
Advice Sheet 35

TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

Step 1: Describe the skill to be learned and the importance of learning this skill

An example might be how to get the pupil to greet others appropriately. Specifically, we want to get the pupils to learn how to say 'good morning' to his teacher and other pupils in the classroom each morning and then to use this skill. The use of the skill may be illustrated by pointing it out in a video, picture, book, cartoon, a simulation using puppets, or by reference to the behaviour of peers: *"look how James says good morning to all his classmates each day"*.

Step 2: Model the skill

Clearly demonstrate the sequence of steps involved in the skill (e.g. walk towards someone, look at their eyes, smile and say "good morning" followed by their name, using a polite tone of voice). This modelling may be conducted by the teacher or by selected pupils. To increase the probability of success, the person modelling the skill should be highly regarded by the learner and of the same age / gender. In addition, the model must appear to receive reinforcement for engaging in the social skill (Goldstein, 1981). Give many examples of the skill to be learned.

Step 3: Role-play and feedback

The pupil tries out the skill in a structured situation (e.g. with a teacher and another pupil). Construct practice opportunities in which the pupil receives descriptive feedback from the teacher (e.g. "well done Sheila for greeting your classmates and saying good morning to me. You're showing very friendly behaviour."). A video recording or photographs of these situations may be useful in providing feedback.

Step 4: Pupil practises the skill

Provide opportunities for the skill to be used, first in pair work and then in small group work. Reward appropriate use of the skill.

Step 5: Maintenance and generalisation of skill

Use visual or verbal prompts to encourage the pupil to use the skill in the classroom (e.g. at the start of the day), on the playground (e.g. to other pupils / staff members) and at home (to family members / visitors). Collaboration between home and school is vital. Observe the pupil in different settings for applying the skill without a prompt. Provide descriptive praise and reward. The pupil may also self-monitor their use of the skill. Over time, intermittent reinforcement can be used until eventually the appropriate behaviour will be maintained by natural positive consequences i.e. a more satisfying initial interaction with adults and peers.

The Special Education Support Service wishes to thank *Anita Prunty, Special Education Department, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin*, for permission to include this document in the Schools' Resource Bank.