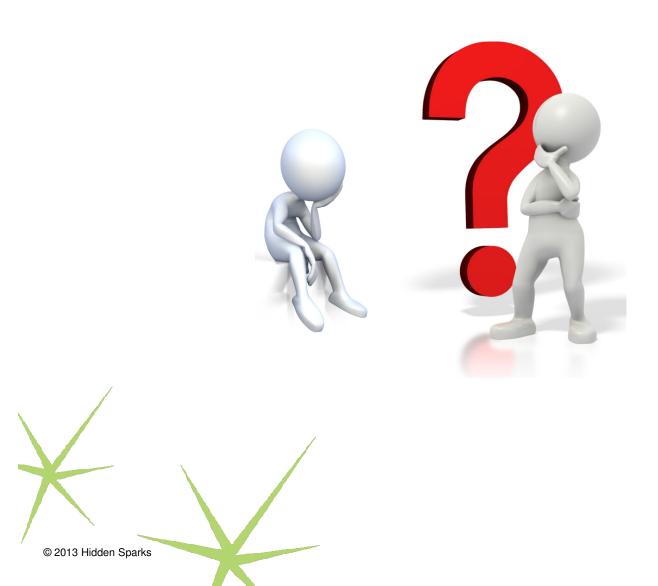
Do any of these sound familiar?

- "No one at school likes me. I'm never invited to parties."
- "I ask other kids to come over to play but they usually say no. Why don't they want to play with me?"
- "I don't like the other kids at camp and they don't like me."
- "You are at a school event and your child's classmates are laughing and chatting together, but, as usual, your child is standing alone looking miserable and lonely."





What can we, as parents, do to help?





Variations in Development of Reading Skills

Need guidance & direct instruction



Specialized instruction To learn to read



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Read effortlessly

with minimal instruction

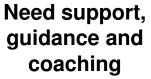
Variations in the Development of Social Skills



Socialize effortlessly with little guidance

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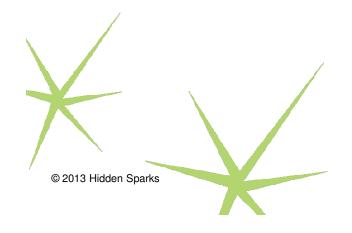
Need significant help with social skills

What are Social Skills?

"The abilities to get along with others and to create and sustain satisfying relationships."



Being attuned to the social context & being able to adapt accordingly





Verbal

Nonverbal

- What to say
- When to say it
- How to say it

Body language:

- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Posture
- Gestures
- Interpersonal space
- Tone of voice



Annoying Behaviors





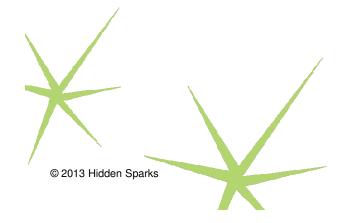
Talking too loud? Talking too much? Asking inappropriate questions? Angry body/facial postures? Standing too close? Constant complaining?

Which ones annoy you? How do you know when your behavior is annoying someone?

Learning to Read Cues

Teach children to read the cues that let them know that others are annoyed or irritated.

Is the other child backing away?
Are you being ignored?
Has the conversation stopped?
Are others rolling their eyes?





How do we Begin to Intervene?

Assessment:

What skills does your child need to learn?

1. Observe your child objectively in different social situations.

For example:

How does your child greet others? Enter and maintain a conversation? Share? Resolve conflicts? Is your child flexible? Empathic? A good sport? Does your child smile frequently or have a negative expression on his or face?

2. Speak to your child's teachers, group leaders and so on.



Jonah- 8 years old

Jonah is a sweet boy with many positive qualities. He wants desperately to make friends but his classmates don't seem to like him. He likes going to birthday parties but is rarely invited. His parents have tried to arrange play-dates but none of his classmates ever seem to be available.

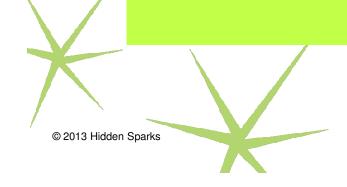
Assessment?

Jonah's Assessment

Teachers report that he often annoys his peers:

- Invades personal space/stands too close/ talks too loud
- When a group of his classmates are talking, he often barges into the middle & takes over
- Frequently complains about other children
- Sadly- he is unaware of any of these habits.





Develop a Plan:

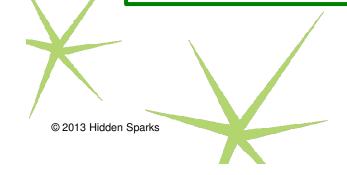
Pick (1 or 2) skills for child to work on: (Jonah)

1. Work on "annoying" behaviors

1. Work on how to join a group and enter a conversation.

What accommodations can the family make?

Arrange short, activity based play dates with the children of friends. Give Jonah a chance to practice skills.

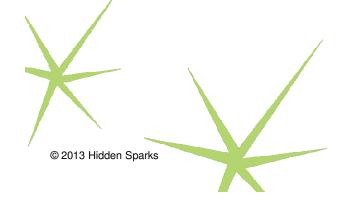




Learning to Read Cues: games to play

What has worked in your family?

- •Ask "What is my face or body saying to you right now?" or "Can you tell by my voice or body what I am feeling or thinking? (A game for the whole family!)
- Record or videotape a child practicing different tones of voice.
- •If you watch a movies, watch one together with the sound off and see who can figure out the moods of the characters.





Joining a group or conversation

DO

- Observe what others are doing or talking about.
- Move in slowly. Contribute without disrupting.
- Think of questions to ask rather than things to say.
- Smile!
- Ask a question or make a friendly comment.
- Conversations are give & take; give others a turn.
- Disagree respectfully.

DON'T

Barge into the middle of a group.

Stand on the side waiting for someone to invite you to join.

Monopolize the conversation or take over and change the rules.

Brag (share instead)

Argue and criticize



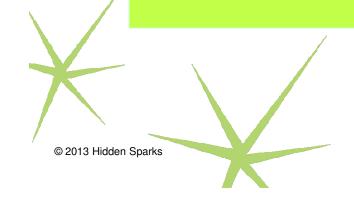
Talia- 6 years old

Talia usually plays alone because her classmates have stopped asking for play-dates. She often doesn't respond when asked questions unless her parents or siblings are there to help her. She also refuses to go to birthday parties. Her parents understand that she is shy but she desperately wants friends and they are at a loss about what to do.



Talia - Assessment

- Easily overwhelmed in noisy settings
- She worries she will embarrass herself & freezes when questioned by her peers
- Her classmates stopped showing an interest because they felt she was not interested in them.





Talia's Plan: proceed slowly & cautiously

Talia

Learn to greet, converse & interact with her peers (while still respecting her shyness):

Role play with family

Scripts

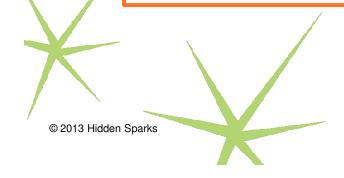
Social Stories

Talia's Family

Emphasize: everyone makes mistakes

Talia can't tolerate noisy gatherings

Plan play-dates carefully





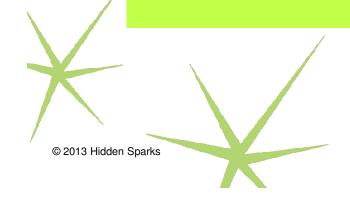
Rebecca- 11 years old

Rebecca's family recently moved and she is about to enter a new school. She struggled with friendships in her old school as well as at camp but hopes to have a different experience in her new school. Her parents are worried.



Rebecca's Assessment

- Can be bossy & impatient and likes things done her way
- Aspires to be in the "popular" group
- Freely discusses her problems with anyone who will listen
- Always has a serious expression on her face





Rebecca's Plan

- Needs to decide whether it's more important to have things done her way or to have friends.
- Learn self-statements:

Let it slide Let it go It's not important

- Focus on making 1 friend at a time
- Learn the difference between close friends & acquaintances



Socially Competent Children & Teens:

- ♦ are self-aware and cognizant of how they are behaving in social situations.
- understand the give and take of conversations.
- ♦ do not brag but also rarely put themselves down.
- smile a lot and appear happy (whether they are or not). As one teen said to me, "Who wants to be with someone who doesn't like him or herself."
- ♦ show an interest in what others have to say. They ask a lot of questions.

- have high self-esteem. If rejected by a peer, they don't take it personally.



Tips for Parents (A work in progress)

- ♦ Avoid criticism! Children who struggle socially probably already feel inadequate.
- ♦ Partner with your child in his or her journey towards social competence. It's more effective than taking an authoritarian approach to behaviors that need changing.
- Empathy & respect are the most important social skills to be learned. Teach by example.
- → Emphasize kindness.
- Getting along with siblings is good practice for getting along with others.
- Understand your child may have different needs.
- Share your positive attitude & confidence that your child will succeed.



Suggested Reading for Parents

Briggs, Nadine & Shea, Donna. *How to Make & Keep Friends: Tips for Kids to Overcome 50 Common Social Challenges.* HowToMakeAndKeepFriends.com, 2011.

Gray, Carol. The New Social Story Book. Texas: Future Horizon, 2010.

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Thompson, Michael & Grace, Catherine O. *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children.* NY: Ballentine Books, 2001.

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Winner, Michelle Garcia & Crooke, Pamela. You are a Social Detective: Explaining Social Thinking to Kids. SanJose, CA: Think Social Publishing, 2008.



Suggested Reading for Kids

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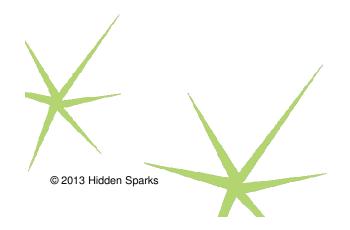
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Petty, Kate & Firmin, Charlotte. Making Friends. NY: Aladdin Books, 1991.



Upcoming Hidden Sparks Without Walls Sessions

Tuesday 3/5/13 8:30-9:30pm	Your Attention, Please! With Kate Sussman
Tuesday 4/9/13 8:30-9:30pm	Understanding Your Child's Psychoeducational Assessment Report With Dr. Orit Goldhamer
Tuesday 5/21/13 8:30-9:30pm	Memory With Karen Kruger



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Contacting Hidden Sparks

Contact Hidden Sparks: www.hiddensparks.org

margaret@hiddensparks.org

(212) 767-7707

