

HLP 9: Teach Social Skills



High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities

Many students with disabilities, especially those with emotional/behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and other low-incidence disabilities have intrusive deficits in social skills that impact their ability to successfully participate fully in the school setting or in the community alongside their peers. The effective special educator stands ready to identify which important skills are lacking, and to develop a plan for explicitly teaching social skills to mastery. Social behaviors cross domains of interpersonal skills like communication with peers and adults, self-management, following classroom expectations, and more. Teachers who set up classrooms to be consistent, organized, and respectful (HLP 7), and use a range of data sources (HLP 4) while in collaboration with colleagues (HLP 1) and families (HLP 3) are in a strong position to implement this important HLP. However, it takes HLP 16 (Use explicit instruction) and HLP 8/22 (Provide high quality feedback) to provide students with effective instruction on how to use the new social behaviors and notes on the extent to which they are meeting expectations.

This resource is intended to support school leaders looking to embed the HLPs in professional development, implementation, teacher observation and feedback efforts at their school site.

The major source for content within this resource is the chapter by Sara McDaniel, Imad Zaheer, and Terrance M. Scott in *High-Leverage Practices in the Inclusive Classroom*; the book *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: The Final Report of the HLP Writing Team*, and content on www.highleveragepractices.org.

Teachers Who Effectively Teach Social Skills

- Systematically and proactively identify students with social skills deficits through a variety of data sources (e.g., systematic screeners, schoolwide office disciplinary referrals, classroom data, family input).
- Collect and use data from multiple sources to determine the specific type of social skills deficit (e.g., problem solving, communication, conflict management).
- Develop social skills groups based upon commonalities in students' social skills deficits to provide targeted instruction in those specific skills.
- Break complex skills (e.g., resolving peer conflict) into smaller, sequenced teachable steps (e.g., check for understanding, offer your opinion, identify areas for compromise, and check for agreement) that facilitate high rates of success at each step.
- Consider the locations and circumstances in which specific social skills may be required and construct examples, non-examples, and role-playing scenarios that will support students' generalization of skills.
- Take students' culture, age, and a range of natural environments into consideration when constructing effective examples..

Example: If teaching greeting behaviors, examples may include formal contexts (e.g., business-related handshakes), informal contexts (e.g., verbal greeting for a casual acquaintance), and close friends (e.g., fist bumps).

- Organize and purposefully sequence examples, prioritizing instruction around the context where the social skill deficit is most likely to result in negative outcomes.
- Use effective practices when teaching social skills, developing engaging and well-paced lessons that mirror the core components of academic lesson plans (e.g., teach, model, practice).
- Include tasks for all students when teaching social skills to groups of students to maintain engagement throughout the lesson.
- Promote students' mastery of social skills through use of positive and corrective feedback that is immediate, consistent, and specific.
- Provide scaffolded supports that are gradually faded to increase students' independent use of social skills.
- Promote generalization of the newly acquired skill after multiple successful trials with natural practice in a single setting by providing opportunities to practice the same skill in other authentic contexts..
- Constantly monitor students' progress with social skills instruction, analyzing responsiveness and adjusting instruction as needed.

Tips for School Leaders to Support Teachers

- Provide instruction, professional development opportunities, and/or coaching to support special educators' knowledge and implementation of effective instructional practices for teaching social skills.
- Teach educators how to use a variety of data sources to identify students who may need social skills instruction.
- Help faculty teams group students requiring social skills instruction around common needs and provide additional supports (e.g., lesson development, curriculum materials) as needed.
- Provide instruction in progress monitoring/data collection and meet regularly with teachers/teams to evaluate and discuss student progress and/or needs of staff.
- If a common set of school-wide expectations are in place, help teachers link lessons to those expectations and use consistent language.

Questions to Prompt Discussion, Self-Reflection, and Observer Feedback

- Why is it important to explicitly teach social skills to students?
- How can teachers support students' generalization of skills across a variety of settings?
- What methods should teachers use to identify areas of need with respect to social functioning?
- What other considerations might be necessary for supporting students' attainment of specific social skills?
- How might student engagement be a challenge during group social skills instruction, and what can you do to prevent disengagement?
- Why is it important to consider students' cultural backgrounds when identifying, planning for, and providing social skills instruction?

● References & Additional Resources

Online Resources

[High-Leverage Practices: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)

A downloadable online guide providing school leaders, including administrators, principals, mentors and coaches, with practical tools for engaging staff members in learning about how high-leverage practices can enhance student learning in the school and district.

Journal Articles

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- Kern, L., & Wehby, J. H. (2014). Using data to intensify behavioral interventions for individual students. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 46(4), 45–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059914522970>
- Marchant, M., & Womack, S. (2010). Book in a bag: Blending social skills and academics. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 42(4), 6–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991004200401>
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- Ogilvie, C. R. (2011). Step by step: Social skills instruction for students with autism spectrum disorder using video models and peer mentors. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 43(6), 20–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991104300602>
- Parsons, L. D. (2006). Using video to teach social skills to secondary students with autism. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 39(2), 32–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990603900206>
- Walker, J. D., & Barry, C. (2018). Assessing and supporting social-skill needs for students with high-incidence disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 51(1), 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059918790219>