

*Hector, a six-year-old Hispanic child, attended kindergarten in his neighborhood school. His teacher was concerned about Hector's inappropriate social behaviors. She reported that he was prone to sudden mood swings and often got into arguments or fights, both during class as well as on the school playground. Early in first grade, Hector participated in a new behavioral program that stressed specific social skills to improve his competence in such areas as listening, answering questions, managing his anger, and getting along with other children and adults. He was also asked to work cooperatively with three other students to observe, firsthand, other children behaving appropriately in class each day. By the end of first grade, there had been a dramatic change in Hector's behavior at school. He now was able to control his anger, avoid fights, and play more cooperatively with his classmates.*

## **Introduction**

*Social Skills Instruction* teaches students appropriate interpersonal communication skills, self-discipline, and problem solving skills. It combines a number of strategies to prevent and replace problem behaviors, and increase skills and behaviors leading to social competence. It is most effective when it becomes a part of the daily academic curriculum and is implemented on a classwide and schoolwide basis.

## **Why This Issue is Important**

The ability of children to interact effectively with peers, teachers, and families is crucial to their social-behavioral development and adjustment at school. Further, poor social-behavioral skills correlate highly with children's low academic achievement, especially their reading ability. Children with antisocial behavior patterns are at early risk of poor adjustment to school.

## **Key Principles of Practice**

Children learn social skills as they grow and develop. These skills are acquired and demonstrated in a broad social context—the home, school, and community. Schools are ideal settings for teaching social skills because of their accessibility to children, teachers, and families.

Below are recommendations for enhancing schools' ability to improve the social competence of students.

- Implement social skills programs to establish a positive learning and teaching environment for all students and school staff across all school settings. This means exposing the entire school to a social skills curriculum.
- Integrate social skills instruction into the school curriculum. *Formal* social skills instruc-

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tion should be planned, focused, and scheduled within all teaching and learning activities. *Informal* social skills instruction takes advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to teach appropriate social behavior such as in the hallways or in the cafeteria.

- Match the intensity of social skills instruction with the intensity and type of social skills problem.
- Incorporate strategies in all social skills interventions to facilitate the generalized use of social skills. The success of social skills instruction should be judged on the degree to which students use acquired social skills across settings, people, and time.
- Evaluate the success of social skills based on the: (a) accuracy and fluency with which a student can display a skill, (b) degree to which peer and adult acceptance is enhanced; and (c) degree to which significant adults judge the student positively.
- Make social skill assessments and interventions culturally relevant. Culturally relevant factors, such as ethnicity and race, influence the student's social behavior as well as the social environment in which those behaviors are performed.

## **Where To Go For More Information**

### Office of Special Education Programs

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