

# PALS

## Social Skills Program

Playing and learning to socialise

### PROGRAM INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



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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 Children who are socially withdrawn need extra teaching to learn to interact socially with others, ask for help, assert themselves and manage stress and anxiety.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Children who behave aggressively tend to be rejected by their peers, while those who appear withdrawn may be ignored or left out of activities.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.

##### Outline of session

Each session includes a greeting, review of the previous week's skill, a story with puppets, discussion, audiovisual activities, songs, play activities, and a farewell.

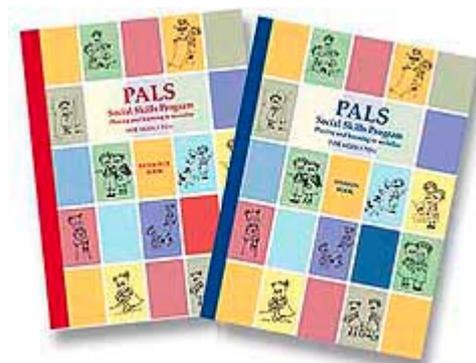
## Parent Information sheets

Each week you will receive Parent Information sheets that contain:

Explanations of the skill and what your child learnt during the session



Suggestions on how to support each skill at home



**PALS**  
Social Skills Program  
Playing and learning to socialise

SESSION 9

PARENT INFORMATION

### THIS WEEK'S SKILL

## Managing frustration

Young children face frustrating situations constantly in their daily lives. They may feel frustrated because:

- they are unable to complete tasks successfully, as they have not mastered the necessary skills, such as doing up buttons, using scissors, kicking a ball, riding a bike;
- they're not allowed to do things and can't understand why;
- they have trouble sharing and waiting to take turns;
- things do not turn out as planned — paintings don't look right, equipment isn't available, puzzles are difficult, plans are changed, for example.



Some children do not handle feelings of frustration well and lack the skills needed to calm themselves down.

Other children have a very strong sense of justice and become frustrated when they think things are unfair.

Frustration is often hard to avoid and can lead to a lot of conflict, anger and tears. Children need help to learn the skill of handling frustration through watching the way adults and other children manage it, and through practice.

### WHAT YOUR CHILD LEARNT THIS WEEK

The words 'mad', 'annoyed', 'angry' or even 'cross' and 'cranky' may be used by your child to refer to feelings of frustration. The situations discussed in this session related specifically to managing frustration. Four steps for dealing with frustrating situations were introduced:

1. Stop.
2. Take three deep breaths to blow your angry feelings away.
3. Say or think 'I can do it' or another appropriate positive statement, such as 'Keep trying' or 'I'm angry but I'll calm down'.
4. Try again (if appropriate).

Managing frustration enables children to keep trying, to complete tasks and to learn new skills.



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SESSION 9

SUPPORTING THIS SKILL AT HOME

In addition to helping children learn how to manage feelings of frustration, it is also essential to look at ways of preventing unnecessary frustration.

- Set up your child's environment carefully — provide safe play areas so that you don't have to continually say 'no', 'be careful' or 'don't touch that'.
- Avoid making promises that you may not be able to keep, for example going to the park may not be possible in the rain.
- Give children warning of what's coming up next so there are no surprises. 'Daniel, when this show finishes it will be time for bed.'
- Be alert for signs of frustration and help your child label how he or she may be feeling (see also the Parent Information for Session 6). 'The way you're trying to force that puzzle piece in makes me think you're annoyed.'

- Praise children for trying again. 'That tower you built looks great. It was good that you tried again after the first one fell over.'
- Give your child time and support to solve his or her own problems and to come up with his or her own solutions.
- Do not give children things that are too difficult for their age group — avoid giving small Lego to a three-year-old, for example.
- Coach children to learn to do new things — for puzzles, start with corner pieces or pieces of the same colour and for painting, start from the top of the page.
- Model for your child the four steps for dealing with frustration (see previous page). If you think your child is starting to get upset tell him or her to stop, take three slow, deep breaths and say something calming. Remember you must be quick, before your child get too upset to practice the skills.

Going to the park may not be possible in the rain.

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## Testimonials

*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

*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

*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

*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

# 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

