

★We're in your Corner★

This month we dive into *social skills*:

Being a kid is tough! We wish our kids could go to school and focus on their studies, but the reality is that school is as much about academics as it is about social learning. When a child struggles with their social life, academic success is often hard to achieve. It really makes us wonder—how do kids experience conflict so early on? Interacting is often difficult for us as adults—Imagine what it's like for our kids! Kids *want* to have happy, friendly interactions with others. They also lack the skills and capacity to consider others. So how do we distinguish between what is typical and what is concerning?

The complaint made most often by young children relates to bossiness. Let's face it—all children want to get their way. The conflict lies between their desire to be social and that developmentally they are still only able to think about their own needs. Children often engage in lying, extravagant storytelling, acting like experts, and melodramatic behaviors (even when we consider the situation to be no-big-deal). Young children often have difficulty tolerating a difference in opinion and have a tendency to see things in absolutes. Some children need help with how to keep their hands to themselves or respect personal space. These behaviors are typical of young children. They are also **necessary**. These behaviors help children gather experiences to reference when they need to problem solve better in future interactions that will undoubtedly come their way. It is important to recognize this rite of passage. Listen to them. Validate their feelings. **But do not** fix their problems for them. Instead, partner with your child to brainstorm problem-solving ideas. Allow them to weigh the pros and cons of different actions, consequences, and possible outcomes. This will better equip them for real life situations they will face.

So if we shouldn't swoop in and save the day how DO we partner with our children in navigating their social dilemmas?

1. Listen.

This may sound like a hefty task, because we all know that kids can talk about a problem with a peer incessantly, and they can talk in circles. But if you tell them what to do, you aren't helping them learn. So listen. What happened, how do they feel about it, what did they do in that moment?

2. Empathize.

Empathize with their feelings, but resist the impulse to demonize the other child involved; name their feelings and repeat back to them why you can see that they feel this way: "You sound frustrated because Shelly said---if I were you I would be upset too".

3. Share your perspective.

Children have a difficult time understanding that their view is not the only side of the story. Try wondering with them about the other child's point of view without negating their feelings; instead of "I don't think Shelly meant to be mean to you...", try: "I wonder what was going on with Shelly that she said such mean things....I wonder if maybe her feelings were hurt when..."

4. Help them learn how to express their needs to others and stand up for themselves.

This is a challenge for all of us, so kids need our guidance—and to practice. Our first reaction is to tell our kids to move on—"She's not a good friend, find a new friend!"—but this is someone they care about, and a hurt they've suffered. Instead of dismissing your child's feelings help them talk it out. You might say "You sound really mad at Bella....Can you tell her how you feel and what you want, instead of what you think about her? That can be a hard thing to say to a friend. Let's practice together, so you feel more comfortable. Bella, I feel frustrated when you tell me what to do, can you please stop."

5. Help them to think through various problem-solving options.

Help your child brainstorm how to solve their problems. Don't come up with the best option for their situation right away. Try giving them options—good and not so great—and asking how each option would work out for them. Try asking questions to guide your child to solve the problem: "Is it more important to you to play the game your way or to have Billy play with you?"

If you continue to have concerns, contact your school counselor to make a plan for a success—they're full of ideas, and are always in your corner!~