



An Adult's Guide to Social Skills, for Those Who Were Never Taught

Many of us were never taught how to constructively interact with each other. Unlike topics like math or science, social skills are more something you learn on the job. As children, we learned how to manage conflict, make friends, and navigate groups by doing it. But we do not learn these lessons the same way. Learning social skills can be more difficult if you were not exposed to traditional group dynamics as a child, if you struggle with anxiety or depression, or even if you did not have a lot of positive role models growing up. This tip sheet will help you learn how to manage your own emotions, recognize those of other people and manage them both effectively by socializing.

The Social Foundation: Emotional Intelligence

- Emotional intelligence is defined as your ability to acknowledge your own emotions, recognize emotions in others and use that information to guide your behavior.

Five Categories of Emotional Intelligence that Compliment and Support One Another

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Socialization

Common Social Scenarios Adults Struggle with and How to Confront Them

- Constructively confronting someone
 - If you prefer to avoid conflict, this one may be difficult. However, this does more to make you avoid your feelings than anything else.
 - The first step to combatting our fear of confronting someone is to recognize that fear in yourself and identify the real issues that led to the conflict in the first place.
 - Once you are ready, focus on using “I” statements and describing behavior and your reaction to it rather than hurling accusations.
 - You must have awareness of your own emotions in confronting someone so it is prudent to practice this skill now so you will be prepared when a situation arises.
- Speak Up and Be Heard in A Group
 - When you are in a group of people, it may be difficult to get a word in due to so many people having something to say.

- o While most tricks revolve around managing how you talk such as pausing in the middle of a sentence rather than the end, an overlooked issue is managing how you react to being talked over.
 - o It would be great if no one interrupted you, but there will inevitably be situations where this occurs.
 - o When this happens, instead of losing your motivation to speak or growing agitated, simply accept group conversations as noise and chaos and just go with the flow.
 - o Do not focus so much on getting a set point in, go with the flow of the conversation and look for new opportunities to join in.
 - o When you do speak up, speak loudly with confidence. Practical tricks like keeping your story short can help too, but regulating your own frustration and annoyance is the foundation these tricks build on.
- Make (And Keep) New Friends as an Adult
 - o When you are young, making friends can be relatively easy because you are often required to see each other in groups every day.
 - o However, it can be more difficult as an adult because everyone is busy, tired, and time feels in short supply.
 - o What is really lacking in this case though is motivation.
 - o When you say to a friend that we should hang out sometime but then never do, ask yourself why that is.
 - o You must have internal motivation to make new friends and dedicate time to seeing these friends, even if your schedule is super busy.
 - o Put yourself in situations where you will meet new people. Take a class, join a club, or just talk to people you know but are not friends with yet.
 - o Put it on the top of your to-do list to follow up on plans to see that friend.
- Strike Up a Conversation with Someone New
 - o Talking to a stranger in any circumstance can be complicated. You never know less than when you are meeting someone for the first time.
 - o However, you can use that lack of knowledge to your advantage. People love to talk about themselves so there is no doubt that whoever you want to talk to will engage with you if they can talk about themselves.
 - o Practice a little empathy- showing empathy can help ease tension for both yourself and the individual you are speaking with.
 - o Understand that not everyone is open to conversation all the time. An easy way to check is to observe what they are doing at the time. If someone is wearing headphones or appears to be in a hurry, chances are they do not want to start a conversation with anyone.
 - o If so, try again later or with another person.

- o From there, you can keep the conversation going with the insight and question method. Simply offer an observation or insight, follow it up with a question, and let the conversation flow naturally.

While there will be many different social situations not listed, the principles discussed are universal and can be applied in nearly any conversational setting. Acknowledge your own emotional state and manage your feelings and needs in a constructive way. Take the time to pursue the social outcomes you want and show empathy to others who are dealing with the same struggles. With practice, the complications in social interactions will flow much more naturally.

Ravenscraft, Eric. New York Times (Online), New York: New York Times Company. Jan 23, 2020.

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