

Incidental Teaching Opportunities During Social Skills Activities

- Start every new activity with explicit instruction about the rules. Use a visual (a poster, or write the rules on the board). For games they have played before, review the rules each time before you start.
- Use clear, brief language when giving directions or explaining things. Don't give more than 1-2 directions at a time. Don't lecture on why or why not to do things. Focus on skills, prompting, and reinforcement of demonstrated skills.
- Use small groups for as much as possible, even things like the ball-tossing activity. This gives each student more opportunities to respond=more learning. It also makes it easier for staff to keep the students engaged and prevent problem behavior. Small group activities can be kept shorter and if there is more than one activity available, the session can be split up (e.g., ball toss for 15 minutes, or board game for 15 minutes, then switch)
- Have the students figure out how to group themselves. Give them an idea like, people with red or blue clothes on go to this group, everyone else go to that group. Have them come up with ideas and try to encourage team-work.
- Have students invite each other to join activities. Have a group "leader" on some days who gets to choose the activity then recruit people to do the activity with him/her. He/she will have to approach each desired peer, initiate the question/invitation, wait for an appropriate response, and accept the answer (even if it is No). Prompt as needed through this sequence.
- If someone is opting out, have a peer invite him/her specifically to join.
- If students are opting-out/refusing quietly (not problem behavior) and have not joined at a peer's request, have 1 staff member only talk them through the problem. For example:
 - Ask, "What's going on?"
 - Ask, "Who do you want to play with?"
 - Ask, "What do you want to play?"
 - Ask, "Can you think of a way to solve this problem?"
 - And support them in solving it if possible
- Consider having a "get out of social skills activity free" card that can be given to students as a reward for other appropriate behavior/work completion (to students who tend to avoid social skills activities, that is). This can also be purchased in the store. Limit use of this to one activity per week (not the whole period, just one of the activities). If they opt-out, they can only sit at their desks and draw or read a book. Provide no attention or other reinforcement on opt-outs.
- Have students volunteer to facilitate games that need facilitating (Bingo, some card games, etc.). Staff only offer support if needed. The ultimate goal is that the students can play a whole game independently without staff intervening.
- If staff are facilitating/supporting/engaging with a game, intentionally make errors. For example, pass the dice to the wrong person. Give someone 2 cards instead of one. Forget someone's turn. Walk away without saying anything. Go the wrong way on the game board. The purpose is to ensure the students are attending to the game and are able to express a problem positively and calmly. Play "dumb" and prompt them through explaining what is wrong. Then ask them for the solution.
- It's fine to repeat activities and have default "we finished the other thing early" activities. If repeating activities, focus on students' accurate participation (e.g., not skipping steps, and doing the activity correctly and independently). Up the ante on things they know how to do, such as fading yourself out and letting the students try to manage issues themselves (only in small groups of no more than 3).
- Look at the students' goals for more information on what type of expectations to place on the individual students.