

## 12 Activities to Help Your Child with Social Skills By Emma

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<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2011/03/28/12-activities-to-help-your-child-with-social-skills/>

Reading and understanding social cues don't come easy for children with special needs.

Here are twelve activities that you can do with your child to help improve his or her social skills.

If you have any resources or ideas to help a child with his or her social skills please add them in the comments.

### Eye Contact

Good, solid eye contact show others that we are both interested in what they have to say and that we have confidence in our ability to listen.

#### 1. Have a staring contest

Making a contest out of making eye contact with you can challenge some kids (especially if they have a competitive streak).

#### 2. Eyes on The Forehead

When you are hanging out with your child place a sticker of an eye or a pair of eyes on your forehead. Encourage them to look at the stickers. It may not be exactly looking at your eyes but it is training them to look in the right direction in a funny, less threatening way. (Idea from: [Children Succeed](#))

#### 3. Swinging

Try making eye contact as your child swings on a swing. Make a game of it where the child tries to reach you with their feet. The sensory input may be calming and allow them to focus more on you. Compliment them on how nice it was to have them looking at your eyes.

### Idioms

Idioms, are very confusing, even in typical children. For Children with ASD it can drive them crazy (is that an idiom?).

Activities that can help kids with idioms include:

#### **4. Books about Idioms**

There are many great books that illustrate and explain idioms. Try **In a Pickle And Other Funny Idioms** by Marvin Terban. It gives a funny literal illustration and then explains the history of the phrase. Use such books as a launching pad. Have your child make their own book of idioms that they hear. When you use one regularly such as “That’s a piece of cake” have children make their own page.

#### **5. Online**

There are many websites that list idioms or have games to try guessing what the idiom really means. Check out **Idiom Site**, **Fun Brain** or **vocabulary.co.il**

#### **6. Memory or Matching Game**

write down idioms on one set of cards and their meanings on another. Have the child try to pair them up. You could also add in the literal picture of the idiom to visualize what the idiom that is being used actually looks like.

### **Reading Faces / Interpreting Emotions**

This skill is important at home, in school and on the playground. Many misunderstandings arise from kids misinterpreting the emotions of others. Sometimes kids can be confused by what a particular look means. They may easily mistake a look of disappointment and think someone is angry, or they may mistake a nervous expression for a funny one.

#### **7. Emotion Charades**

Instead of using movie titles, animal or other typical words, use emotions. Write down feeling words on pieces of paper – or, print out and cut up the worksheet below. Take turns picking a slip of paper and then acting out the word written on it. You could substitute written words for pictures showing the emotion. If kids prefer, you can draw the emotion rather than act it out like in the game Pictionary. You can make it harder by setting a rule that you cannot draw the emotion using a face. Instead, they have to express the feeling by drawing the body language or aspects of a situation that would lead to that emotion (e.g. for sadness, you can draw a kid sitting alone on a bench, or a rainy day, etc.)

#### **8. Face It**

Face games are a way to work on social interaction. Like in an acting class, you can try “mirroring” with an autistic child: Touch your nose or stick out your tongue and have him or her imitate you. Make funny faces that the child can copy. Kids with social skills deficits often have trouble reading expressions and interacting socially, so activities that get them more comfortable with these situations are a great idea.

#### **9. Bingo/Matching Game**

You can use the pictures from the **printable emotions game** as bingo boards. You can also cut them up and make a matching set of words written or other similar faces and then you can play a matching or memory card game.

## **Staying On Topic**

When people have a conversation, they pick a topic to discuss. Each person adds something to the conversation until the conversation has finished or the top has changed. Sometimes it is hard for children to stay on topic and take part of a regular conversation. Here are some activities to help with staying on topic and carrying out a conversation.

### **10. Topic Game**

Play a game with the alphabet where every letter has to be the beginning of a word in a theme such as fruit or vegetable: **A**...apple, **B**...banana, **C**...carrot

### **11. Step into Conversation**

**Step into Conversation** is a learning tool that provides children with autism with the structure and support they need to hold interactive conversations. Cards provide 22 basic, scripted conversations with areas for the child to fill in the blanks. Icons with labels run along the top of each card and remind the child to Stand, Look, Talk and Listen. They are reminded to listen after they make each statement.

### **12. Improvisational Storytelling**

To play this game, put pictures of different emotions face down on the table. Then players decide together on some story elements must appear in the story (e.g., an arctic wasteland, a lemur, and a banana). The goal is for the players to take turns making up the narrative, building on each other's ideas and (eventually) making use of all the required story elements.

To begin, first player picks a card, and starts the narrative. He can take the story into any direction he likes, but he must incorporate the emotion depicted on the card. After a minute or two, the next player picks a card and continues the narrative. Players continue to take turns until they have used all the required story elements and reached a satisfying conclusion.