

SOCIALLY REJECTED CHILDREN: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

For Teachers and Parents:

1. Directly teach and reinforce appropriate social skills. This can be accomplished using the following techniques. (Note that it often helps if these skills are taught by a school psychologist or counselor and practiced in the classroom)

- **One-on-one coaching** and supervised rehearsal of skills such as sharing, taking turns, playing by the rules, and correct responses to teasing. After children are coached on these skills, they can be told to select “friendship targets” within the classroom. Here, socially rejected children can use their new skills to become better friends with these targets.
- **Descriptive Discussions:** Define a desired skill, specify why the skill is needed, and when it should be performed. **Then describe several situations and ask the child to discriminate which would be the most appropriate for the skill being taught.** Classroom discussions that are geared toward pointing out both positive and negative behavioral examples are important for effective interactions with peers.
- **Modeling: Children benefit from watching others who interact successfully.** This can be achieved through interaction on videotape, other children, or puppets. This is especially beneficial for kids who have difficulty reading other children’s cues. A warm and friendly attitude should be displayed in the classroom to all students, to insure that they are modeling a positive example.
- **Provide a withdrawn child with assertiveness training.** Role-play different scenarios with the child in which he/she must assert him/herself. Another approach is to pair a withdrawn child with a younger peer in a mentoring situation so the rejected child can practice his/her positive assertion skills.
- **Teach an aggressive child to control his/her anger.** Teach him/her to understand how the body feels why he/she is angry and using a coping skill instead (counting to 10, taking a deep breath, getting a drink of water).
- **Teach the interventions across multiple settings.** This will maximize the potential that the prosocial behaviors generalize to other situations.

2. Use cooperative learning activities. These activities foster cooperation and respect and help the rejected child assimilate more adaptive communication strategies from more socially skilled playmates.

- **Create situations in which positive exchanges between students can occur.**
- **Private places in the classroom should be available to allow children to interact in small groups.** This place should be away from the noise and confusion of the whole classroom.
- **Choose student groups yourself.** This enables a good match of children (outgoing mixed with introverted.)
- **Include activities which children have enjoyed in the past** (this will lead to cooperative interaction).

- **Encourage children to rely on each other – not you!** (This will promote the value of “give and take.”)
- **Formulate “in group projects.”** Have each child responsible for an aspect of the outcome (mandates that the rejected child will take a more active role and will help the student to feel valued and useful).
- **Rearrange the seating in the classroom** by putting the child next to someone who has effective communication skills and may become a friend. Consider assigning a “buddy” to the rejected child who can help him/her interpret social situations.
- **Enlist specific classmates with well-developed social skills to support the rejected child** as he/she tried to change his/her behavior and attempts newly learned social skills.

3. Praise specific social behaviors, such as sharing and cooperation, and teach the purpose of such behaviors. For example, rather than saying, “That is good” say “You are being helpful” or “You shared because you like to help other people”.

4. Emphasize close friendships more so than popularity. Remember that it’s often easier for a student to overcome rejection through the development of one-on-one relationships, rather than trying to immediately integrate into the larger social group. Help the child make friends one by one, which might eventually change the larger group’s perceptions.

- In the classroom, teachers can pair the student with those with similar interests.
- At home, parents should encourage opportunities for interactions with potential friends such as encouraging the child to invite someone to spend the night or go to a movie.

5. Seek advice from a school psychologist or counselor on the need for individual group counseling to address coping skills and resiliency. This would be in addition to strategies above for teaching social skills.

6. Always be a sympathetic listener for the rejected child!

For Teachers:

1. Assess social skills of student in order to better identify needs of social improvement and factors that might be contributing to the student’s social rejection. Assessments should be reliable, valid, and practical. Components of assessment may include:

- Direct observation of the student with his/her peers
- Interviews with the student and the person who referred them
- Rating scales such as Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) School Social Behavior Scale

2. Pay attention to child’s level of classroom participation. Studies have shown that early peer rejection and class participation are associated.

- 3. Carefully observe classroom behavior and identify antagonizers.** Talk to them about their behavior and if necessary, move them to the front of the classroom so as to better monitor their negative behaviors.
- 4. Place the alienated student with a supportive and nurturing peer or peers for class activities.**
- 5. Avoid singling out rejected children, comparing them to others, and communicating negative feelings for a child in front of the class.** Often, teachers contribute to peer rejection, especially in the lower grades, by unintentionally highlighting a student's weaknesses (e.g., learning or behavior problems).
- 6. Work hard to create and maintain a positive classroom environment in which respect and acceptance are highly valued and practiced.**
- 7. Conduct a group activity in which you compare and contrast positive social skills,** such as encouragement and inclusion vs. negative behaviors like teasing. Have students define and discuss what negative behaviors look like.
- 8. Develop a social contract** for the child. Meet privately with the alienated student to develop a written plan to monitor the problem. The contract should include teacher's perception of the problem, student's perception of the problem, what the teacher will do to help the student carry out strategies, and a date for progress review.
- 9. Find out what the child enjoys.** What are they successful at outside of class? Accentuate these triumphs. Identify special interests and talents and integrate them with class interests.
- 10. Experiment with behavior analytic techniques** such as Positive Peer Reporting (PPR). PPR is a technique that "uses the peer ecology to influence behavior and promote social acceptance of peer rejected youth. PPR works by actively soliciting peers to provide positive reports or statements to a targeted youth identified as the recipient. The peers are called Tellers and are given positive reinforcement using a token economy system for making positive statements about the recipient" (Bowers et al 1999). As the socially rejected child receives continual positive social attention, the peer ecology of the classroom changes from one of isolation/rejection into one of support and reinforcement.
- 11. Be sure to include the student's parents.** Positive and supportive parents go a long way in alleviating peer rejection and building self-esteem.
 - **Communicate closely with parents** (telephone calls, notes, letters, conferences, etc.).
 - **Ask for parental input and suggestions.**
 - **Encourage parents to use reinforcement for socially desirable behavior at home.** Encourage parents to allow children to initiate conversation, use turn-taking, and leave time for children to respond during conversation.

For Parents:

1. Encourage a child to participate in confidence building activities outside of school, such as martial arts. Also, recommend books that the rejected child can relate to.

2. Don't overreact if your child is rejected. Never try to be a public relations representative for you child by confronting their persecutors. This approach is not effective and can serve to make matters worse, increasing alienation.

Resources:

Bierman, K. (2004). *Peer rejection: Processes and intervention strategies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Bowers et. al. (1996). Improving the social status of peer rejected youth with disabilities: Extending research on positive peer reporting. *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*.

Buhs, Ladd & Herald. (2006). Peer exclusion and victimization: Processes that mediate the relation between peer group rejection and children's classroom engagement and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 1-13.

Burke, K. (2000). *What to Do with The kid Who...Developing Cooperation, Self Discipline, and Responsibility in the Classroom (2nd ed.)*. Arlington Heights, Ill: Skylight Professional Development.

Elliot, S., Roach, T. & Beddow, P. (2008). Best practices in preschool social skills training. In Thomas, A. & Grimes, J. (Eds.) *Best Practices in School Psychology IV*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychology.

Gresham, F. (2002). Best practices in social skills training. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology IV*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Juvonen, J. (1997). Peer relations. In G.G. Bear, K.M. Minke, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Children's needs 11: Development, problems, and alternatives*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Vaughn, S., McIntosh, R., & Spencer-Rowe, J. (1991). Peer rejection is a stubborn thing: Increasing peer acceptance of rejected students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 6, 83-88.

www.3cprogram.com/grownupidprobs.html: Peer Problems.

www.focusas.com/PeerInfluence.html: Peer Influence and Peer Relations.

www.drkutner.com/parenting/rejected.html: Dr. Lawrence Kutner of "Parenting &

Child”, *New York Times*

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