

VI Times

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MN Regions 5 & 7 Vision - O&M Staff
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Vision-O&M Staff

The purpose of a newsletter is to provide specialized information to parents and teachers of students with vision impairments. We hope to send regular newsletters that will cover topics of interest that are informative and create a base of knowledge that will assist our students with their on-going success!

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Social Teaching

The *Focused On* social skills series by Karen E. Wolffe, Sharon Z. Sacks, and Karen L. Thomas (2007), AFB Press shares many ideas for not only recognizing the social skills that are necessary for success in our world today, but how to teach those skills to our children with vision impairments.

Observing a role model is the way most children learn their social skills. The child who is sighted will watch parents, siblings, peers, teachers, television characters, etc. to determine what to do in different situations. The child who is sighted will do this multiple times just in the course of everyday life. Multiple exposures and experiences create the skill base for future interactions.

Our children who have low vision or are blind have fewer opportunities to incidentally learn about social skills. There may be some misinterpretation of what the interaction, actions, comments, etc. are due to the restricted ability to see the details of the interaction (there are always multiple things going on at the same time in a social interaction). It is easy to have a misunderstanding of what is happening and what is being implied.

This issue of the newsletter is a continuation of the last newsletter on social skills. It will hopefully address teaching social skills.

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Contact your Teacher for the Blind / Visually Impaired or Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist if:

- You have further questions on the newsletter topic
- Would prefer the newsletter in electronic format by email or in print.



Social Interactions

Greet others

Gain attention

Ask for help

Have a conversation

Share jokes

Join a group

Whisper a secret

Work cooperatively

Cope with conflict

Make friends

Be culturally sensitive

Understand/express emotions

Talk on the phone

Use social media

Negotiate

Communicate assertively

Deal with teasing, bullying and victimization

Social Skills for Early Childhood

Interaction in the preschool years involves many factors we may not think about as strategies, but they are!

- Establish routines that the young child can anticipate what will happen next. Give your child a role in the routine (dressing, feeding, etc.) so there is a reason for interaction. Talk about what you are doing. Ask for responses.
- Get excited about word plays and games. Pat-a-cake, for example should be the most exciting thing you have every done. Show your child how to take turns, interact, have fun!
- Your child will not be able to respond to your smiles and gestures as your children with vision. You will need to substitute some physical interaction to help your child become familiar and comfortable with touch and interaction.
- Children will not join a group until they know what the group is doing. Help your child approach peers and tell him/her what is happening and how it is happening. Help him/her engage.
- Children all need practice developing social skills. Allow your child to play with other children (frequently from an early age). Find toys that appeal to children who are sighted and those who have a vision impairment.
- Help your child develop turn-taking and conversation skills. Practice together at home. Children with vision loss tend to take a backseat to the conversation, as they are listening for other clues to what is going on.
- Structure play time to provide your child with materials that can be moved, used, and shared. Play with others needs to be successful and focused on fun.
- Always tell your child what other children are doing—and why. The more he/she understands about the world, the easier it is to not have to guess about what is happening.
- Every day, practice asking and answering questions in the routine of your day. This is an ice breaker for the future.
- Explain nonverbal gestures, behaviors, signals, etc. to your child. They are an important part of our daily experience in the sighted world.
- If your child has some nonverbal behaviors that are not socially the norm, redirect him/her when these occur.
- Read books to your child that describe how a character acts, solves a problem, deals with an issue, etc. Talk about it. Try it at your house.
- Remember: Don't assume your child understands what is happening around him/her. The subtle cues and information we receive visually builds experience and understanding. When a child cannot take advantage of the vision, we must describe and help the child experience it firsthand.

Teaching Elementary Social Skills

Elementary age children are moving from a very self-centered to a peer-centered life focus. They are less aware in the early grades, and more aware in middle school, of the things that “matter” to their peers. What is popular? What is acceptable?

To help your child with a vision impairment become socially aware, understanding, and understood in their classroom and at home, think about these strategies:

- Talk about how people behave when they speak with one another: smile, turn toward the speaker, facial/eye contact, pay attention to what the other person is saying, don't be self-focused.
- Encourage exploration, discussion, and understanding of the environment. Real life experiences will build toward topics for peer interaction and understanding the world. Don't worry about getting dirty!
- Play with your child! Imaginative play is essential—dress up, be a character, etc. Play with toys and games. Learn to take turns and win/lose.
- Find out what the peers are talking about. Talk to your child about expressions and things they might hear from their peers. Show them what these things mean!
- Role play situations. Pick scenarios and act them out. Give your child a role. Play it out and talk about it.
- Listen to stories and talk about them. The stories should address behavior, problem solving, real/make believe, things that happen in the world, etc. If you read about something, bring items in or go out and find that setting or the objects in the story.
- Talk about what is going on in your household, your neighborhood (someone is building a new house), town, state, and country. This is not gossip, but how things work. When the snowplow goes by, what happens to the snow and how do people get out of their driveways?
- Model tone of voice, word use, body posture, etc. to show your child what other people see. Your child will need to touch you and have explanations.
- Model empathy and talk about how people feel when events occur. He's sad because he lost his favorite marble bag.
- Start good eating etiquette early...and don't drop it!
- Make certain your child with the vision impairment has the same chores expectations as your other children.
- Give your child the opportunity to make decisions. What should he/she wear to school? Which of two toys does he/she want to play with today?
- Make it fun and demonstrate facial expressions.
- Develop touch or auditory cues to help your child maintain posture or monitor his/her own personal space and behaviors.
- Make it an expectation that your child helps and is responsible for his/her own grooming.
- Make it an expectation that your child is responsible for his/her own belongings, assignments, and actions.
- Have a set time for homework. And a set time for relaxation after school. School is demanding and time off is needed.
- Teach your child how to pass on a message.
- Find out what activities are age-appropriate for your child. Help him/her learn to do these things alone or with friends.
- Role play and practice telling jokes with your child, so he/she will know when peers are positive and when they are not positive.
- Talk to your child about bullying (all types).
- Describe the friendship relationships you see around you for your child. This is important for your child to know when a peer is being too care-giving, ignoring, or really being friendly.
- Talk about strangers. Talk about what to do.
- Talk about puberty prior to puberty. Don't make it scary, but help your child understand and be ready for it. Talk about the changes to expect and what will happen.
- Help your child develop hobbies and interests for down times, vacations, etc. It is important for your child not to become bored and unmotivated.
- Plan events using a calendar. Plan for tomorrow, next week, in a month, in the summer, in a year from now. It is important for your child to get an idea of how to build toward a goal.
- Find a group of neighborhood children (and their parents) who will help you when you need to show your child how to do something. Children will listen to other children long before they will their parents!!

Sacks, S.Z., & Wolfe, K.E. (2000) *focused on teaching social skills to visually impaired elementary students*. New York: AFB Press.

Topic Preview

Future issues of this newsletter will address:

- Parenting
- Self-Determination & Advocacy
- Teaching Social Skills

Past Topics

- Introduction to BVI
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Living Skills
- Low Vision
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orientation & Mobility
- Recreation & Leisure
- Transition
- Braille
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Technology
- Sensory Skills
- Social Skills



Teaching High School Skills

High school students are forming their personality and are dealing with the ups and downs of friendships, conflict, challenges to their “style”, and balancing the demands of preparing to leave home. All teenagers have social anxiety! The pressure to succeed, have friends, pick a career, and become independent create demands on social skills and their development. Driving becomes a focus of many young people. Some strategies for this age:

- Help your young adult get 6-8 hours of sleep and maintain a good diet and exercise lifestyle...it will help contain the stress. Some young people with vision impairment have difficulty with sleep cycles.
- Know what the peer group is wearing, doing for recreation, where they hang out, etc. Talk about it with your young adult and help them get involved through a peer or other mentor. Try not to be too “present” when your son/daughter is trying to be a teen with friends!
- If your child has acne, get medical care for him/her.
- Make sure your son/daughter knows their Social Security Number and has a MN state ID. Picture identification cards from the state are as important as a driver license when getting a job, traveling, etc.
- Set up situations that will help your young adult problem solve when things don’t go as expected during the day. Get lost on the way to a movie so you are late...have your son/daughter decide what to do.
- Model and practice having conversations throughout your day. Also, how to maintain the conversation, how interrupt someone appropriately, and how to end the conversation. Stress what to do when in doubt about the attention of the other person.
- Encourage/Assist your young adult to get involved in group projects, clubs, activities, and volunteer work in the community.
- Work on phone, email, texting, Twitter etiquette.
- Drama and speech classes are good ways to assist the young person in learning to use movement, gestures, facial expression, nonverbal communication, etc. to express meaning.
- Continue to reinforce and give your young adult experiences with different public situations that involve dressing appropriately, eating in different settings (picnics, buffets, formal restaurants, etc.), being in large and small groups, and getting around the community—don’t just drive them, use other means of travel (bus, walk, etc.).
- Give your young adult an opportunity to manage money ranging from cash to plastic to paying bills with you. Show him/her your budget.
- Model your family’s acceptance of cultural, gender, or religious differences. Explain different positions. Discuss how to approach conversations about these topics with others.
- Once your young adult is 16, work with your State Services for the Blind Counselor on getting a part-time job for the summer.
- Have your son/daughter set goals and make a plan on how to reach that goal. It could be something as simple as cleaning their room! Have him/her make a personal To Do List.
- Most people lose their jobs due to social interaction issues rather than skill level. Take breaks together and do small talk, read the newspaper, have a snack. Practice break room skills.
- Keep up on the news: hard news, entertainment news, weather, sports, etc. Give your young adult something to become interested in and to talk about with their friends.
- Model for your son/daughter how to ask a friend for a ride and how to offer payment for the gas in appreciation.