



Helping your secondary age child
to interact with others



Social interaction

It may surprise you to know that the skills needed to listen, understand and interact with others that typically emerge during early childhood continue to refine and develop into adolescence during the secondary school years.

Social interaction skills are important in both social and learning situations and continue to develop in response to the shifting demands at home and school.

Supporting a child/young person to build their interaction skills helps with:

- ✓ Building and maintaining relationships with family, friends and others
- ✓ Joining in conversations
- ✓ Working in a team
- ✓ Developing thinking and learning
- ✓ Understanding and managing emotions
- ✓ Solving problems and resolving conflict
- ✓ Success in the workplace

If you are concerned about your child's listening, understanding and interaction, whatever their age, talk to your GP or seek advice from a qualified speech and language therapist.

Read this leaflet for general ideas of how you can help your child to build their social interaction skills. Please adapt suggestions to take account of your child's age and stage of development.



What is social interaction?

Social interaction is a two-way process that involves conveying and understanding a message communicated between (at least) two people.

Social interaction skills

Social interaction involves a complex set of skills.

Successful interaction involves being able to use eye contact and facial expression, paying attention and listening, understanding what someone is saying, taking turns and interpreting social cues eg: interest, confusion, offence. Expressively, successful communication includes being able to give the right amount of information, staying on topic and 'repairing' if communication breaks down.

An increasing number of 'unwritten' rules are involved in social interaction throughout the school years. These rules include how to be polite, knowing when to talk and when to listen, speaking in formal or informal styles to different people, when and how to change topics, and how to interrupt. Other areas that develop include, understanding and using non-literal language, inferring what someone might really mean, and understanding/using humour and sarcasm.

Social interaction during adolescence typically includes being able to share and retell, for example, a humorous story from a personal experience.

If your child finds talking and communicating difficult,

- They may find it difficult to understand or follow the rules of conversation.
- They may not fully understand or remember what others are saying.
- They may not be able to use words to talk about their actions or the feelings underlying them.
- They may find it difficult to answer questions, explain or tell stories.
- They may become frustrated when interacting with others in a social or learning context.
- They may find it difficult to make friends or to join in with group conversations.



How you can help

- a. Ask your child what they consider makes a good conversation. Ask your child what they think helps them to have good conversations and whether this is ever tricky for them. Reassure your child that it is ok to talk about anything that they are finding tricky when talking to others.
- b. Help your child to learn the words for a range of emotions and develop their abilities to tell a story or explain something that has happened. This helps your child to develop the skills for talking about their feelings and any worries they may have. See our Explaining and storytelling leaflet for further information.
- c. If your child is finding it difficult to explain something, allow plenty of extra time. Offer to help your child find the words they need to describe a situation, a problem or label their emotions.
- d. Explain the importance of paying attention and taking turns when talking together. Practise these skills through simple rule based games, for example, Jenga.
- e. Check that your child knows that one word can mean different things eg: tidy, chill. This will help with understanding and joining in with conversations.
- f. Children may use slang words or phrases that they hear before they fully understand the meaning and when it would be appropriate. Help your child understand the rules that will prevent them getting in trouble for using a phrase inappropriately!
- g. Help your child to understand sarcasm by giving some examples or spotting sarcasm on television, and talking about what it means.
- h. Create opportunities for conversations. For example, during a walk, in the car, at the shops, or when cooking together. Doing something together or offering information about yourself by sharing a story of your day, can be the best way of starting a conversation.
- i.



- j. Questions are important for clarifying information in class but are also used a lot as part of social interaction, for example when talking to friends and family. Help your child to listen and ask a range of questions. For example, who, where, when, what, how, why. This can be practised through taking turns to share a story from your day.
- k. Help your child to keep a topic of conversation going for a few minutes. Show your child ways of doing this and explain what you are doing. For example, listening carefully, identifying the theme within the topic, sharing your thoughts or ideas in a way that connects with what has already been said, taking turns, and asking questions to find out more or clarify.
- l. Describe and explain one of the rules of conversation and show your child how this 'rule' might work, and why it's important. For example, talking in different ways to different people. Modelling how you greet a friend and how one might greet a teacher or headteacher.
- m. Explore options for youth clubs that may offer opportunities for structured interaction in a supportive environment.
- n. If you want to check how the skills for talking and communicating gradually progress, follow this link to view a 'What's typical at secondary?' poster.
<http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/sites/talkingpoint.org.uk/files/Secondary%20Milestone%20Poster%20-%20Final.pdf>

