

Working with educators across the country, I often hear, “I just don’t have time to teach social skills.” With all that needs to be done in a school day and school year, I understand where teachers are coming from. But challenging behavior is going happen and stopping a lesson to address and correct behavior can take a lot of time.

Rather than waiting for the behavior to happen and teaching appropriate behaviors during correction, we recommend proactively teaching students alternative positive behaviors. Yes, proactively teaching skills takes time but with proactive teaching comes prevention. When you prevent inappropriate behaviors from happening or reduce their frequency, you gain valuable academic time.

Proactive teaching includes setting aside time for a purposeful social skills lesson, prompting students when an opportunity arises to use a social skill and helping students see the value of using a skill outside the classroom. All of these help set students up for success by creating expectations for behavior in a variety of environments.

Once proactive teaching of skills has been done, teachers can embed additional social skill instruction and practice into the academic day. Blending academic and behavioral teaching provides effective and efficient enhancement of social skills teaching. This blending can be done by pairing social skills with both academic content and academic activities.



Pairing social skills with academic content. Whether you are teaching kindergarteners or seniors in high school, curriculum at all grade levels can lend itself to discussion and reinforcement of social skills.

When I was in the classroom, I often added a social skill to my reading and literature lessons. Discussing skills that could have helped the characters or how their emotions affected the story was a great way to embed social emotional learning into assessing comprehension of a story or a novel. One that I used often was a story about a man who lived on a ‘neat’ street where all of the houses looked the same until one day a seagull carrying a can of orange paint spilled paint on the man’s house. The man had a choice. He could repaint his house to look like everyone else’s or he could repaint his house to represent his dreams. He chose the latter. One by one his neighbors came to talk to him to convince him to change his house back so the street could remain a ‘neat’ street. Adding a discussion on skills like *Listening*, *Accepting Criticism*, and *Having a Conversation* aided the comprehension of the story and helped students see real life application of those skills.

Social studies, government or history lessons also provide great opportunities for social skill discussions. When teaching about different events, add in a lesson on making an apology. Look at the context of the situation and discuss how the situation could have been handled better if those involved used skills like *Disagreeing Appropriately*, *Accepting No for an Answer* or *Making an Apology*. Get this lesson and others [here](http://www.boystowntraining.org).

Pairing social skills with academic activity. Daily activities are another great place to add in social skill lessons and reminders. These preventive reminders need only take a minute or so and can prevent problem behavior from arising. Watch this [video clip](#) to see one teacher remind students how to *Accept Feedback* before handing back an assignment, it takes her less than 90 seconds.

These types of reminders could be helpful before using math manipulatives to enhance a student's understanding of concepts and processes. Before having access to manipulatives, a teacher may want to review *Following Instructions* to keep students focused on the task at hand. Perhaps even, *Ignoring Distractions* from others who may be using the manipulative inappropriately might help the activity run more smoothly. When conducting a science experiment, it may be important to reinforce with students the skills of *Staying on Task* or *Asking for Help* as well as any expectations or procedures you have previously discussed with students. Any time students work in Cooperative Learning Groups, skills such as *Working with Others* and *Appropriate Voice Tone* help students be more efficient and productive. Get ideas and strategies on teaching all of these skills and more in [Teaching Social Skills to Youth](#) from [Boys Town Press](#).

With all that needs to be accomplished each and every school day, teachers can enhance their efficacy in both academic and behavioral instruction by taking the opportunity to blend academics and social skills whenever the opportunities present themselves.