



Rifka Schonfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

Excelling in School: Beyond the Report Card

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter discusses the topic of children excelling in school in all areas...

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QUESTION:

How can I help encourage and guide my child to excel in school?

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ANSWER:

“We know from human history and the latest learning science that success comes from the combination of academic knowledge and the ability to work with others...” – Walter Isaacson

The Social Skills – Academics Connection

There's a lot of research out there on the connection between social skills and academic

success. In a report in the *Child Development* journal, Dr. Joseph A Durlak, a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Chicago found that student who took part in social and emotional learning in school improved in grades and standardized test scores by 11 percentile points compared with students who had no social and emotional curriculum.

What does that mean? Well, first it means that students who have social skills training are better primed for academics. And second, it probably means that we should incorporate social skills training into our regular curriculum, since it is an integral part of success both in school and in later life!

If we incorporate curricular (or co-curricular programs in schools) that deal with social skills and emotional learning, we are bolstering the school's academic program. Studies show that emotional intelligence is key to excelling in school, and we all know that emotional intelligence is of particular importance in job interviews and in the office. This means we should work on seeing social and emotional learning as a key part of the curriculum. Rather than seeing social skills as different from the skills students need to succeed in school, we should understand that they are inherently connected.

Learning Disabilities and Social Skills

The same is also conversely true. We all know that children with learning disabilities traditionally struggle with academics. Children with learning disabilities can have a harder time focusing, deciphering letters, or sitting still. These problems often lead to struggling learners, but what people don't often realize is that having a learning disability is also intrinsically connected to social issues and self-esteem.

Many times, children with learning disabilities struggle and receive little positive feedback from their teachers and parents. Sometimes they are misunderstood and labeled as "lazy," "slow," or "unmotivated." Rather than feeling good about what they are able to accomplish, children with learning disabilities often end up feeling shame and frustration.

Research at the University of Iowa and the UCLA indicates that as much as 70% of children with learning disabilities (LD) suffer from poor self-esteem. Dr. Marshall Raskind, an expert in the field of learning disabilities, says, "Over time, children with LD may just stop trying, entering a state of 'learned helplessness' where they see little connection between their efforts and ultimate outcomes. 'Why bother?' they may ask, 'No matter how hard I try, I always end up failing.'"

Before I address how to combat these negative feelings, it is important to understand just what self-esteem is. People with self-esteem have a strong sense of their own worth, which leads them to stand up for themselves when others attempt to put them down. Those with strong self-esteem also tend to express their feelings freely, enabling them to establish long lasting friendships.

Therefore, there is often a connection between learning disabilities and social skills. Other people's reactions to children with learning disabilities might cause them to feel badly about their self-worth. This in turn could make them hesitant to stand up for themselves (a target for bullies) and also cautious when it comes to opening up to other people (an inability to maintain long-term friendships).

What can you do to help children gain self-esteem and also make friends? The first thing you can do is to make them understand that his learning disability does not make them stupid or slow. Tell him about Albert Einstein's struggles in grade school and Beethoven's difficulties with hearing loss. They turned their weaknesses into strengths.

Then, you can look for the child's strengths. Is he really creative? Athletic? Generous? Whatever his strength is, make the most of it. Sign him up for an afterschool activity that he will excel in. This will not only help him gain confidence, it will also introduce him to children his own age who share his passion. This way, you'll be killing two birds with one stone – he will gain self-esteem and friends.

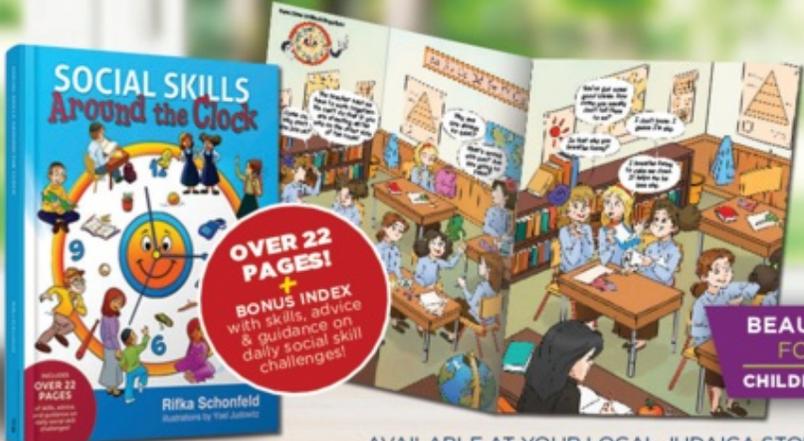
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