

Social Skills Groups: Is One Right for Your Child?

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Social skills groups and individual social counseling can do wonders for your child's friendship skills and self esteem. A trained therapist or counselor can help kids figure out all sorts of subtle situations and expectations that may be occurring with classmates, siblings, on the playground, and with adults. They can help translate how the social hierarchy comes into play in the classroom. This type of therapy can help your child learn to be calmer in stressful situations, so his or her natural personality can shine. This article discusses when parents might want to consider finding a social skills therapist for their child.

1. Your child has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder:

Many parents first look for a group as a part of a more extensive treatment plan after their child has been diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder, an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Officially called ADHD or AD/HD, commonly also referred to as ADD). One of the key symptoms of all of these conditions is that there may be difficulty in managing social situations. It's not uncommon for children with these disorders to have more interpersonal difficulties as they get older. The relationships get more complex, the unwritten rules are more abstract and there is less tolerance for anyone outside the norm. Keep this in mind, and be sure to do a periodic reevaluation of how your child is doing.

2. Your child has been diagnosed with another behavioral or emotional disorder:

Many other disorders can have a strong impact on social functioning, even when the social aspects are not one of the key features. For example, kids with Tourette's or a Tic disorder may be troubled by anxiety, other children's reactions and teasing. A child dealing with a mood disorder may also struggle with making friends. In these cases, social skills training can provide a safe environment for children to learn to have more satisfying relationships with others.

3. Your child is in the assessment process:

If you and/or your child's teachers are concerned about your child's emotional and mental functioning, a doctor should be consulted immediately. Generally, it doesn't take long to see a general physician. Unfortunately, a more thorough assessment process can take six months or more to schedule and complete. Check with your doctor first, but often a counselor or therapist can start working with your child during this waiting and assessment period. This gives both

your child and your family some support and can help ease a difficult situation. Social skills therapy is rarely going to interfere with an evaluation.

4. Your child is going through a tough time socially:

The school years can be brutal for some kids. Every year the social rules get more complicated, the kids can be meaner, and the teachers have less time to get involved. Some kids breeze right through the social issues of school, some have minor problem periods and for some it's an ongoing battle.

If your child is struggling with making friends, is uncomfortably shy, seems unhappy or distressed about going to school, or is often excluded by the other kids, some type of social skills intervention can be very helpful. Both bullies and victims can be helped by these groups, especially if they get to be together in one group. Being in a social skills group doesn't mean your child has a social skills disorder, just that some coaching in interpersonal skills can help.

If you're worried, or especially if your child asks for help, look into finding a therapist. If the teacher or principal is concerned, you should pay attention, because they spend their days with kids and they can tell when something is beyond ordinary behavior. Depending on the school and district rules, school personnel may not be able to suggest treatments that aren't available at the school, so teacher's suggestions may be very subtly made. You need to pay close attention.

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