

Strengthening social skills

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with California mothers, parents, and caregivers to understand how parents are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives. A mom in Northern CA shared her concern that "socially we noticed with the older kids, if they stayed online too long, they didn't even know how to hold a five-minute conversation." A mom in Southern CA shared that her family is trying "to replace the technology and bring my son back into human connection."

Parents have noticed that their children's social skills are lagging. Social emotional skills and social norms have been upended due to the pandemic. They express concern about how to boost their children's social-emotional skills as in-person social interactions increase.

Open-ended questions facilitate authentic conversation. Consider whether your children know how to introduce themselves to others and how this simple act can build community and connection. Social skills can help kids achieve what they need in terms of friendships, family relationships and school partnerships.

Tips to strengthen social skills

TIP 1: Practice conversation with those you see outside the home and encourage kids to think of open-ended questions to ask friends.

Dr. Dana Tuttle, co-founder of [ScreenSense](#), suggests that parents and youth "rebuild conversation and connection muscles by making small talk with everyone you engage with during the week." Dr. Tuttle suggests asking "How is your day going so far? What have you been up to today?" instead of the typical "how are you?" ([Child Mind Institute](#))

TIP 2: Schedule small playdates, or encourage teens to gather, with non-tech activities.

Reintroduce your kids to what it's like to be in in-person relationships and interactions. Pediatrician [Dr. Jackie Douge](#) reminds parents that "just like riding a bike, children will adapt. Be ready to help them adapt by helping organize opportunities for social connection. The social skills will come back but they have not experienced friendship in the usual ways over the past year."

TIP 3: Pair physical activity with face-to-face interaction.

Dr. Tuttle advises a good way to diffuse nervousness and get the flow of conversation started is to take a walk or engage in another in-person activity. An outing like this can double as a chance to make time for some physical activity.

TIP 4: Teach kids to know how to ask for help.

Support kids' self-advocacy and self-awareness. Academic counselor and school adviser [Ana Homayoun](#), founder of Green Ivy Educational Consulting, suggests teaching this helpful language to youth, "I could really use some support around this. Is that something you could help me with or refer me to someone who could?" Also support youth in case they are asked to help a friend who needs more assistance than they can provide. In such a case, suggest your child tell a friend, "I want to be supportive and refer you to an adult who can help."