

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home

This Week's Focus – Relationship Skills

What are Relationship Skills?

Relationship Skills, the ability to interact positively and productively with other people, is one of the most important social and emotional skills. Whether it is making and keeping a friend, being part of a team, or working on an important project with others, relationship skills are essential to our success, productivity, and happiness.

Like all social and emotional skills, relationship skills take practice to develop. Here are some suggestions to help your child build these critical skills.

Strategy – “Who’s Great at This?”¹

The goal of this strategy is simple – to help our children recognize and build important relationship skills.

For elementary students – The first step is to help our children name and recognize important relationship skills. Take a sheet of paper and make two columns. On the left side list key relationship skills such as “says something nice about someone,” “is polite,” or “offers to help others.” On the right side, have your student write the name of someone *Who’s Great at This* and give an example of how that person showed that skill. Start with a small list of easy skills for your child to identify and then add more as they get better at recognizing relationship skills in others.

For middle school students – Relationship skills can be particularly hard because they involve other people. Teenagers often struggle with relationship skills as part of growing up. Issues like being loyal to your friends, keeping their trust, and being accepted while still being true to oneself and doing the right thing are very hard lessons to learn. Fortunately, there are many great movies that deal with these themes such as *Riding with My Sister*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Stand By Me*, and even *Toy Story*. Watch one of these films with your middle schooler and then talk about the relationship skill challenges portrayed in the film and *Who Was Great* at solving those challenges and how.

For high school students – The ability to get along with all kinds of people is important in the workplace and in the community. Help your high schooler learn to form positive relationships with a variety of individuals. Have your teen pick someone that they do not yet know well but would like to get to know better. The person could be a classmate, a neighbor, or even a family member like a cousin. Encourage them to strike up a conversation with that person and explore three things: 1) their interests, 2) their goals, and 3) someone they admire. Have them share with you what they discovered – likely they will have more in common with the person than they thought! Help your high schooler become someone *Who Is Great* at getting along with others.

¹*Who’s Great at This* was developed by Ann McKay Bryson and is part of Aperture Education’s DESSA Comprehensive SEL System.



For Preschool students – These early years are the perfect time in your child's life to focus on naming and recognizing important relationship skills. Take a sheet of paper and make two columns. On the left side list key relationship skills such as "plays nicely with others." Read the words to your child and ask if they can think of a family member, friend or neighbor *Who's Great at This*. If your child needs help identifying someone, offer some suggestions. Encourage your child to draw a picture of that person engaging in the behavior. Suggest sharing the drawing with the person as a way to show that your child recognizes their kindness. If this exercise was enjoyable for your child, make a list of easy skills and suggest doing this activity on a regular basis. (Suggested skills: "is kind and says nice things"; "makes me feel safe and loved"; "is fun to be with and makes me laugh".)

For Infants and Toddlers – Parents are the first and most important teachers in a child's life. Teaching relationship skills starts from the moment a baby enters the world. Model for your child what it looks like to be kind by showing kindness to yourself, to your baby, and to others. When you reflect on *Who's Great at This*, remember that you are the number one role model for your child. When your child learns that *YOU are Great at This*, you will know that you are setting the foundation for healthy relationship skills.

A Note to Parents

Healthy relationships are critical for all parents to be the best that we want to be for our children. Let's be honest, parenting is a joy and also incredibly hard work. Having strong relationships helps us manage the challenges that parenting, and life in general, brings our way. The number of healthy relationships don't matter. What matters is what the relationships bring to your life, including: *Laughing more * Feeling healthy *Feeling supported *Having fun *Sharing our emotions *Being honest. Take some time to reflect on how you are maintaining healthy relationships and take action to ensure that your relationships are a daily priority.

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Next Week's topic – Goal-Directed Behavior