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Using Community Activities to Develop Social Skills

Community activities are diverse, fun, and provide a wide range of opportunities for social skill development. Meeting people, maintaining conversations, collaborating with peers, following directions, and problem solving are a few social skills to practice in a community setting. Below are a few ideas on incorporating social skill development into your community activities.

1. Story Times and Plays – Community libraries, bookstores, and theatres often have book readings or short plays for children. These events are opportunities to practice attending, following directions, maintaining personal space, and asking and responding to questions in a group setting. For children working on attending, find out how long the event lasts, if there are frequent breaks, and if the event is interactive. Attend shorter, more interactive events then gradually increase the length of time so children are successful and are engaged in the event.

2. Playground - Although primarily thought of as a place for exercise, playgrounds are a wonderful place to learn conflict resolution, problem solving, and communication skills. Children can practice asking to join an activity, helping peers, and working with friends to create and resolve game rules. Patience can be practiced waiting for a swing or the slide. Playgrounds in fast food restaurants are a way to get out of the hot summer or cold winter weather and help children interact with peers.



From *Playing Together*

3. People of Authority in the Community - The ability to socialize with people of authority is important for school, community, and future work environments. Doctors, dentists, and religious leaders are examples of people who should be addressed more formally. Use these interactions as opportunities to practice formal introductions, greetings, conversations, and good-byes. Prepare children by letting them know who they will be seeing and practicing short conversations.

4. Frequent Interactions – Addressing people at a store or in the neighborhood involves less formal interactions. These meetings are an opportunity for greeting someone by name, asking questions about their interests, and ending the conversation appropriately. Practice at home in advance and remind children, if necessary, how to respond when they see the person. For example, 'Alex, you remember Mrs. Smith who lives across the street and has the dog, Skipper.'

5. Community Parks and Recreation Centers - Community parks and recreation centers frequently have summer baseball, soccer, or basketball teams. These teams are opportunities for children to learn good sportsmanship, meet with children their age, and learn to follow rules and regulations associated with an activity. Other activities offered at community centers include art and science camps which teach fun skills while providing social interactions. Children learn to work collaboratively with children their age on projects or share materials for completing activities.

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