

St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Social Skills Program

Parent Information

Introduction

- Social success is critical for broader success and resiliency research shows that children who are popular, likable and able to resolve conflicts with others are also more likely to succeed at school, and are generally more resilient than children with less developed social skills. Positive social behaviours and skills are perhaps the most important skills that children need to learn to lead a successful and happy life. These skills include such things as:
 - Basic interaction
 - Conversation skills
 - Maintenance skills (sharing, turn taking, following rules, cooperate)
 - Friendship skills
 - Developing confidence and self esteem
 - Learning adequate self control over emotions and behaviours
 - Being able to consider other points of view
 - Conflict resolution
 - Empathy
 - Assertiveness
 - Problem solving skills

Having these skills not only helps a child to get on well at home and at school but also is likely to lead to a child having more friends, leading a satisfying, productive life and being a much nicer person to know. As children learn these positive behaviours and skills they also tend to develop positive attitudes and respect towards others.

Aims of the program:

- To teach the positive social behaviours and skills the child needs to get on well at school and with others.
- To help the child understand and manage their anger in appropriate ways
- To provide follow up strategies required to translate the knowledge that has been gained in the program into changed patterns of behaviour in everyday situations.
- To encourage the development of positive attitudes towards others.

This is not an easy task and will need the dedication from a partnership with home and school, to support with the reinforcement of the new skills learned. And to ensure that the skills learned are being used within a cross setting environment.

About the Program:

- The groups will be age specific and up to a max 4-6 children
- Sessions will be 30-45 minutes in length
- Run for 10 weeks
- Working within the Kids skills/social skills and anger management framework
- Involve drawing, discussions, writing, artwork, role playing, modelling, game playing, etc
- Teacher evaluations pre and post
- Parent evaluations pre and post
- To have follow up sessions with the students to ensure that the behaviours learnt are being used in other areas of their life.
- Using any incidents that arise as opportunities to teach and reinforce the positive ideas and strategies covered in the program
- The skills to be learned are acquired from feedback from parents, classroom teacher, counsellor and student.

Converting problems into skills using the 'Kids Skills Framework'

Fran was a boy of six with an inconvenient behaviour. He refused to use the toilet like everyone else and soiled his underwear instead. His parents had tried many things to help him, to no avail. Fran suffered as a result of this delay in his development: other kids often shunned him and he was rarely invited to play at friends houses. Also, the possibility of attending a summer camp was out of the question.

However, the summer just before his 7th birthday, Fran started to go to the toilet regularly like everybody else. One day his mother brought up the issue with him.

'You don't know how happy I am now that you have finally learned to use the toilet regularly' she said 'isn't it nice for you too?'

'Yes it is' said Fran, and then he continued: 'It took me quite a while, but in the end I learned it!'

This story illustrated the basic idea of Kids Skills. When children refuse to go to the toilet and soil their underwear, adults usually think this is a symptom of some serious underlying disturbance. But Fran saw it differently. His words 'in the end I learned it' show that for *him*, going to the toilet regularly was simply a skill that all children need to learn, the only difference being that it took him longer than other children and that's ok.

Kids Skills is based on the notion that children do not actually have problems, only skills they have not yet learned. In other words, most issues confronting children including fear, bad habits, social skills, manners and some disorders involving sleeping, eating, can be perceived as an undeveloped skill. By learning the relevant skills, children may overcome the corresponding problems.

In Kids Skills we start the problem solving process by ‘converting’ the problem in to skill, that is moving from the perception of a ‘problem’ to awareness of the skill required to overcome it. When we have identified the particular skill the child needs to learn for the problem to disappear, we can start to talk about skills rather than problems. After all, the thought of learning skills is far more appealing to children – and more motivating – than the thought of dealing with difficulties.

Building Motivation

Coming to an agreement with a child about which particular skill needs to be acquired does not guarantee that the child will automatically become motivated to learn that skill. We may still have to do various things to build the child’s motivation, to help her become truly interested. There are a number of things we can do to build the Childs motivation. For example allowing the child to come up with a name for the skill, and making plans with the child – well in advance – about how she can celebrate her acquisition of it. In addition, we can make sure that there are a number of people who are willing to support and help the child as she is learning.

Practising the Skill

When we have succeeded in getting the child interested in learning the skill we encourage him to start practising it. We also find suitable ways for the child to practice the skill and make sure he gets lots of positive feedback whenever he practices and performs it.

Because learning rarely follows a straight line, we must also be prepared for set backs – times when the child temporarily loses the skill and the problematic behaviour reoccurs.

Reinforcing Learning

When the child has learned her skill, we give encouragement and praise and celebrate within the group. Another important part of the process, is for the child to arrange an opportunity for her to pass her newly learned skill on to someone else. You can also do this through other siblings, and family members.

Working as a ‘Partnership’

There are two equally important aspects to teaching social skills and behaviours:

- The actual teaching of the behaviour – so the child knows and can correctly perform the behaviour in the appropriate setting.
- Ensuring that the learned skill/behaviours become regular part of the Childs behaviour patterns – that is the behaviour being generalised and maintained across the settings and time. E.G. school and home environments.

This generally involves some combination of the following between school and home environments:

- **Clearly explaining the skill/behaviour** – often breaking it down into sub skills e.g. greeting a person could be broken down into the following skills: look at a person and make eye contact, smile, say ‘hello’ in a friendly way, wait for their reply.
- **Modelling** – the skill should be demonstrated to the child. It is useful to point out the relevant aspect while the behaviour is demonstrated e.g. ‘see how John made eye contact and smiled’ Children watch and learn from us so it is important for us to show them how to behave.
- **Supervised Practice (includes feedback and reinforcement)** - the child should practice the behaviour while the teacher observes so that the teacher can give praise, encouragement and feedback about whether the child did the behaviour correctly e.g., ‘That was a good effort John. Remember to look at Jane when we do it again. Let’s try again’ they should also be encouraged to use the new skills learnt at home and praised when demonstrated.
- **Ongoing practice, feedback and reinforcement** – further opportunities for practice must be provided including opportunities for practice in the regular setting e.g. classroom, playground, playing at home. Prompting and providing cues can help remind the child to use the skills and when it is appropriate to use them. Peers can be encouraged and trained to be part of this process. Using incentives is often necessary to motivate children who otherwise would be unmotivated to learn new skills and to increase the rate of learning. This is also achieved through a fun session at the end of the program.

Teaching Positive Attitudes

Positive attitudes that are associated with particular behaviours can be fostered by:

- **Giving the reasons for doing these behaviours** – as they are explained and demonstrated. Usually the positive effects for others or the child themselves. E.g. ‘it is good to be kind to people because it makes people feel happy and they are likely to be kind back to you.’
- **Asking the child to verbalise why he/she should behave this way** – it is fine to give the child the answer and then get them to repeat it. This is in effect the strategy of verbal rehearsal. Verbalising an idea or attitude makes the acquisition of the idea or attitude more likely.
- **Modelling behaviours** that reflect positive attitudes.
- **Regularly stating positive ideas and attitudes** – and pointing out examples of children doing things that illustrate or reflect these positive attitudes.
- **Getting the child to engage in positive behaviours that reflect positive attitudes** - Changing behaviour is probably the most powerful way to foster positive attitudes particularly when accompanied by verbalisation of positive attitude.

Ensuring that learned social skills/behaviours become a regular part of the Childs behaviour begins with ongoing practice, feedback and reinforcement. Teachers do not stop practising times tables as soon as a child gets them all correct once – rather they continue with regular practice and reinforcement for months knowing that if they do not many children will soon

forget them. It is the same with social skills/behaviours. A planned structured program with small groups will start the process of learning new skills and then to generalise into another setting then another setting. The new skills learned should be encouraged at home, with regular reinforcement, praise and encouragement. It is suggested that parents, grand parents etc are able to provide these opportunities at home in order for cross setting skills to be demonstrated. It then becomes habit for the child and the skills learnt are not just used within school but at home also. This program will only be effective if there is input from home also.