What strategies are most effective to help diverse groups of young children learn positive social skills? This review suggests ways to build a foundation for children's future success at home, in school, and in the community.

Social Skills: Laying the Foundation for Success

Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson

Well-informed teachers of young children recognize the importance of children's social development. The development of social skills lays a critical foundation for later academic achievement as well as work-related skills (McClelland & Morrison, 2003).

Social development is such a key issue with young children that a number of methods to address social skills have been advocated. Some of these methods include
- setting up classrooms to enhance social development,
- providing play opportunities to promote social functioning, and
- teaching social skills directly.

Teaching social skills can incorporate a number of techniques, including direct instruction, learning from peers, prevention of problem behaviors, and children's books. Many social behaviors are better learned among peers (Ladd, 2005), so teachers of young children are in a unique position to promote social learning in their classrooms. The purpose of this article is to provide teachers with several research-based strategies to promote young children's social skills development.

What Social Skills Are Important?

All children need to learn appropriate social skills. Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others and the environment. Some of these skills include
- showing empathy,
- participation in group activities,
- generosity,
- helpfulness,
- communicating with others,
- negotiating, and
- problem solving.

What are social skills?

Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others and the environment. Some of these skills include showing empathy, participation in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, communicating with others, negotiating, and problem solving.

Children learn these skills from the adults and children in their environment who model and explain how to behave in particular circumstances (Ladd, 2005). The social skills that children learn when they are young form the basis for subsequent relationships that they develop in later childhood and adulthood (Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996).

Because of the importance of social development in the formative early years, all children need to learn and practice social skills. Many children spend a significant

---

Sharon A. Lynch, Ed.D., is Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Populations, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas. She is the author of *Preschool Classroom Management* (2004) and has published extensively on the subject of social skills. She has 10 years experience in public schools, 4 years experience as an educational consultant, and 16 years in higher education where she teaches courses in special education.

Cynthia G. Simpson, Ph.D., is Associate Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Populations, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas. She has published numerous books and articles on the subject of preschool inclusion. Simpson has extensive experience in both private and public schools as a classroom teacher, educational diagnostician, child care director, educational consultant, and administrator. She teaches courses in special education.

Learning areas can be large enough to give children the space they need to play together, but small enough to provide an intimate setting for social interaction. Select toys and activities that promote cooperation, helpfulness, and generosity, rather than those that are competitive.

portion of their day in child care or preschool settings, so it is incumbent on teachers of young children to positively influence children's social development.

With the passage of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), there is an increased focus on including all children in typical classrooms (Jacobson, 2005). As a result, there are more children with disabilities in early childhood and primary-level classrooms.

> **Intervention can improve social relationships.**

Some authorities contend that for young children with disabilities, social skills development should be the central goal of early childhood programs (Guralnick, 1999). In addition to children with identified developmental problems, there are often other children in classrooms who lack social skills or demonstrate problem behavior, although they do not have an identified disability.

How Can Teachers Help?

Many teachers of young children are more comfortable with approaches that involve setting up environments to promote social growth and making the most of teachable moments as they arise, while other teachers prefer a more direct instructional approach to teach specific social skills. Although philosophies may vary, many experts who work with young children with problem behaviors advocate techniques that address specific social behaviors directly, while also recognizing the need to structure the environment and take advantage of situations that provide spontaneous opportunities for teaching (Vaughn, et al., 2003).

Arrange the Environment to Promote Positive Social Skills

The classroom environment definitely can be structured to promote

social interaction, smooth transitions, and social communication (McEvoy, 1990). Learning areas can be large enough to give children the space they need to play together, but small enough to provide an intimate setting for social interaction. For example, in the housekeeping center, low dividers enable adults to supervise children as they play and learn. They also set clear boundaries to provide sufficient space for several children to play with the sink, appliances, and table.

Toys that promote cooperative play as well as isolate play are always available in a classroom designed to facilitate social skill development. Learning materials that encourage cooperative play include pretend cars and trucks, blocks, imaginary food and cooking props, and puppets. Select toys and activities that promote cooperation, helpfulness, and generosity, rather than those that are competitive (Honig & Wittmer, 1996).

Enhance Social Functioning Through Play

Children learn a vast array of skills during play opportunities. From building with blocks and role playing in the dramatic play area, for instance, children develop skills such as one-to-one correspondence, early writing and reading behaviors, as well as counting and patterning.

Play also provides a means and opportunity for children to learn and improve their social skills (Barbakoff & Yo, 2002). For children who are socially isolated, play offers important occasions for social interaction and skill development. Children with disabilities also benefit from the experience of playing with typical-developing peers, who provide

suitable role models, initiate social interactions, and maintain ongoing communication. Additionally, free play is an effective, spontaneous way for children to apply social skills that have been taught directly.

The four stages of play are marked by different types of social interaction in which children engage:

- onlooker,
- solitary,
- parallel, and
- cooperative play.

Each type of play elicits different types of social interactions. Select toys that stretch each developmental play level to increase children's social learning opportunities. For example, a well-stocked pretend play center is filled with real objects, writing materials, play telephones, and dress-up clothing. These items foster children's social development as they begin to interact with others using social skills such as turn taking, sharing toys, listening, and using appropriate greetings.

The social learning that takes place during center time activities can be unlimited when best practices are implemented. Engage children in discussions and physical movement, ask assistants or volunteers to sit with wiggly children to help them focus, and keep group times short. Follow this simple guideline: Actively involved adults lead to actively involved children.

Build on Teachable Moments

Teachers are urged to show children how to share and negotiate before problem behavior occurs, because it is nearly impossible to teach children social skills when they are arguing or upset. Typical classroom

opportunities to teach social skills include sharing in the work of cleaning up, thanking a classroom visitor for bringing her dog, or inviting a newcomer to the classroom to join in play.

> **Children learn social skills from adults and children.**

When teaching young children appropriate social behaviors, everyday events often become teachable moments. For example, when a child demonstrates a problem behavior, view it as an opportunity to facilitate social growth. When Madison, an older toddler, grabs a new doll from Carly and Carly cries, good teachers recognize that these children are ready to learn negotiation, communication, and conflict solution skills.

Most such events also provide opportunities for children to learn about the feelings of others, a foundational support for social growth. Young children are still learning to recognize and understand the feelings of others, so they can benefit from specific guidance to learn to identify the emotions of other children and adults. With these children, the teacher can

- name feelings as other children demonstrate them, and
- suggest why they may feel that way; then later
- describe feelings observed in additional children, and
- ask the children who are having difficulty why they think their peers may feel as they do.

When teachers use classroom conflict as an opportunity to promote social growth rather than to punish

children, everyone involved benefits (Stone, 1993).

Teachable moments do not necessary revolve around negative behaviors. Everyday events can also be designed as proactive measures to teach social behaviors. Teachers can teach alternative behaviors and prompt their use before the time when the negative behaviors are likely to occur.

For example, negative behaviors—biting, pushing, screaming, or hitting—are likely to occur during transition times. An example of setting up a teachable moment is to design transition activities around those times in the day in which children move from one activity or area in the classroom to another. Effective transition activities can include chants, games, and songs that are designed to help bring closure to activities as well as to assist children in moving to and from group activities. In addition, effective transitions help focus children's attention while waiting for a turn (Pica, 2003).

Prevent Inappropriate Behavior

In addition to arranging furnishings and learning materials to promote appropriate social interactions, classroom routines can be structured in ways to avoid problem behaviors to the greatest extent possible (Warner & Lynch, 2004). Problem behaviors have a variety of causes and effects.

- Problem behaviors attract teacher and peer attention. Some children seek this attention, even when it is negative.

*Show children how to share and negotiate **before** the problem behavior occurs, because it is nearly impossible to teach children social skills when they are arguing or upset. When teaching young children appropriate social behaviors, everyday events often become teachable moments.*

- Problem behaviors provide negative role models that other young children may imitate.
- Problem behaviors can create situations where children are hurt, resulting in a classroom where children do not feel safe.

With individual children and even the whole group, an observant teacher often can predict when inappropriate behaviors are likely to occur. There are various ways teachers can help children avoid negative behavior.

Plan for transitions. In addition to addressing teachable moments, planning for transitions can avoid problem behaviors when children change from one activity to the next (Briody & McGarry, 2005). Some effective techniques for smooth transitions are to

- provide a signal that the activity will soon end,
- sing or chant a predictable song or fingerplay to cue transitions,
- set a timer, and
- alternate free play with more structured activities.

The "plan-do-review" process (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1999), or posting a picture schedule, enables children to learn the daily routine and predict upcoming activities. As a result, children learn the social skill of following group customs. This builds a foundation for following routines that children will encounter in elementary classrooms and through-out their lives.

Entering and leaving structured settings such as circle time or table tasks are difficult for some children. When teachers maintain a fast pace, encourage personal involvement, and change activities every 5 to 10 minutes within the structured setting, children are more likely to be interested and engaged.

When a child is becoming restless, give the child a delay cue—such as "just one minute and then we will play outdoors," or "after this story we will sing a song"—depending on the activity that is planned next (Warner & Lynch, 2004). When children learn to attend during group times, they are gaining a social skill that will help them in their classroom learning for many years to come.

Offer choices. Providing opportunities for choice is very important when working with young children (Ward & Dahlmeier, 2004). Even with low-preference activities such as naps, choice making can give children a sense of autonomy, enabling them to settle into a routine that otherwise might be problematic. For example, at rest time, a teacher might give a child the choice of sleeping on a cot or a rug, or of sitting quietly and playing with a toy or reading a book.

> **Choices should be limited, safe, and appropriate.**

Choices should be limited, safe, and appropriate to the child's age and to the activity. Choice-making helps children adjust to the social demands of a group setting and promotes responsibility. Working cooperatively within the group becomes increasingly important as children move into intermediate grades.

Teach Social Skills

Direct instruction typically involves teaching children specific social behaviors such as sharing, taking turns, or asking for a toy. This method can be used with a group of children during circle time, or with an individual child who has difficulty with a specific social skill.

When social skills instruction is targeted to the needs of children with social difficulties such as aggression or isolation, the intervention can significantly improve the nature of the child's social relationships (Ladd, 2005; Mize & Ladd, 1990). Direct instruction using a social skill script usually involves these steps.

1. The teacher models the appropriate behavior.
2. The child demonstrates the behavior with the teacher.
3. The teacher models a correct and incorrect example of the target social behavior.
4. The teacher asks the child to identify the correct social behavior.
5. The child role plays the positive skill with another child.
6. To promote generalization of the social skill, the teacher reminds the child of the skill before the activity where it is likely to be employed.

An example of direct instruction using a social skill script with an older preschool child is provided in Table 1. Notice that with young children, a social skill is broken down into just a few behaviors.

Promote Peer Learning

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals learn many social behaviors by observing others. Teachers can take advantage of this phenomenon by grouping children in activities to promote appropriate social behavior. These are just two examples.

- When a child has difficulty with social skills, seat her between two socially adept

---

Table 1. Example of direct instruction using a social script

Teacher: Let's learn how to share. First, I look at my friend. I give her a truck. And I say, "Here." Tell me, what do you do when you share?

Child: (teacher may need to prompt the child) I look at my friend. I give her a truck. I say "Here."

Teacher: Yes, that is one way to share. Now watch me and tell me if I share. I look at Libby. I give her the doll. And I say, "Here." Did I share with Libby?

Child: Yes. You shared with Libby.

Teacher: You were really watching. Now tell me if I share this time. (demonstrate with another toy, but grab it and say "That's mine.") Did I share?

Child: No, you grabbed the doll.

Teacher: I see that you were watching carefully. Now watch me this time. (Demonstrate sharing a car with the child). Did I share with you? What did I do?

Child: You did. You gave me the car and said, "Here."

The teacher then has the child role play the act of sharing with a friend.

Before the children go to play in centers, remind them to remember to share with their friends. Some teachers may want to role play again just before center time to reinforce the skill.

peers during circle time and snack time.

- During playground time, centers, and other play activities, encourage the children with strong social skills to invite a child with less mature social development to join them.

When teachers affirm appropriate social behaviors, other children see this happening and are more likely to imitate behaviors that are socially enhancing. At the same time, be careful not make the same children always the caretakers of less socially adept children. One way to avoid this is to pair the child with social difficulties with a variety of children rather than with the same child all of the time.

Tell Social Stories

Originally, teachers used social stories to assist young children with disabilities to learn social skills. The effectiveness of social stories with children with disabilities is widely documented (Sansosoti, Powell-Smith, & Kinkaid, 2004). In recent years social stories have become increasing popular among preschool and elementary teachers (Lynch & Simpson, 2005).

Through the use of social stories, teachers can address specific social skills such as how to greet friends or share a toy. After the target skill is identified, the teacher, along with the children, creates a story that demonstrates how to use that skill. Later, the teacher reads the social story during circle time and follows up with interactive role playing where children can practice the skill informally.

After the children are familiar with the appropriate behavior, the teacher

reminds them to use the skill throughout the day. This technique is highly effective for children who may not have appropriate role models of social behaviors at home, or may not be able to generalize skills into alternate environments. Very often children independently use their newly learned skill in various learning centers.

The process for implementing social stories presented here has been adapted from its original format to assure that the activity is developmentally appropriate for typically developing young children. When developing the social story, Gray (2000) recommends that the stories follow a specific five-to-seven-sentence format.

- The first sentence (*descriptive sentence*) simply describes the appropriate behavior in social situations.
- The following sentence describes positive, observable, appropriate responses (*directive sentence*).
- The next sentence (*perspective sentence*) helps children to understand the viewpoint of others as they react to a situation. This perspective sentence was developed by

Gray (2000) for children with autism spectrum disorders who may not understand the feelings of the teacher or peers in the situation described in the story. For typically developing children, the teacher may want to include a sentence that reflects a more internal locus of control and reflects on the child's perspective rather than the perspective of others.

- The next sentence is optional. It describes a *commonly shared value or opinion*.
- The last sentence reminds children of the appropriate behavior in the social situation (*control sentence*).

The social story in Table 2 was written to assist children who were having difficulty in cleaning up after center time.

For children with autism spectrum disorders, a perspective sentence from Gray's framework would be included to provide the child with insight about the viewpoint of others. Instead of "Tomorrow our toys will be ready to play with again," the sentence might read "Our teacher is pleased when we pick up our toys." Because the

---

Table 2. Social story to assist children with clean-up time

Center Time

We like to play with toys during center time.

When it is time to clean up centers, our teacher sings the clean-up song.

Sometimes we are having fun playing and do not want to clean up.

Even when we want to keep playing, we pick up our toys.

After we clean up our toys, we can go outside to play.

Tomorrow our toys will be ready to play with again.

We feel proud when we get all of the toys picked up.

It is very important to pick up our toys and put them away neatly.

We will try to remember to pick up our toys when we hear the clean-up song.

social story in Table 2 is applicable to most classrooms, and not necessarily for children with autism, the perspective sentence was adapted to provide an example that promotes internal locus of control, rather than doing something simply to please the teacher.

Explore Story Books

Teachers have long used story books to promote children's social development. Doll and Doll (1997) introduced the term *developmental bibliotherapy*, which is reading stories to children that address issues that most children are likely to experience at a particular age. Many young children are likely to experience feelings of anger, teasing, or bullying during the preschool years.

Developmental bibliotherapy
Reading stories to children that address issues that most children are likely to experience at a particular age.

If the teacher reads *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang, there are a number of issues that can be discussed, such as the fact that everyone feels angry, what makes us angry, how we know when we feel angry, and what we do when we are angry.

Using children's literature in this way offers children perspectives and options for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As a result, children are able to gain insights about, and learn healthy ways to face, common difficulties (Heath, Leavy, Young, & Money, 2005).

When selecting picture books to promote young children's social development, choose books that contain
- attractive illustrations,
- interesting story content,
- situations that are developmentally appropriate for young children, and
- appealing recurring refrains (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003).

Young children often enjoy stories where animals portray characters, and this eliminates the uncertainty about whether or not children will identify with characters due to age, gender, or race. Because story reading is a part of everyday classroom activities, this method affords a natural way to help children to learn to deal with problem situations and express feelings.

Some of the goals of developmental bibliotherapy include providing

Subjects & Predicates

Read stories to children that address issues that most children are likely to experience at a particular age, such as anger, teasing, or bullying. Using children's literature in this way offers children perspectives and options for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As a result, children are able to gain insight and learn healthy ways to face difficulties.

appropriate role models through book characters, validating children's feelings, giving children the vocabulary to talk about their feelings, and improving children's self-esteem (Bauer & Balius, 1995).

Assist Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

Some children who have difficulty with social interaction have experienced trauma, such as neglect. These experiences have a serious impact on young children's developing neurological systems. These children may experience physiologically altered states of arousal and brain chemistry, making it difficult for them to regulate their behaviors (Anda, et al., 2006; Cicchetti & Toth, 2005).

Children who have experienced trauma also may have attachment problems that contribute to significant difficulties in relating to and interacting with others (Lieberman, 2002). Some estimate that 35% of children in the United States exhibit some difficulty with attachment (Lubit & Maldonado-Duran, 2006). Such children need a predictable, nurturing classroom with non-punitive caregivers who establish a safe and rewarding environment for them.

Teachers are urged to collaborate with specialists when children who have experienced trauma are enrolled in their classrooms. An extensive discussion of children experiencing trauma and neglect is beyond the scope of this article, so interested readers are encouraged to explore the principles of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics discussed by Perry (2006). A few common techniques are described here as an introduction to the topic.

Stein and Kendall (2004) provide an intervention model for children who have experienced psychological trauma. Their model consists or three components:

1. safety and stabilization,
2. symptom reduction and memory work, and
3. teaching developmental skills.

For *safety and stabilization*, children need a safe, predictable environment. A nurturing classroom with a predictable schedule and planned transitions supports these children. Firm limits and boundaries, where children are aware of classroom expectations, are important as well.

Stein and Kendall (2004) also recommend that caregivers redirect children toward more appropriate behaviors and teach them coping strategies. Providing a safe space in the classroom where children can calm down and regain composure is helpful. This should be a comfortable area that is *not* associated with punishment or time out.

> **Intervention can improve social relationships.**

The second component of this model, *symptom reduction and memory work*, involves a counselor who is trained in working with abused and neglected children. Caregivers can support these children by teaching them ways to calm down. A number of methods have been developed to teach young children to calm themselves.

- One approach to teaching a relaxation response is through self-instruction by crossing one's arms and repeating "control."

- Another calming technique is to teach children to cross their arms pretzel fashion, bring their arms toward their body, and take deep breaths (Miami Dade County Public Schools, 2007).

- The turtle technique (Guetzloe, 1998) is another approach to help children calm themselves by using the concrete example of a turtle. The class can observe a real turtle or read about a turtle in a book. The teacher shows children how a turtle draws in its arms and legs when scared or angry. Children are then taught to imitate the turtle by pulling their arms and legs in close to their bodies. They can also learn to "turtle" while standing. Children practice this response and the teacher prompts them to use it when they are agitated.

The third component of Stein and Kendall's model is *teaching developmental skills*. They recommend directly teaching social skills and problem solving. The goal is to foster social development so that children can learn compassion, responsibility, and concern for others.

*   *   *

Learning social skills during early childhood is essential, so teachers can employ a variety of developmentally appropriate approaches to address children's individual needs. Designing effective classroom environments, taking advantage of teachable moments, implementing proactive approaches when teaching social behaviors, and giving direct social skill instruction are

some of the options available to teachers. Each of these strategies can be implemented within any classroom structure and is appropriate for diverse groups of learners.

When teachers assist children to learn the social skills that are needed for success in their homes, schools, and communities, they are building a strong foundation for everyone for many years to come.

References

Anda, R.F., Felitti, V.J., Bremner, J.D., Walker, J.D., Whitfield, C., Perry, B.D., Dube, S.R., & Giles, W.H. (2006). The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood: A convergence of evidence from neurobiology and epidemiology. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience, 256*, 174-186.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Publishing.

Barbakoff, S., & Yo, Y.P. (2002). *Levels of social play: Observing and recording preschoolers.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED472748).

Bauer, M.S., & Balius, F.A. (1995). Storytelling: Integrating therapy and curriculum for children with emotional disturbances. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 27*(2), 24-28.

Briody, J., & McGarry, K. (2005). Using social stories to ease children's transitions. *Young Children, 60*(5), 38-40.

Doll, B., & Doll, C. (1997). *Bibliotherapy with young people: Librarians and mental health professionals working together.* Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Cicchetti, D., & Toth, S. (2005). Child maltreatment. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 1*, 409-438.

Gray, C. (2000). *Writing social stories with Carol Gray* [Videotape and workbook]. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Guetzloe, E., & Rockwell, S. (1998). Fight, flight, or better choices: Teaching nonviolent responses to young children. *Preventing School Failure, 42*(4), 154-159.

Guralnick, M.J. (1999). The nature and meaning of social integration for young children with mild developmental delays in inclusive settings. *Journal of Early Intervention, 22,* 70-86.

Heath, M.A., Sheen, D., Leavy, D., Young, E., & Money, K. (2005). Bibliotherapy: A resource to facilitate emotional healing and growth. *School Psychology International, 26*(5), 563-580.

Honig, A.S., & Wittmer, D.S. (1996). Helping children become more prosocial: Ideas for classrooms, families, schools, and communities. *Young Children, 51*(2), 62-70.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). (2004). Public Law 108-446, 20 U.S.C., Section 1400.

Jacobson, L. (2005). NGA Task Force endorses more inclusion for preschool. *Education Week, 24*(17), 5.

Ladd, G.W. (2005). *Children's peer relations and social competence: A century of progress.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ladd, G.B., & Burgess, K.B. (2001). Do relational risks and protective factors moderate the linkages between childhood aggression and early psychological and school adjustment? *Child Development, 72*(5), 1579-1601.

Ladd, G.W., Kochenderfer, B.J., & Coleman, C.C. (1996). Friendship quality as a predictor of young children's early school adjustment. *Child Development, 67*, 1103-1118.

Lieberman, A.F. (2002). Treatment of attachment disorders in infant psychotherapy. In J.M. Maldonado-Duran (Ed.), *Infant and toddler mental health: Models of clinical intervention with infants and their families* (pp. 105-128). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Lubit, R., & Maldonado-Duran, J.M. (2006). *Childhood abuse and neglect: Reactive attachment disorder.* Retrieved September 13, 2007, from http://www.emedicine.com/ped/topic2646.htm.s

Lynch, S.A., & Simpson, C.G. (2005). Social stories: Tools to teach positive behaviors. *Dimensions of Early Childhood, 33*(2), 32-36.

McClelland, M.M., & Morrison, F.J. (2003). The emergence of learning-related social skills in preschool children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18*(2), 206-224.

McEvoy, M.A. (1990). The organization of caregiving environments: Critical issues and suggestions for future research. *Education and Treatment of Children, 13*(4), 269-272.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2007). *Prekindergarten program for children with disabilities extended school year (ESY) activities home packet.* Retrieved November 21, 2007, from http://prekese.dadeschools.net/docs/esy/Behavior.pdf.

Mize, J., & Ladd, G.W. (1990). A social-cognitive learning approach to social skill training with low-status preschool children. *Developmental Psychology, 26*, 388-397.

Nicholson, J.L., & Pearson, Q.M. (2003). Helping children cope with fears: Using children's literature in classroom guidance. *Professional School Counseling, 7*(1), 15-19.

Perry, B.D. (2006). Applying principles of neurodevelopment to clinical work with maltreated and traumatized children. In N.B. Webb (Ed.), *Working with traumatized youth in child welfare* (pp. 27-51). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Pica, R. (2003). *Teachable transitions: 190 activities to move from morning circle to the end of the day.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.

Sansosoti, F., Powell-Smith, K.A., & Kinkaid, D. (2004). A research synthesis of social story intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(4), 194-205.

Schweinhart, L.J., & Weikart, D.P. (1999). The advantages of High/Scope: Helping children lead successful lives. *Educational Leadership, 57*(1), 76-79.

Stein, P.T., & Kendall, J.C. (2004). *Psychological trauma and the developing brain: Neurologically based interventions for troubled children.* New York: Hawthorn Press.

Stone, S.J. (1993). Taking time to teach social skills. *Childhood Education, 69*(4), 194-195.

Vaughn, S., Ae-Hwa, C., Morris-Sloan, C.V., Hughes, M.J., Elbaum, B., & Sridhar, D. (2003). Social skills for young children with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*(1), 2-15.

Ward, G., & Dahlmeier, C. (2004). Choices and voices: A developmental view of guided choice. *Montessori Life, 16*(1), 16-20.

Warner, L., & Lynch, S.A. (2004). *Preschool classroom management: 150 teacher-tested techniques.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.

Put These Ideas Into Practice!

Social Skills: Laying the Foundation for Success

Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson

What are social skills?

Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others and the environment. Some of these skills include showing empathy, participation in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, communicating with others, negotiating, and problem solving.

Use Teachable Moments

- Recognize that behavior problems indicate a need for children to learn a more effective way of interacting
- Model and teach social skills within the context of everyday play
- Help children recognize and identify their feelings and the feelings of others
- Smooth transition routines with songs, chants, and games

Prevent Inappropriate Behaviors

- Based on past experience, anticipate when there might be problems
- Instruct children in the appropriate behavior before the problem situation occurs
- During circle time and structured settings, keep a quick pace, involve children, and change activities every 5 to 10 minutes
- Let children know that "they are almost finished" when they become restless

Teach Social Skills Directly

- Use social scripts to teach turn-taking, sharing, and other needed skills
- Pair less mature children with those who have stronger social abilities
- Use social stories and story books to teach valued social skills

Subjects & Predicates

Note: *Dimensions of Early Childhood* readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.