

You can teach key social skills to your child

Teaching good social skills is important because research shows that children with good social skills do better in school, get better jobs when they mature, and are often more successful than those with poor social skills. To teach a new social skill, use the four P's that are the four basic principles of training: practice, praise, pointing out, and prompting.

When the problem is interrupting

Practice alternative behavior. You and your child should practice or role-play the appropriate new behavior together. Show your child that, if she wants to get your attention, she should lightly place her hand on your forearm. As soon as she does it, gently place your free hand on top of her hand and ask her what she wants. Over time, extend the time between when she places her hand on your forearm and when you ask her what she wants. If you need to bridge the gap in time, gently pat her hand.

Praise the child for practicing.

To maintain the child's interest in practicing, select a reward that she wants to work toward—possibly reading an extra story at naptime or bedtime, or allowing more time for a game during the day. Be sure to praise your child when she waits to interrupt you or another adult, or does not interrupt when you are out together in public.

Point out when you or another adult behaves considerably toward someone else. When you wait and do not interrupt the other parent who is talking, or when you wait your turn to speak to the salesperson in the store, point out to your child that you are waiting just as you have taught her to wait and that everyone, in fact, has to learn to wait.

Prompt your child when she is about to be in a situation where she must not interrupt and should wait to speak to someone. For example, when you go to the deli counter, show her that you must take a number and wait for it to be called before talking to the salesperson. Another example could be waiting to talk to the teacher when you go in together for a conference. You will have no trouble finding many opportunities each day to teach this concept.

When the problem is taking turns

Practice or role-play taking turns at being first in line

Praise your child for practicing taking turns

Point out examples of other people who are taking turns in everyday situations: At a stoplight you could say: "The car in front of us has to go before we can." At dinner you could point out: "Now it's Daddy's [or Mommy's] turn to use the salt."

Prompt your child, when necessary, to wait her turn during a board game or when passing food at the dinner table. Both offer good opportunities to teach social skills.

When the problem is sharing

Practice situations with your child when you are sharing a seat, food, money, etc.

Praise your child for practicing sharing

Point out examples of sharing when they arise in everyday situations: You could say: "Mommy is sharing her glass of orange juice with Daddy"

Prompt your child to share when opportunities arise during a meal

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