

# Autism: Including Children with Social, Communication, and Behavioral Needs



*"Children and Challenging Behavior  
Making Inclusion Work,"*

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## **Suggestions for parents and early childhood practitioners to encourage social-skill development in young children include the following:**

1. Maintain a daily routine and structure. Arrange a play space with materials that are visibly accessible and highly organized. (Using labels or outlines helps with cleanup of materials.)
2. Provide visual cues (e.g., gestures, pictures, and signs) along with simple spoken language to help the child understand your meaning.
3. Teach appropriate play with toys through the use of imitation (e.g., “Do like me,” or “Do this”) and model play with the toy such as cars going down a ramp rather than being lined up or pounding the balls into the tunnel holes rather than shaking a hammer and staring at the movement.
4. Reinforce appropriate, positive social interactions such as eye contact, responding to their name, sharing with a peer and initiating a play scenario with verbal praise, combined with either an edible or non-edible item the child prefers. Gradually decrease the use of the additional edible or non-edible item so that the child learns to respond appropriately to the reinforcement that occurs naturally within the social interaction.
5. Set up occasional, structured play situations where peers with typical development are pre-taught the play activity and encouraged to include the child with Autism in the play activity (e.g., peers with typical development are taught phrases to use to include the child with Autism in a turn-taking game such as rolling the ball back and forth, or playing a table game such as Jenga).
6. Use pictures and a simple story to show the sequence of specific skills needed for success in a particular situation. Children rely on their skill of rote memory and can recall the sequence of the story in needed situations. (e.g., “Many times children like to play with the same toy. When someone else has a toy I want, I need to use words or my picture card to ask for a turn. I can say thank you to the other person for sharing. I can share the toy with someone else. Taking turns and sharing makes people feel happy.”)