

## Social Skill Building

Feeling awkward or uncomfortable in a new environment or group is very common. Difficulty in social situations varies and is determined by social skills either learned or not learned. We are not born with social skills – they are always learned within families, through parental and environmental modeling, as well as various life experiences. If not learned adequately, individuals typically experience some level of anxiety in social situations, but probably most people have room to improve or build their social skills.

There are various aspects of communication to be aware of and learn to deal effectively with to be at ease in social situations that involves the art of timing and a chain of skills. For example, skill is involved in comfortably initiating conversation, maintaining your part of the conversation with one (or more) individuals, or joining in a conversation.

Social skill level is determined by rehearsing and practicing in real-time social situations. We don't learn without the social experience! Skills can be powerful tools for developing and building or improving relationships.

Noticing social *cues* facilitates our interpretations of social situations so that we can communicate appropriate responses and apply specific skills. This involves practice and being open to therapeutic feedback about certain aspects of our interactions.

Cues can be misinterpreted if we make automatic negative assumptions or have anger in the way. So, self- and social awareness are increased in social skill building.

Social rejection is a *self-fulfilling prophecy* that can become a learned, even unconscious way of avoiding intimacy. For some, the lack of social skills may be easier to deal with than coping with the responsibilities of developing a more intimate relationship. Some of the signs of social inadequacy are: withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, depression, or negative behavior. Many individuals can be helped out of social inadequacy by joining with others therapeutically.

Social skill building can be done in individual and group therapy. Children, adolescents and adults can learn to develop social competencies.

An effective way to learn social skills is to identify ways in which the skills will be beneficial in your life. A realization occurs when making behavior choices to change an outcome and experience of feeling in control rather than out of control. Seeing how one's choices affect others also leads to improved ability to recognize cause and effect and being able to see oneself in context. Ultimately the experience of success begins to ground more confidence in dealing with conflict situations.

Sometimes anxiety or impulsivity, or not exercising self-control or thoughtfulness of others can be an obstacle to social skills. This involves respect for boundaries, accepting limits and problem solving skills. Recognizing and addressing these issues facilitates social skill competency.