



# Speech and Language Therapy Services

## Social Interaction



Some children have difficulty understanding the rules of social behaviour. These are described as social interaction difficulties. Social interaction skills include:

- *Conversational (Pragmatic) skills*
  - understanding and using social language such as greetings and idioms (figurative language)
  - joining in with a conversation, topic maintenance and verbal turn-taking
  - active listening and being aware of personal space
- *Play skills*
  - initiating play
  - co-operative play and reciprocal play
  - turn-taking
  - sharing
  - compromising
  - coping with 'no' and/or losing
  - conflict resolution/problem solving
  - ending play
- *Understanding emotions*
  - understanding and using facial expressions,
  - understanding and using appropriate body language,
  - understanding and using appropriate voice - intonation, pitch, speed.
  - understanding and using emotional vocabulary
  - managing a range of emotions in a socially acceptable way
  - having self-regulation skills



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- *Friendship skills*
  - knowing what a friend is
  - choosing appropriate friends
  - recognising 'true' friends from false friends
  - sharing a friend
  - dealing with peer pressure
  
- *Handling conflict*
  - managing associated emotions
  - asking for help
  - walking away from a stressful situation
  - being assertive and not aggressive





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## General Strategies: Helping a Child with Social Interaction Difficulties

- Ensure that you gain the child's attention before speaking and/or providing an instruction by saying their name.
- Encourage the child to give some eye contact, but if they find this hard then do not persist.
- Encourage an acceptable amount personal space between you and the child. For a non-family member, this is usually one arms-length away.
- Keep language simple – break into manageable chunks; be precise and specific.
- Use visual strategies wherever possible.
- Always give sequential instructions in the order you wish for the tasks to be carried out. Remember to use language such as 'first and then' or 'now and next.' For example, rather than saying, '*before you pick up a tennis ball run around the pitch one time*' say: '*first run around the pitch one time and then pick up a tennis ball*'
- For tasks that must be completed, do not provide a choice by using polite questions e.g. 'Would you like to..?' Instead, tell the child what you want them to do e.g. 'I want you to....'.
- Use direct literal language, avoiding idioms and sarcasm.
- Use the child's interests and experiences to help them understand - relate the curriculum to real life situations.
- Make clear associations between new and old information.
- Model appropriate conversational rules, responses etc. For example, asking for help, requesting clarification, greeting peers etc. Be honest with the child when you do not understand their conversation. Implement the use of social stories to aid the child's understanding of social rules/expectations.
- Provide a suitable environment – calm, predictable and safe. Watch out for anxiety in crowds e.g. lesson changing time, lunchtime etc.
- Give clear structure and set routines and ensure there is a policy for crisis situations.
- Ensure that there are clearly defined breaks in lessons.
- Ensure a clear system for rewards/motivation is developed and used consistently.
- Develop good links between school and home to try to anticipate difficulties and manage problems promptly.



## Games/Ideas to Develop Social Interaction Skills

### Problem Solving

How do you know it is a problem?

Show the child photographs/picture and/or carry out role play.

Ask:

- What can you see? *[e.g. broken glass, crying, fists clenched]*
- What can you hear? *[e.g. alarm, humming, soft voice]*
- What can you feel? *[e.g. headache, butterflies in tummy]*
- What can you remember? *[e.g. other times like this]*
- What will happen next? *[i.e. cause/effect]*
- What do you need to do about it?
- How will you do it?

This works particularly well when reflecting on past situations.

Rather than acting impulsively,  
encourage the child to:

- Stop
- Think
- Find a Solution!



Think out loud. Understand that the child needs to learn how to solve problems. Demonstrate how to solve problems at every opportunity. Create opportunities to make mistakes and problem solve. They may need you to show them, demonstrate and talk through the process.

Use comics, TV programs and stories to identify problems, cause and effect, consequences, emotions, and the solutions.

Read the beginning of a story, identify the problem, close the book and think out loud about the possible solutions.

Identify the clues (see, hear, feel & remember) around them in their environment.

**See:** flashing lights, facial expressions, body stance and distance

**Hear:** angry voices, bells, telephones, people talking or silence

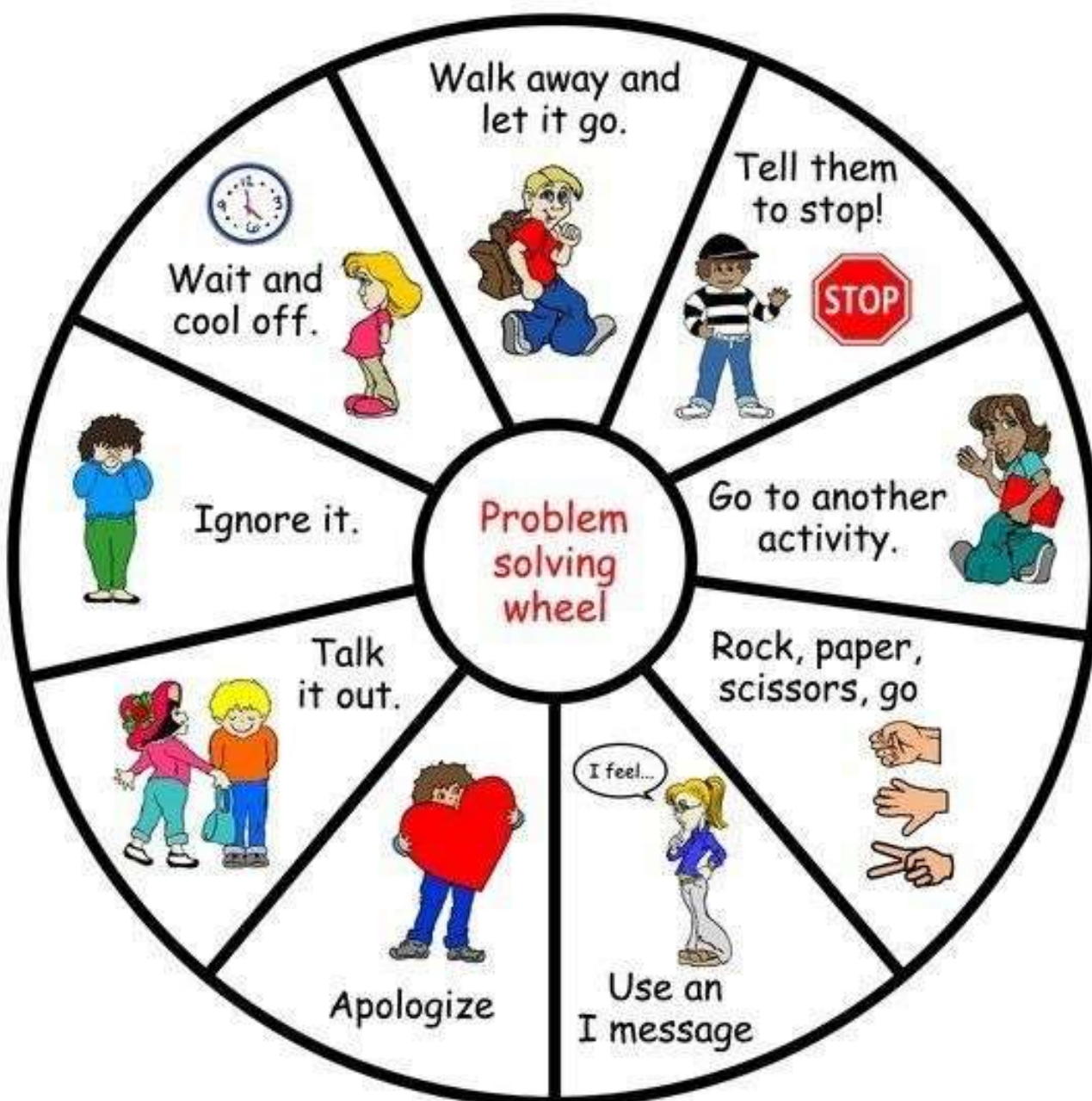
**Feel:** tight jaw, loose muscles, nausea, headaches

**Remember:** remind the child of other events like this one. Use concrete examples/visuals to assist learning. Practise by asking the child to draw the problem, use arrows to link the problem to the solutions (use only key words or pictures)

Avoid problems: practise using the strategies of see, hear, feel and remember to tell you a problem may happen. Show and tell the child in day to day living situations e.g. running out of milk, doing homework



# What can I do?





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*All of the following games within the Social Interaction Section are designed to be played within small and/or whole class groups. They have been split into three areas: Looking, Listening and Taking Turns.*

## Looking

**Magic fairy:** The magic fairy stands behind a chair and when the group member makes eye contact with someone in the group that child can sit in the seat until another child makes eye contact.

**Who's got the Ted?** The group members close their eyes and the leader hides the toy under someone's chair. The group is instructed to open their eyes and look to see who has got the Ted and then put their hand up to tell the adult who has got the Ted. The child can then be the leader to hide the Ted.

**Differences.** The leader chooses a child to change something about their appearance. The group looks at the child before the child leaves the room. The first child to notice the changes becomes the leader and chooses another child to have a go at changing something e.g. different jumper, holding a toy, taking off a shoe, wearing glasses, wearing a scarf.

### **Rolling a ball/throwing a bean bag:**

the group members take it in turns to roll the ball to each other. They say the name of the child and then roll the ball to that child.

**Copy the action.** A child is chosen as the leader and the rest of the group must copy their actions and they may change the action at any time.

**Miming actions.** Use the verb Colour Cards and the child must mime an action and the rest of the group must guess and the one who answers correctly can then be the leader.

**Kim's game:** Put a small number of objects on a tray. Allow the children to look at the objects for a few minutes and then tell the group that one object will be taken away. Cover the tray with a towel and then remove one of the objects and ask the group to tell you which one was removed. If they struggle reduce the number of objects and use cueing questions e.g. it's something you play with, it's round, it bounces, its name begins with a 'b' sound.

**Lotto board:** Each child is given a lotto board (nouns/verbs/prepositions), the cards are placed face down and each child take turns at turning the cards over. The child names what is on the pictures and if it is on their board they can keep the card. The other children in the group must listen and put their hand up if it is on their board. The child must look at the other child to win the card to put on their board.





## Listening

**Matching sound to picture/object** Play a recorded sound (animal, human, home, transport, instruments etc.) and the children must identify what is making the noise and choose a picture/object.

**All change:** Give instructions such as change places if you have;

- brown hair
- called Jack
- 4 years old
- if you are holding a plate.

**Round games:**

- I went to the supermarket and bought ..
- I went to a farm and saw ..
- I went to the beach and I felt ..

**What did you hear?:** Lay out a selection of 3 instruments and the child is instructed to close their eyes or put a barrier up and then the adult plays one of the instruments. Then they remove the barrier and ask the child to choose the instrument they heard.

**Barrier games:**

- Guess Who
- Battleships
- Any homemade – be inventive!

**Copying the beat:** The leader plays a beat using a drum/shaker/bells and the child copies the beat.



**Locating the sound:** Keys Game Children should sit in a circle. One child sits in the middle blindfolded with keys on the floor next to them. One of the other children is chosen to go and take the keys. When the blindfolded child hears them moving they must point in their direction. If they point in the right direction then the blindfolded child can remove blindfold and go and sit in the circle with the others.

**Shopping game:** Lay 10 objects out on a table and talk about the items that are for sale in the shop. Give the child a shopping bag and send them to buy something. If this is too easy ask them to go and buy 2 or 3 items.

**Stepping stones:** Each group member has 4/6 stepping stones to climb over to get to the treasure (brick/star/object) They can only move forward if the adult says their name. If they move forward without their name being called they return to the start.

**Duck-duck-goose:** The children sit in a circle and one child is chosen to be the leader. The child walks round the outside of the group and taps each child's head saying duck but as soon as the child says goose the child must chase the leader and try and catch them before they return to their place.



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## Taking Turns

**Feely bag:** Play music, and ask the children to pass the bag around the group. When the music stops they can take something out of the bag.

**Skittles:** Set out some skittles in the traditional pattern. Place an action or object picture under the skittles. Each member of the group has a turn rolling the ball and naming the picture under the skittles that have fallen.

**The baby wants to sleep:** A player is chosen to be the baby and lies in the middle of the room. They must have their eyes covered and pretend to be asleep.

Visitors want to come and see the baby. One by one visitors tiptoe quietly up to the baby without making any noise.

If the baby hears a noise it cries and points in the direction of the visitor who then must go back to the starting point.

The aim is for a visitor to be quiet enough to get to the baby and touch the baby before it notices and cries.

Take turns to be the baby.

**My me-bag:** A me-bag is a small bag that contains a person's own important things e.g. a picture of family pet, favourite toy, favourite colour.

Each person takes an item out of their bag and tells the group what it is.

**Posting pictures:** Lay out vocabulary pictures on a table near a post box (make sure there are enough pictures for each child to have several turns).

The children will take turns to go and post 1 or 2 pictures named by the adult. When all the pictures are posted, open the box and ask the children to name the pictures.

**Fishing:** You will need a commercially available fishing game with a pond and magnetic rods or you can make your own rods from sticks, string and small magnets.

Attach a paper clip to individual small vocabulary/number/colour pictures and place the pictures in the 'pond'. Then the children can take turns at 'fishing' using the magnetic rods. When they catch a 'fish' they should name the picture.

**Touching chain:** The group is seated in a circle on the floor.

A person is chosen to start the touching chain and thinks of a part of the body they want to touch e.g. tip of the nose. They then do this to the person next to them, who then passes it along etc.

**Box-lists:** The adult shows the group a list of items that belong in a box. The children work together to find the items around the room and put them in to the box. They must find an item one at a time, taking turns.

**Commercial Games:** Hanging monkeys, pop up pirate, build a beetle, snakes and ladders and snap are all good for encouraging turn taking.