



Special Connections

A newsletter connecting our Special Kids, Families and Schools

PARENTS TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS NATURALLY

By Sue J. Sheridan, Ed.D., FAAMR

Due to special requests, Dr. Sheridan's article is reprinted from the inaugural issue of *Special Connections*

Parents, you are natural teachers for your children. When you have a child with special needs however, the teaching becomes more explicit and less incidental than with your other children. Most students who qualify for special education services have a need for understanding, learning and practicing social skills. When you add your expertise and daily practice to the social skills teaching the school is doing, your child learns faster and is able to generalize social skills development to real environments inside and outside of school. By using every situation possible to explain, teach and practice social skills, you are one of your child's best teachers.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS?

A social skill involves any interaction with another person. The range of social skills is broad and diverse. Your child may need to be taught to look at a person who is talking to him/her, to ask to join a game on the playground or eat lunch with a group of people he/she wants as friends or to write a thank you note to grandma for the birthday present she sent.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO TEACH MY CHILD?

Asking your child's teacher, therapists and/or the IEP committee about the social skills being worked on in

the classroom will be helpful. In addition, think about the social skills that other children your child's age seem to have. The neighborhood park, McDonald's, Burger King or other popular fast food restaurants with play areas are wonderful teaching/learning environments for both you and your child. Take your son or daughter to the park and be sure and bring wonderful toys to share with other children. Bubbles, sand toys, trucks and cars, buckets, balls are all great magnets for young children. Teach your child to ask a new friend if he or she wants to play with the bubbles, cars, trucks, balls, etc.

Sometimes you will need to tell your child exactly what to say. You might say, "Go to that nice boy and say,

"Do you want to play with the bubbles with me?" If he says yes, smile and let him blow bubbles too.

If he says no, say 'okay' and come back to me". You know the understanding level of your child but remember he/she might not have the right words or gestures and might need to be taught exactly what to say and do. At McDonald's or Burger King, your child might just say, "May I play with you?" Remember to tell your child what to say if the new friend says "yes" or if the new friend says "no". As you are there, listen carefully to what the children are saying, the games they are playing, the

toys they have, the TV programs or movies they are role playing and keep this in mind to teach your child for the next play time or social outing. If your child is not an only child, use your other children as resources to know what others are finding interesting and playing. This is your homework.

Sue J. Sheridan, Ed.D., FAAMR, is a private consultant in special education after retiring from Harris County Department of Education as a special education consultant for the County Superintendent of Schools. Sue's specialty is working with students with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. She also enjoys working with and programming for individuals with mental retardation and their families. Sue does non-standardized, functional educational evaluations. In addition she has two play groups in which she and a colleague take children into the community on a weekly basis to learn social skills in the least restrictive environment.

Cy-Fair ISD

Should you have any questions regarding your child and/or special education services, you may contact the Diagnostician or High School Support Specialist at your child's campus.

There may be times when you need to contact the district's special education office.

The contact information is as follows:

Jane Flinn, Director of Special Education
10300 Jones Road, Houston TX 77065
Phone: 281-897-6416
Fax: 281-897-6403
Email: jane.flinn@cfisd.net -or-

Nadine Fidler, Assistant Superintendent
Phone: 281-897-6416
Fax: 281-897-6403
Email: nadine.fidler@cfisd.net

ChildFind

The Cy-Fair ISD provides support services for students with disabilities residing within the district. Through Child Find efforts, eligible children, birth to 21, may be identified for needed services. Anyone who has a child or knows of a child who may qualify for services should call the Special Education Department (281-897-6400) or the child's home campus for information.

Education Service Center

The state of Texas is divided into 20 regions served by Education Service Centers. Our Education Service Center is Region 4 and is located in Houston. Region 4 has staff trained in special education who may be a resource to parents. The telephone number of the special education department at Region 4 is 713-462-7708.

"Hoping that all school personnel and families have a pleasant summer full of good times with family and friends. The next issue will arrive in September, 2005 to kick off another school year."

Active and Alert

By: Ginger Sewell

As children's minds begin to wander to long carefree summer days parents begin to wonder how they might keep their children alert and aware of all the progress made during the school year. Less TV and more interactive computer games, less TV and more reading books, less TV and more physical movement, less TV...., well you get the idea. Students need to engage physically, socially and mentally to remain active and alert. A few moments spent at the end of each day to review what was done that was fun, what was learned that we did not know and what needs to be remembered is a great way to increase our child's awareness and keep minds active during the summer break.

Ginger Sewell is the parent of a young adult with a disability and a former Director of Special Education. Currently an educational consultant, she is the recipient of both the Parent of the Year and Professional of the Year awards from the Learning Disabilities Association

Homework Alternatives

For parents, supervising homework can be a critical, but difficult task. Even though homework is chiefly considered as time for practicing skills taught in school, there are other reasons for homework, such as linking learning from the classroom to the community and home. Rather than families seeing homework as a negative task, parents and guardians can look at homework in practical ways so that they can help their children work on school learning by integrating it into what they are already doing as part of family routines.

For example, reading books, watching movies or TV, shopping in a mall or at the grocery store, caring for plants or animals, and cleaning house can be opportunities for practicing and linking school skills. When reading books or after watching movies or TV, parents can ask comprehension questions: Who is the main character? What happened first, in the middle, last? What was the book, movie, show about? When shopping, math skills can be practiced: How much is the item? How much money will you have left after a purchase? What is the cost of a larger size rather than a smaller size item? How many servings will the item provide? Cleaning house can be a time for children to both participate in teamwork and have independent jobs. Skills involving sequencing, time, and fractions can be practiced: What is the schedule? How much time does the task take? Charts and pictures can be made that show the task, when it needs to be done, the steps needed, time, etc. These are a few ideas to help your children learn and link school skills to a different environment.