



## ADHD: Developing and supporting social skills

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If we think about some of the common characteristics of our loveable children with ADHD, they do not always lend themselves to successful social situations. Common difficulties may include finishing others sentences, interrupting, zoning in and out of conversations, appearing not to listen, difficulty waiting or turn taking, and losing interest. Every one of these can occasionally make social situations difficult.

**To help develop our child's social skills we can break the skills down into four main areas; listening, expressive language, turn-taking and self-esteem or confidence.**

If we see that our child is struggling in one or more of these areas, it is important to model them as much as we can and as clearly as possible whilst also encouraging them to practise in these areas. All these skills can be developed through play, fun activities or even using characters in films and books to highlight these behaviours in others.

### Listening Skills

A good place to start is with body language. Talk with your child about how we know if someone is listening. We use our ears but what else can we look for? You can discuss what their body doing. Is it turned away or towards the person? Also, how can we best show that we are listening? For our younger children we could model this through play, with dolls or puppets, whatever they enjoy.

Why not explore with your child the use of voices? What do indoor and outdoor voices sound like? How do we know if someone is happy or sad? We can explore how our voices change if we are excited or frightened and if we know how someone is feeling, how might we respond to them? Doing this through role play can be effective.

For parents of older children, it is important to be open if we are possibly stressed or tired. Explain that you may need space or are more cranky than usual. This could really help develop their confidence to articulate when they are feeling like this, something that children and young people with ADHD often struggle with.

### Taking Turns

Turn-taking is another skill that can be developed to help in social situations. Waiting in the bus queue, for a go on the swings or even waiting for a slice of a cake; these are all opportunities to practise turn taking! This can be an area that many children with hyperactive or impulsive ADHD really struggle with. Taking opportunities to practise this skill will again reap great benefits; playing board games, letting your child share things out or anything that involves turn taking is helpful.

## Expressive Language

As far as expressive language is concerned, try to explicitly practise what happens to our voice if we are asking a question. Does our voice go up or down? What body language is used, are our arms folded or hands animated? If we are feeling confident, do our shoulders go back slightly and what about when we are sad, is our head bowed? We can explore this concept in so many ways, such as watching how our favourite characters act in certain situations.

## Low Self-Esteem and Confidence

We know that many children and young people with ADHD can experience difficulties around low self-esteem and confidence. This can make social situations painful and manifests in many ways. They may appear to be rude, offensive or even aggressive. We can help them to build their self-esteem by; showing that we love them, celebrating effort rather than outcome, encouraging them to voice their own opinions, supporting them to step slightly out of their comfort zone by trying new things, acknowledging their opinions, challenging any negative perceptions they may have of themselves and helping them to discover hidden personal skills or talents.

**The ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity is the UK's leading neurodiversity charity, offering a strength-based, lifespan service for the 1 in 5 of us who live with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, DCD, Dyscalculia, OCD, Tourette's Syndrome and more. Integrity of purpose is fundamental to all we do as a user-led organisation. Our vision is for a world that views neurodiversity and 'thinking differently' as a strength, whilst acknowledging and understanding the difficulties associated with lifespan neurodevelopmental conditions.**

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