Dear Parents,

One of the hardest things to do as parents is to see our children not behaving around other people. We all want our children to be well behaved, but how can we help our children gain good social skills? How can we ensure they play well with others?

Check out this video clip, and then grab some great tips below!

<https://vimeo.com/parentministry/review/123967150/273e20a50e>

Romans 12:18 says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*.” Sometimes this can be very difficult, especially for children. Kids are naturally ego-centric and they are not born with the tools to effectively handle conflict. This is where we must help them to form good social skills and healthy play habits.

Parents are one of the primary sources that children learn from on how to respond to life. They model behaviors that they see and that are acceptable at home. Playing with your child at home lays the foundation for how they will play with other children. Do you ever get stumped for ideas on what to do at home? Here are some suggestions:

**Encourage make believe and pretend play.** Research has shown that pretend play is very important for a young child’s development in number of ways. First, children develop and hone a number of important social skills in the midst of zooming cars and fort building. In fact, when another person is involved, they are able to practice turn-taking, sharing responsibility (for the direction of play), and creative problem solving. In addition, children practice language skills within the context of pretend play. During play, children often experiment with language and voices (e.g., mom calling the children to dinner). Parents and teachers can facilitate this process by introducing new words into the play. Finally, pretend play inspires the imagination and thinking skills.

**Art Projects.** Granted, this play can get messy, but encouraging your little artist will only increase creativity. Children can become more self-confident and assured when they are able to express themselves and art can be a great way to do that. This translates to playing well with others because as your child has more confidence, they can more easily speak up in play with others. Either in suggesting a fun activity, or in speaking up for themselves if the other child is pushy.

**Create something to share with someone else**! Do you have a neighbor, teacher or family member who you would like to reach out to? Maybe a shut in from the church that misses the fellowship of believers? Have your child help to draw a picture or put together a little gift to brighten their day. This also creates a teaching moment for your child and shows them to think about the feelings of others. This translates to playing well with others because they are learning to see things from another’s perspective.

Ultimately, there will be disagreements between kids. It just happens, but how we deal with it can help to ensure the best result. Philippians 2:4 says, “*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others*”. If your child has frequent disagreements with a friend or sibling, consider practicing some of these techniques at a neutral time when the child is not upset and is not in conflict.

Teach empathy and understanding. Often, children who argue are so caught up in being right, they forget to think about how the other person may be feeling. Help your child understand that a friend may be upset because she feels jealous, sad, or lonely about something, and work on identifying times when your child has felt the same way. This can help your child step back from being “right” and remember to be caring.

Apologize and admit mistakes. It’s not easy (even for adults!), but helping your child learn to admit when he is wrong can take away the fuel that feeds many arguments. Role-playing apologies can be helpful here, but what’s more important is to practice what you preach. Let your child see moments when you admit you’re wrong and try to make amends.

Practice ways to compromise. Help your child understand what compromise is (when a common agreement or solution is reached) and why it’s a valuable tool to use in any relationship. Teach your child how to take a few moments to breathe and main her composure as best she can. Give kids the opportunity to practice compromising with you, too.

Taking the time to work with our kids to form good social skills while they are young will be so beneficial for them as they grow older. You are giving them the tools to be a good friend.

Building Young Disciples,

Pastor Sarah