

PALS

Social Skills Program Playing and learning to socialise

PROGRAM INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS



CONTENTS

Introduction

About the program

Session example

Testimonials

Kit contents

PALS Social Skills Program teaches children from 3 to 6 years of age about greeting others, listening, sharing, taking turns, dealing with feelings of fear, sadness and anger, and solving problems. Learning social skills like these in early childhood is just as important as learning numeracy and literacy, and of the utmost importance for children's future development.

PALS Social Skills Program is an Australian research-based educational resource, developed by clinical psychologists and early childhood teachers, for use in day care centres, preschools and kindergarten classrooms.



Introduction

THE NEED FOR SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

The number of children enrolled in formal early childhood care is increasing and while the importance of teaching cognitive skills, sensory motor skills and pre-literacy skills before school is recognised, there are few programs which systematically teach social skills to young children. Yet research indicates that social skills are of the utmost importance for a child's future development. The early childhood and early school years are when children start to learn to cooperate, take turns and solve social problems. Children need to learn to wait their turn, share, resolve conflicts, manage anger, stand up for themselves appropriately and be socially confident. If they do not learn these basic skills in the early years it can affect their development. Like all skills, some children develop social skills more easily than others. Children who are socially withdrawn need extra teaching to learn to interact socially with others, ask for help, assert themselves and manage stress and anxiety. Other children who are aggressive or impulsive need to master waiting their turn, sharing with others, resolving conflicts, empathising with others, managing their angry feelings and being assertive rather than aggressive. Children with Asperger's syndrome or autism need help with basic social skills, such as making eye contact, as well as learning to recognise emotions and develop empathy. PALS Social Skills Program teaches these skills in a fun and practical way.

Children who behave aggressively tend to be rejected by their peers, while those who appear withdrawn may be ignored or left out of activities. This can lead to a vicious cycle in which such children do not interact as much as other children and therefore have fewer opportunities to learn, practice and develop their social skills. They can fall behind socially and the gap between them and other children may increase. The early childhood



and early school years are an important period for social development. Evidence suggests that the quality of children's peer interactions in preschool predicts their school adjustment in primary school and their peer status among new classmates (Ladd, 1981). Furthermore, interventions with preschoolers have been successful in teaching preschool children improved pro-social skills (Mize & Ladd, 1990); in reducing negative behaviours (Gresham & Nagle, 1980); and in increasing social interaction in children who are withdrawn (Evers & Schwartz, 1973). Furthermore, in support of early intervention in the preschool years, Schneider and Byrne (1985) in a meta-analysis of social skills training studies, found that social skills interventions were more effective for preschoolers than for primary school children.

References

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About the program

ABOUT PALS SOCIAL SKILLS PROGRAM

PALS Social Skills Program has been designed by clinical psychologists and early childhood teachers for children from three to six years of age, for use in day care centres, preschools and kindergarten classrooms and other early childhood centres.

Although it can be adapted for the whole class, the format is more suitable for small groups of six to eight children. The children are taught constructive ways to solve problems that arise in social situations. This is done through stories acted out by puppets, video scenarios, probe questions, role-play activities and songs.

Research into social skills training with young children indicates that children learn best through modelling and practice (Evers & Schwartz, 1973). In PALS Social Skills Program, the skills and problem-solving steps are modelled by the puppets and in the video segments at an appropriate developmental level. The children then practice the skills through activities and role-play, and continue to do so during suggested classroom activities. The major shortcoming of some social skills programs is that the skills do not generalise to other situations.

PALS Social Skills Program consists of ten sessions, each focusing on a particular skill. One skill builds on another so that the program gradually progresses to the more complex skills required for competent social interaction.

The skills taught are:

1. Greeting others
2. Taking turns: talking and listening
3. Taking turns at play
4. Sharing
5. Asking for help
6. Identifying feelings
7. Empathy
8. Overcoming fear and anxiety
9. Managing frustration
10. Calming down and speaking up



SESSION STRUCTURE

Each session lasts for 20 to 30 minutes. Puppets act out a story which poses a social problem related to the theme for that session. Children are asked questions designed to help them learn to solve problems related to social situations. The puppets then act out an appropriate solution to the problem. For five of the ten sessions the skill is reinforced by showing a video in which children solve a similar social problem. The video provides an important age-appropriate model for teaching the children problem-solving skills. There are also songs to accompany these sessions. All the sessions conclude with directed activities whereby children are encouraged to problem-solve and act out their solutions. The following week the skills are reviewed and reinforced before a new skill is taught. Each skill builds on the previous skills.

PALS Social Skills Program emphasises the importance of involving all staff in contact with the children in order to promote the generalisation of skills. The suggestions for supporting skills in the classroom are considered an essential part of the program. For each session suggestions are given to teachers on how to support and reinforce the skills the children have learned in the group setting.

Equally important is encouraging parents to support the skills at home. The Parent Information sheets have been written so that parents can practice the skills at home with their children. An important part of the program is for staff to have contact with the parents and to provide feedback about the children's social skills in the peer setting, and on their progress in the group.

Session example

SESSION 9

Managing frustration



ABOUT THIS SKILL

Young children face frustrating situations constantly in their day-to-day lives. They are often frustrated because:

- they are unable to complete tasks successfully, as they haven't yet mastered the necessary skills, such as tying shoelaces;
- they're not allowed to do certain things and can't understand why;
- they have trouble sharing and waiting to take turn;
- things do not turn out as planned — paintings don't look right, equipment isn't available, puzzles are difficult, for example.

Children need to learn how to tolerate and manage frustration in order to persevere with more challenging and difficult tasks. This is an essential skill for learning and development.

SESSION AIMS

During the session

- To discuss the feeling of frustration.
- To discuss various frustrating situations.
- To introduce strategies for managing feelings of frustration:
 1. taking three breaths
 2. trying again
 3. asking for help

After the session

- To encourage children to manage feelings of frustration.
- To help children manage frustration in a variety of situations.
- To encourage children to independently solve problems that cause frustration.

See next page for session contents.

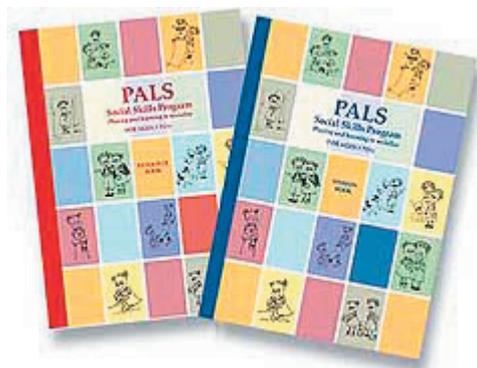
Session example

Each session contains:

Resources
required
and a
session
outline



Audiovisual
components
and
activities



A story and
discussion
questions



Suggestions
for
supporting
skills,
activities
and
resources



RESOURCES REQUIRED

Kit resources
Puppets: Jack and Kate
PALS poster
Audio CD Track 1: 'The Hello Song', Track 5: 'Angry Feelings Song' and/or Track 6: 'Angry Feelings Song and Breathing Exercise'
Parent Information sheets and Staff Information sheet for Session 9

Additional resources needed
Group Rules poster
Listening Rules poster
Special toys, not usually used (hidden close to the group)
Small backpack with toy car in side pocket
CD player

SESSION OUTLINE

- Greeting.** Greet each child individually and praise greeting skills, including specific components, that is eye contact, smiling and saying 'hello'. Play 'The Hello Song' on the audio CD to begin the session.
- Rule review.** Review group rules and listening rules, using the posters from Sessions 1 and 2, and praise good listening skills.
- Review of previous session.** Use the puppets to illustrate if desired.
Last week Anna was scared of speaking in front of the other children at news time. Anna did two things to feel better.
 - How many deep breaths did Anna take?
 - What did Anna say to herself?
- Story.** Present the story and, after each part, lead a discussion using the questions provided.
- Audiovisual.** Sing 'Angry Feelings Song and Breathing Exercise' with the group.
- Activity.**
- Farewell.** Children can say 'goodbye' to the presenter and/or the puppets. Direct children to the next activity.

STORY Part 1

Put Jack puppet on hand.

JACK: (greeting group) We've got news this morning and I brought in my new car. I'll just go and get it out of my backpack. It's my favourite toy.

Jack searches for his car then starts to become annoyed.

OHHHH! It's not fair, I can't find it!

Discussion of story

1. How do you think Jack is feeling? (Prompt cranky, annoyed, mad or any words the children might use.)
2. Why is he feeling annoyed?

STORY Part 2

Put Jack and Kate puppets on hands.

KATE: What's the problem Jack?

JACK: I can't find my new car. It's making me feel mad.

KATE: Oh dear, have you looked in your backpack?

JACK: (angrily) Yes, I've looked there, but it's not anywhere.

KATE: It sounds like you're getting upset. Just calm down for a minute.

JACK: But how? How do I do that?

AUDIOVISUAL

There are two versions of the 'Angry Feelings Song' on the audio CD. The second one includes a breathing exercise. Play the audio CD of the 'Angry Feelings Song' and/or the 'Angry Feelings Song and Breathing Exercise'.

Angry Feelings Song and Breathing Exercise

If you're angry with a frown, Then try these things to calm you down. Stop right there and stand real still. This will help, it really will.	(Put hands on hips, frown on face.) (Continue previous action.) (Stand statue still.)
Take three breaths: one, two, three, And let your shoulders go flop-py. Now let's try what we have learned. Our calm feelings have now returned.	(Hold up three fingers.) (Exaggerate floppy shoulders.)
Stand really still. Take three slow, deep breaths. Floppy shoulders. That's better.	(Stand still, but relaxed.) (Take three exaggerated breaths.) (Exaggerate floppy shoulders.) (Repeat breathing exercise.)

ACTIVITY

1. Hide several special toys close by. Tell children you have brought in special toys that they can play with, 'Let's play with our special toys now'. Go and look for the toys and pretend that you can't find them. Tell children you're getting annoyed because you can't find the toys. Ask all the children to:
 - stop;
 - take a few slow, deep breaths and let their shoulders go floppy;
 - say 'we can find the toys' or 'we can keep trying';
 - then try again, looking in different places.
 When they are found, everyone feels happy.
2. Praise the children for trying again.
3. Allow time for the children to play with the special toys. Praise children for sharing, taking turns, waiting for a turn and asking for help during the play session.

SUPPORTING SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM

SKILL FOR THE WEEK: Managing frustration

- More verbally skilled children may be able to understand the concept of frustration. If so, gradually introduce the word into their vocabulary where appropriate.
- Be alert for signs of frustration and help children label how they may be feeling. For example: 'The way you're trying to push that puzzle piece in makes me wonder if you're feeling annoyed or frustrated.'
- Help children try to find ways to manage feelings of frustration, including trying again. For example: 'Yes, it is annoying when you have trouble doing up your buttons. What do you think might help?' 'I can see that you're having trouble with this puzzle. Would it help if you tried another piece in that spot?'
- Praise children for trying again. For example: 'That tower you built looks great. It was good that you built it again after the first one fell over.'
- Give children time to solve their own problems and to generate their own solutions. Frustration can often result from feeling pressured so it's important to allow time and space for problem-solving, rather than trying for instant solutions.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Activities

- Show pictures of faces with sad, happy, angry, annoyed or frustrated expressions. Ask the children to complete the following sentences:
 - 'One thing that makes me happy is...'
 - 'One thing that makes me sad is...'
 - 'One thing that makes me mad and annoyed is...'
- Ask children to close their eyes and visualise something upsetting them. Then ask them to take three slow, deep breaths to calm down.
- Make up a story about a child who gets upset because Mum or Dad said they would play together and then Mum's or Dad's friend arrived and they talked instead. Ask the children:
 - What could you do? (Take three slow, deep breaths.)
 - What could you say to yourself? (I'll play with Mum or Dad later.)
 - What could you do? (Do something else.)

Testimonials

PALS Social Skills Program is a carefully evaluated program, not making excessive demands on parents, and very enjoyable for the children and the teachers involved. The tunes and lyrics are catchy and remembered without effort. The puppets are intriguing and children are readily involved in the role-plays. Skills that are fundamental to successful relationships at work and play are learned with pleasure. We have been waiting for an acceptable, evidence-based, social skills program for young children for a long time. I have observed the application of PALS Social Skills Program and can thoroughly recommend it.

Prof. Bryanne Barnett
Professor of Perinatal and Infant Psychiatry
The University of New South Wales

The wonderful concept of the PALS Social Skills Program not only benefited the children who were directly in the group but the staff were able to adapt it for other children attending the centre. Because the sessions focused on ten key learning areas that taught the children ways of developing social skills, they were able to put into immediate practice what they had learnt. All the staff highly recommend and support this program.

Debbie Barden
Director
Theaslea Preschool

I believe the PALS Social Skills Program was a fantastic course for the children as it helped prepare them for school and it also reinforced several subjects taught at home, such as sharing, taking turns and waiting for your turn. Nathan really seemed to enjoy it, he came home each week and we went through what he had learnt that day. I would definitely recommend this particular course to all parents, carers and preschools.

Melinda T.
Parent

My daughter Rochelle was involved in the PALS Program. Rochelle was a well behaved but quiet and sometimes clingy, shy child. She knew answers to questions when asked but lacked the confidence to answer. Following the PALS Social Skills Program, Rochelle's confidence increased dramatically. Two years after leaving preschool, Rochelle received a special award and shield at primary school for 'Outstanding Attitude and Effort in the Junior School'. I firmly believe that this program helped Rochelle, especially imparting her with skills required for her transition to primary school.

Lesley M.
Parent

PALS

Social Skills Program

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Kit contents

- KIT CASE** Cardboard case with carry handle
340 mm x 340 mm x 130 mm
- RESOURCE BOOK** A4, 72 pages, colour cover, b/w text
- PART 1: PROGRAM INFORMATION**
Introduction
How to run the program
- PART 2: PROGRAM RESOURCES**
Behaviour Screening Form
Parent Introduction sheet and Consent Form
Parent Information sheets for Sessions 1 to 10
Staff Information sheets for Sessions 1 to 10
PALS Social Skills Program certificate
Emotion photographs set
Song lyrics and actions
Audio CD with seven tracks, 15 minutes duration
- SESSION BOOK** A4, 76 pages, colour cover, b/w text
- How to run the sessions
Ten session outlines
Appendix
- PALS POSTER** A3 colour poster of Snow Gum Preschool
- PALS VIDEO** Five episodes, 17 minutes duration
- PUPPETS** Kangaroo, koala and kookaburra puppets with mouth movement, each approximately 30 cm high

