

Mastering Social Skills for Success in the Workplace

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Advocate
Medical
Group

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Please note:

- This presentation is intended for families, caregivers, health care professionals, and service providers of individuals with Down syndrome.
- The information in this presentation is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to serve as a substitute for a medical, psychiatric, mental health, or behavioral evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment plan by a qualified professional.
- We recommend that you bring specific questions about an individual with Down syndrome to their medical and/or therapy providers.

Objectives

- Describe the common characteristics that support or hinder successful employment for individuals with Down syndrome.
- Identify common social skills areas that impact job performance.
- Provide practical strategies and resources to help develop specific social skill areas.

Background

What are social skills?

- Skills used to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language, and our personal appearance.
- These are learned skills.

Why should social skills be taught?

- Rules are not always clear and often unwritten.
- Rules do not apply to all situations.
- Social competency requires abstract thinking.
- Lack of appropriate social skills may lead to negative consequences.
 - Embarrassment
 - Disagreements
 - Being reprimanded at work or school
 - Losing a job, a friend...

Importance of employment for individuals with Down syndrome

- Financial support
- Increase self-esteem
- Provides a sense of purpose
- Opportunity for social engagement and communication
- Encourage physical activity
- Lifelong learning

Employment and Down syndrome

- Studies on work show that job loss for someone with I/DD is very commonly related to lack of interpersonal skills and are not related to completing the actual job tasks.
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Temperament
 - Social awareness
- Employers often praise employees with DS.
 - Thorough work
 - Persistent
 - Reliable

(Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Reitman, Drabman, Speaks, Burkley, & Rhode, 1999)

Common characteristics of most (but not all) people with Down syndrome

Strong visual memory

Strengths

- Good at remembering visual data
- “Video-graphic memory”

Challenges

- Slower auditory processing
- Limited sense of time and chronological order
- Memories experienced as if happening now

Self-talk and imaginary friends

Strengths

- Process
- Cope
- Prevent boredom

Challenges

- Social appropriateness

The “Groove”

Strengths

- Functional
- Can help build routines and healthy habits

Challenges

- Inflexibility

Concrete thinking

Strengths

- Follow instructions

Challenges

- Abstract concepts difficult to grasp
- Take comments literally
- Difficulty generalizing skills across settings

Empathy radar

Strengths

- Sensitive and compassionate to others

Challenges

- Internalize the feelings of others
- Difficulty managing emotions

The brain

Strengths

- Provides a unique perspective

Challenges

- Areas of the brain that are impacted are responsible for memory, planning, decision making, problem solving, social behaviors, and attention and language.

Common social skill areas of concern

Skills to be learned

- Communicating needs
- Lack of rules
- Gray areas
- Appropriate conversation topics
- Professional behaviors
- Personal/Social boundaries
- Problem-solving skills
- Managing emotions
- Flexibility
- Conversation skills with people in various roles
- Planning skills
- Initiation skills

Ideas for goals

- Demonstrate appropriate professional behaviors
 - Will clock in and out on time
 - Will return from break on time
 - Will identify appropriate topics to talk about at work
 - Will arrive to work with appropriate professional hygiene
 - Will demonstrate appropriate boundaries
 - Will identify who to ask for help
 - Will complete a daily check in with a supervisor
 - Will list/state tasks to be completed
 - Will demonstrate strategies to cope when feeling strong emotions
 - Will identify the rules of the workplace
 - Will complete a non-preferred task without complaint

Common workplace problem scenarios

- Too much downtime
- Wanting to make friends at work
- Too many tasks to do and remember
- Being interrupted
- Freezing up when overwhelmed
- Admitting mistakes and asking for help
- Avoiding unpreferred tasks

Practical strategies to teach social skills

Strategies that work for most

- Teach how the individual learns best.
 - Visuals, videos, modeling, repetition, practice
- Say what to do instead of what not to do.
 - Establish rules/expectations
 - Refer to any established goals
 - Be concrete
- Help establish a routine.
- Provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors.

Professional behaviors

- What to teach
 - Job etiquette
 - Respecting coworkers
 - How to respond when coworkers behave inappropriately
 - Punctuality
 - Teamwork
 - Grooming/hygiene
- Strategies
 - Model
 - Practice
 - Teachable moment
 - Use visual supports

Tips for Being a Successful Employee

Uniform Care

We need to make sure our uniform and clothes for work are clean every day!

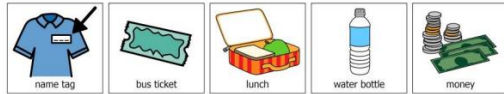


Have Good Hygiene



Be Prepared

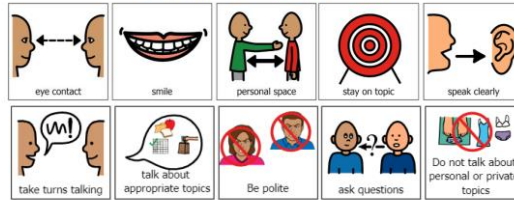
Do you need your...?



Be On Time!



Have Appropriate Conversations



Complete All Work Tasks



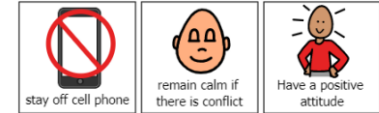
Problem Solve



Ask For Help When Needed



Be Professional



Accept Feedback

- Feedback is helpful information someone gives you about an idea or your work.
- It helps us know what we are doing right and what we can improve on.



Appropriate conversation topics

- What to teach
 - General conversation skills
- Strategies
 - Appropriate conversations visual supports
 - Model appropriate conversations
 - When something is inappropriate, use it as a teachable moment
 - Practice

Rules for Successful Workplace Conversations

To be successful at work, it is important to have appropriate conversations.

Appropriate conversations mean I should not get in trouble for what I say or who I say it to.

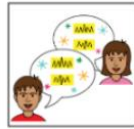
There are appropriate topics I can talk about at work. It may depend on who I am talking to.



Appropriate talk at work...



Makes people feel good.



Uses nice words.



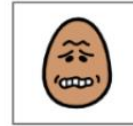
Is friendly, but professional.



Includes shared interests or things you have in common.

Examples: compliments, greetings, work-related tasks, offer help, sports, hobbies, weather

Talk that is NOT appropriate at work...



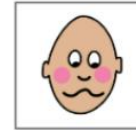
Makes people feel uncomfortable.



Is too personal.



Uses mean words.

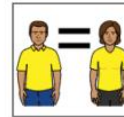


Might make people feel embarrassed.

Examples: bathroom habits, health issues, politics, gossip, weight, curse words, religion

Topics that are appropriate with people at work

Appropriate topics may depend on who I am talking to.



A **co-worker** is a person who I work with who is not my manager or supervisor.



A **manager** or **supervisor** is the person or people who make the rules and who I report to.



A **customer** is a person who comes to my place of work and needs something from my job.

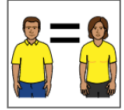
Communicating with various people

- What to teach
 - Conversations require the right fit between the person and the topic
- Strategies
 - Visual supports
 - Modeling
 - Role play/Practice
 - Teachable moments

Co-workers, manager/supervisor, and customers are all people I interact with at work. They may not be my friend.

Co-worker

- When I talk to a co-worker, I can...
 - o Use greetings or farewells.
 - "How are you today?"
 - "Have a nice day."
 - "How was your weekend?"
 - o Talk about work-related tasks.
 - "When is your break?"
 - "What time do you get off?"
 - o Talk about common interests (sports, school, movies, music, etc.)



Manager of supervisor

- When I talk to a manager/supervisor, I can...
 - o Use greetings or farewells.
 - "How are you today?"
 - "Have a nice day."
 - "Hi there."
 - o Talk about work-related tasks.
 - "Can I take my break now please?"
 - "I have a trip coming up and will need some time off."
 - "Can you remind me what I should do again?"
 - "How can I do this better?"



Customer

- When I talk to a customer, I can...
 - o Use greetings or farewells.
 - "How are you today?"
 - "Have a nice day."
 - "Welcome."
 - o Offer assistance.
 - "Can I help you?"
 - "Is there something I can find for you?"



Communicating needs

- Reminders
 - If the individual uses a communication device, make sure it is available to them at work. Program common phrases. Have a work page.
 - Provide alternate/multiple ways to communicate (pictures, whiteboards, tablet, etc).

Communicating needs cont.

- Information to share with the workplace
 - Share important background information about the individual.
 - Be up front about abilities and strengths as well as areas for improvement
 - Communicate strategies that are effective with the individual (giving choices, First/Then, simplified language).
 - Speak slowly with the individual with Down syndrome to allow time to process.
 - With self-talk, allow it to happen if it is not disruptive or can direct self-talk to a more appropriate location.
 - Scripted speech
- Educate the employer on how to best support the individual.



Personal/social boundaries

- What to teach
 - Personal boundaries relate to adequate distance during conversations and interactions.
 - Social boundaries relate to who, when, how much, and what we talk about with others.
- Strategies
 - Visuals
 - Modeling
 - Practice
 - Teachable moments


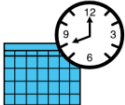
Boundaries

Boundaries are a line you do not cross without permission. There are 2 types:



1. Personal Boundaries

 <p>Personal space and what type of touch you are comfortable with.</p>	 <p>You can hug members of your family. You can fist bump or high-five your friends.</p>
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2. Social Boundaries

 <p>How much we talk, text, hang out, and what we talk about.</p>	 <p>You can silence your phone while at work or at bedtime. You can choose to make plans to see your friends.</p>
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Setting Boundaries

<p>To help me set boundaries, I can use words like...</p>  <p>"I am not comfortable with..." "I am comfortable with..." "I want..." "I do not want..."</p>	<p>Remind others of your boundaries.</p>  <p>"I told you I do not want hugs. If you keep hugging me, I will not come over to your house anymore."</p>
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Respecting Boundaries

 <p>Listen to the boundaries of others.</p>	<p>Respect their boundaries by apologizing and changing your behavior.</p>  <p>"I am sorry. You told me you do not like hugs. I will stop."</p>
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Flexibility

- Strategies
 - Use the groove until you cannot
 - Grooves establish quickly- try to redirect
 - Plan ahead and include flexibility from the start
 - Use calendars or visuals
 - Model
 - Practice
 - Teachable moment

Lack of rules

- Strategies
 - Establish rules from the start as much as possible
 - Make sure rules apply to everyone
 - Model following the rules
 - Post rules that apply to everyone (for example, dress code or use of cell phones)
 - Role play

Abstract thinking/Gray areas

- What to teach
 - The goal is to make things as black and white as possible.
- Strategies
 - Establish rules
 - Plan for obstacles
 - Limit use of non-literal phrases
 - Say what to do instead of what not to do
 - Offer choices

Managing emotions

- What to teach
 - Identify emotions, triggers, calming and coping skills
- Strategies
 - Visual supports
 - Provide or identify safe places to take a break
 - Recognize cues and prompt the individual to take a break
 - Consider the tasks and the skills of the individual
 - Acknowledge if you are having a bad day, the individual may notice and change their behavior
 - Model appropriate behavior
 - Practice calming and coping strategies. Create a plan.

Calming vs. Coping

Some feelings come and go quickly. We can use **calming strategies** to handle those feelings.

calming strategies



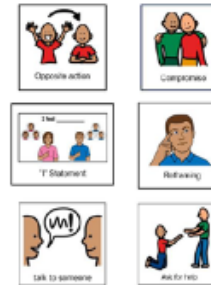
Calming vs. Coping

Some feelings last a long time. We can use **calming strategies AND coping strategies** to handle those feelings.

calming strategies



coping strategies



When I feel _____ I will...



STOP.



THINK.



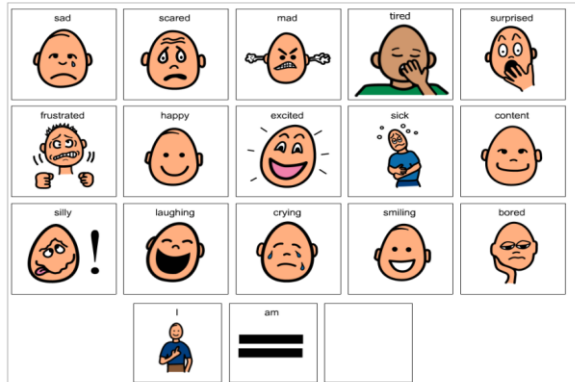
MAKE A GOOD CHOICE.

When I feel _____,

I will try

_____ , or
 _____ , or

so that I stay calm and make a good choice!



Planning skills/time management

- What to teach
 - Using modifications and tools to support difficulty with skill development
- Strategies
 - Visuals—Checklists
 - Before assigning tasks, understand that work may not be done quickly
 - Check-ins
 - Timers
 - Say what to do instead of what not to do
 - Break tasks down into simpler steps
 - Modeling
 - Practicing
 - Teachable moments

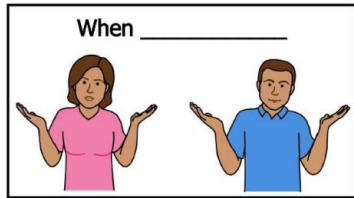
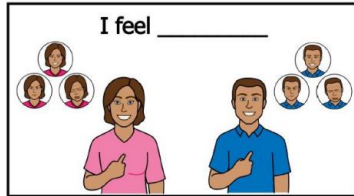
Lack of or slow initiation

- Strategies
 - Break tasks down to simple steps
 - Visuals
 - Timers
 - Check-ins—supervisor or peer
 - Consider and simplify the sequencing of tasks
 - Model
 - Teachable moment

Problem solving skills

- What to teach
 - Things do not always go our way
 - What happens when someone says no
 - Conflict management
 - Coping skills
- Strategies
 - Visuals with who to go to for various concerns/issues
 - Visual reminder to ask for help
 - Cue to request assistance
 - Practice
 - Modeling
 - Teachable moment

"I" Statements



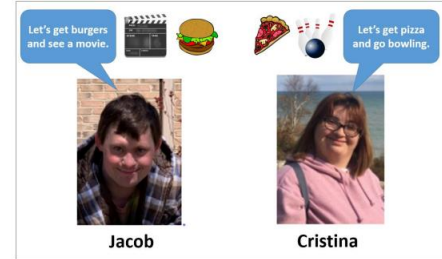
COMPROMISE

What does it mean?

- **Not** always getting your way.
- Doing something that is **not** your idea.

Compromise...

- Requires flexible thinking.
- Is a skill that helps us develop & maintain healthy relationships.



Jacob



Cristina

WHAT SHOULD JACOB & CRISTINA DO?

Compromise 1

Do one thing that they both want to do.



Jacob



Cristina

Compromise 2

Do one of their choices this time and the other person's choice the other time.



Jacob



Cristina

Compromise 3

Decide together to do something that is not either of their first choices.



Jacob AND Cristina



Cases

Case 1

- 22-year-old man with Down syndrome works at an indoor activity park. He is conversational and relatively intelligible when he speaks. He desires friendships. He was paired with a typically-developing female peer. There was downtime in their day, and he made an inappropriate comment that was sexually suggestive.

Case 2

- 30-year-old man with Down syndrome works at a grocery store. His task was to bring in the carts from the parking lot. A customer thought they were being helpful and grabbed a loose cart to bring into the store with them. This frustrated the employee, and he yelled profanities at the customer.

Case 3

- 39-year-old woman with Down syndrome works in a daycare center. There are a variety of tasks she has been trained to do, but they are not predictable and change from day-to-day. Instead of asking for help, she sits in her seat and engages in self-talk. The tasks do not get completed.

Tips to remember

- Many employers value the work ethic of individuals with DS.
- Lack of appropriate social skills is one reason individuals with DS may lose their jobs.
- Provide opportunities to learn, practice, and develop appropriate social skills.

Resources

[All resources](#)

[Employment resources](#)

[Social skills resources](#)

The screenshot shows the website for Advocate Medical Group's Adult Down Syndrome Center. The header includes the logo, name, a search bar with the text "I'm looking for...", and a menu icon. Below the header is the "Resource Library" section with the subtext "All Resources". There are three main categories, each with a representative image and a title: "People with Down Syndrome" (image of a young woman in a purple shirt), "Families & Caregivers" (image of a woman and a man), and "Health Care Professionals" (image of a woman talking to two men). At the bottom, there are five navigation options with icons: "Events, Classes & Programs" (bell icon) with a link to "See the Schedule"; "Video Gallery" (play button icon) with a link to "View All"; "Related Organizations" (target icon) with a link to "See Listing of Links"; "Projects" (document icon) with a link to "See Our Latest Projects"; and "News" (document icon) with a link to "View News Articles".

Contact information

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Questions?

Resources:

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Email newsletter:

eepurl.com/c7uV1v



resources



email newsletter

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