

## POOR SOCIAL SKILLS

Having and utilizing healthy social skills is critical to functioning successfully in life. These skills enable teens and adolescents to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. The extent to which children and adolescents possess good social skills can influence their academic performance, behavior, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities.

Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety. This is particularly true today given the critical role that social skills play in maintaining a positive school environment and reducing school violence.

### WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS?

While there are hundreds of important social skills for students to learn, here are four main areas usually in need of modification and assistance:

1. Survival skills: listening, following directions, ignoring distractions, using nice or brave talk, rewarding yourself
2. Interpersonal skills: sharing, asking for permission, joining an activity, waiting your turn
3. Problem-solving skills: asking for help, apologizing, accepting consequences, deciding what to do
4. Conflict resolution skills: dealing with teasing, losing, accusations, being left out, peer pressure

### CONSEQUENCES OF POOR SOCIAL SKILLS

Teens and adolescents with poor social skills have been shown to:

- Experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and peers.
- Evoke highly negative responses from others that lead to high levels of peer rejection.
- Peer rejection has been linked on several occasions with school violence.
- Show signs of depression, aggression and anxiety.
- Demonstrate poor academic performance as an indirect consequence.
- Show a higher incidence of involvement in the criminal justice system as adults.

## SOCIAL SKILLS TREATMENT THROUGH THERAPY MODELS

The lessons teens and adolescents learn as they go through the sustainable Growth Wilderness Therapy Model serve them throughout life. The focus is on determining and defining the social skill deficits and facilitating the desirable behavior as well as eliminating the undesirable behavior. Therapy can:

- Emphasize the learning, performance, generalization, and maintenance of appropriate behaviors through modeling, coaching, and role-playing. It is also crucial to provide students with immediate performance feedback.
- Employ primarily positive strategies and add punitive strategies only if the positive approach is unsuccessful and the behavior is of a serious and/or dangerous nature. Provide training and practice opportunities in a wide range of settings with different groups and individuals in order to encourage students to generalize new skills to multiple, real life situations.
- Draw on assessment strategies, including functional assessments of behavior, to identify those children in need of more intensive interventions as well as target skills for instruction.
- Look to enhance social skills by increasing the frequency of an appropriate behavior in a particular situation. This should take place in “normal” environments to address the naturally occurring causes and consequences.

