Skill Steps and Useful Teaching Techniques

*Teaching Social Skills to Youth* features the step-by-step component behaviors to 182 skills, from the basic (following instructions and introducing yourself) to the complex (managing stress and resolving conflict). Opening chapters explain the individual and group teaching techniques that enable youth to recognize when, where, or with whom to use a particular skill. The authors also show how to plan skill-based treatment interventions for youth with difficult problems such as substance abuse, aggression, running away, depression, or attention deficits.

New Edition Features Updates and CD-ROM
The second edition of this classic guide offers many updates and new features including:

- A CD-ROM that helps readers search for social skills by title, category, or problem behavior and allows you to print copies of social skill steps for display
- New information on how to help youth generalize the use of individual skills to varied social situations
- An index that cross-references the 182 skills to the Six Pillars of Character – respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and citizenship
- References to and information from the latest research findings

*Teaching Social Skills to Youth* is an ideal resource for the classroom, in counseling or therapy, and in job training programs. Use it to increase the skill competency of any child, help improve student behavior in school, or develop an individualized plan of treatment for troubled or at-risk youth.

Includes CD-ROM with reproducible social skills posters for instructional use

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Introduction to Social Skills Teaching

Before he learned the skill of “Following Instructions,” 10-year-old Damone would look down at the floor and mumble to himself whenever someone asked him to do something. If the person giving the instruction was lucky, Damone would carry out the task or activity, but his track record for following through was shaky. Even if he did the task, Damone didn’t know that he was supposed to let the person know he was finished. He didn’t have much confidence in himself because he just wasn’t sure what was expected of him. People didn’t have much confidence in Damone because they couldn’t be sure he was reliable. At home and at school, Damone was often in trouble for not doing what he was told.

Damone’s education in how to appropriately follow instructions started in school when his teacher began teaching students the skill as part of her class. Then she sent home some papers with the steps of the skill: Look at the person; Say “Okay”; Do what you’ve been asked right away; Check back. Damone’s parents started working with him on learning the steps and practicing. Within a couple of weeks, Damone had the steps down, and his behavior began to change for the better. Now when someone gives him an instruction, he does what is asked quickly and with confidence. He gets along better with his parents and teacher, and they are proud of his progress. For this child, one simple, basic skill made a huge difference in his behavior, his personality, and the way he gets along with others.

Social skills like “Following Instructions” are nothing new – except to the children (and adults) who don’t have them or know how to use them. The earlier children and adolescents (and even adults) learn and know how to use social skills, the more successful they can be.

Everyone needs social skills. Social skills are the tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask questions, ask for help, get their needs met in appropriate ways, get along with others, make friends and develop healthy relationships, protect themselves, and generally be able to interact with anyone and everyone they meet in their journey through life.

Most importantly, these skills help youngsters begin to develop and build on the essential character traits of responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, respect, fairness, and citizenship. These traits provide young people and adults with the internal moral compass that enables them to distinguish right from wrong, understand why it is important to do what is right, and make good choices in their thinking and behavior. (The six traits have been identified as the Six Pillars of Character by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the nonprofit Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics. [See the box on page 5.] The Coalition is a diverse partnership of...
nearly 500 organizations that works to improve the character of America’s young people by promoting consensus ethical values. Boys Town and the Coalition have worked together on youth-oriented projects.)

While the long-term goals of social skill instruction are generalization (using the right skill at the right time in the right situation) and internalization (making skills a natural part of one’s everyday life), the short-term benefits to teaching children skills cannot be overstated. In fact, when children learn foundational skills like “Following Instructions,” “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer,” and “Disagreeing Appropriately,” it enables whoever is teaching to continue teaching and sets the stage for instruction in more advanced and complex skills. In other words, if a child knows how to appropriately follow instructions, he or she can be directed to adopt and use a variety of prosocial behaviors that make up other beneficial skills. It is the repertoire of skills a child develops over time that shapes how he or she functions in society.

A child who does not learn social skills and the basics of social interactions is at tremendous risk for failure in the classroom, juvenile delinquency, being ostracized by positive peers, or being adversely influenced by negative peers. Children who are never taught social skills develop their own habits and devices for getting their needs met, habits and devices that often conflict with what society views as acceptable behavior. The result can be an adolescent and adult life punctuated by violence, drug and alcohol abuse, failed relationships, incarceration, and the frustration of never realizing one’s goals.

Boys Town’s Approach to Teaching Skills

Social skill instruction and achieving skill competency are so important to the success of young people and adults that they are an integral part of every child-care program Boys Town offers. Boys Town has been caring for children since 1917, and while times and children’s problems have radically changed over the years, our approach of combining the “head” – child-care technology, research, and innovation – and the “heart” – compassion, caring, and loving guidance – has remained constant. All kids – especially those who are at risk or in danger of becoming at risk – need the kind of attention and help that brings about positive, lasting changes in their way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Social skills hold the key to unlocking the potential for good that every child possesses.

Boys Town’s mission is to change the way America cares for her children and families. Accomplishing that mission on a day-to-day basis is difficult, and requires commitment, sacrifice, and skilled caregivers. In addition to our long-range goals, Boys Town first provides a safe environment for young people where they can put their lives in order and, in many cases, begin healing wounds that run very deep. Within this caring atmosphere, individualized treatment focuses on enhancing a youth’s strengths and improving his or her deficiencies.

At the famed Village of Boys Town near Omaha, Nebraska, and at nearly 20 other sites across the United States, the work that our founder, Father Edward Flanagan, began in 1917 continues today. Four major programs are responsible for the majority of direct and indirect care we offer. These programs are:

- **Long-Term Residential Program**, where boys and girls live in separate group homes with trained married couples called Family-Teachers. In this family-style environment, each resident has his or her own individualized Treatment Plan to address behavior problems and is part of the larger community of youth. More than 100 group homes serve the needs of youth across the country.
Assessment and Short-Term Residential Program, which includes emergency shelters and staff-secure detention facilities for youth who must be removed from a dangerous environment or who are awaiting a more permanent placement.

Ecological Family-Based Services Program, where trained Consultants work with families who are in danger of having a child or children removed from the home. Treatment occurs in the home as the Consultant and family work together to enhance family members’ existing strengths and develop new ones.

Ecological Treatment Foster Care Program, which provides foster care for youth with more difficult behavior problems. Trained married couples (and sometimes trained single parents) provide a safe, loving environment as well as teaching and treatment for children for as long as necessary.

In all four programs, the source of all treatment is the Boys Town Teaching Model.

The Boys Town Teaching Model

To understand the concept of helping children learn new skills and behaviors so that they can competently use them in society, one must first realize that we are in the “business” of bringing healing and hope to children and families. Everything we do is rooted in the human experience – the successes, the failures, the progress, the obstacles. Children are human beings, not products on an assembly line. Boys Town’s caregivers are not robots programmed to perform the same task, the same way, every day. It is true that technology and theory (the head) are necessary, but so is genuine compassion and concern (the heart) and treating each youth as an individual with unique problems. Technology without compassion is pure manipulation; love and compassion without good science is pure sentimentality.

While the Boys Town Teaching Model has its basis in learning theory, it has not adopted a “mechanistic” view of how a child learns, as have other models that take this approach. In the Boys Town Model, the child is an active participant in the teaching and learning that occurs. The child isn’t merely told how to behave; he or she learns positive behaviors and how to choose to use them in many different situations. This “empowerment,” or self-help, approach combines the active participation of the child with the active teaching of the parent or caretaker. The strength of this approach is that it teaches children prosocial skills and helps them build healthy relationships with others.

The goal of this approach is not to control children, but to help them take control of their own lives. This is an ongoing learning process. Boys Town’s teaching methods utilize behavioral principles, while allowing children to integrate their thoughts and feelings into this learning process. And, unlike many other learning theory models, Boys Town effectively uses external reinforcement, where appropriate, to promote and maintain skill-learning and relationship development. This allows children to change intrinsically. Inadequate thought patterns change, negative feelings diminish, and inappropriate behaviors are replaced by positive behaviors for the youth and others.

In addition to teaching skills, other elements of the Boys Town Teaching Model include building healthy relationships, supporting moral and spiritual development, creating a positive, family-style environment, and promoting self-government and self-determination. Together, these elements comprise a proven, research-based, outcomes-oriented, and effective approach to helping children. In our programs, we expect kids to get better, and they do.
While all of the elements of our Model share equal importance, teaching skills is what helps kids learn new ways of thinking, new ways of feeling good, and new ways of behaving. Through teaching, we give kids the skills they need in order to take control of their lives and be successful. Whether it’s a parent who wants to teach his daughter the skill of problem-solving, or a staff member in a youth shelter trying to help a youth learn anger control strategies, teaching skills is the key to healthy child development and replacing problem behaviors with positive alternative behaviors.

**What This Manual Offers**

This manual reflects and focuses on the importance of teaching social skills to youth of all ages, the elements of social behavior (task and behavior analysis), individual and group teaching techniques, generalization of skills, the role of skill-based treatment interventions for difficult youth problems, and the Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum itself.

Our Social Skills Curriculum of 182 skills defines the positive alternatives to many of the maladaptive and self-defeating behavior patterns in which a young person might engage. It is intended to serve as an effective resource and tool for anyone who works with children and adolescents. This includes teachers, staff members in long-term residential youth programs and youth shelters, foster parents, counselors, therapists, and others.

All 182 skills and their steps are presented in this manual (Chapter 7). Besides being task-analyzed into their specific behaviors, the skills also are paired with specific skill types – social, emotional management, academic, ethical/moral, and independent living – and character traits, and categorized according to behaviors and situations in which they can be used to address problems or enhance a youth’s abilities. (See Appendices A, B, C, and D at the end of this book.) A compact disk at the end of the book contains these appendices and the entire Social Skills Curriculum. Individual skills and their steps can be printed from the CD.

**NOTE:** For ease of reading, we use the term “social skills” throughout this book when referring to all of the Curriculum skills in general. The specific skill types – social, emotional management, academic, ethical/moral, and independent living – are used to better define the link between individual skills and behavior areas. Definitions of the five skill types are on page 6.

Skills open the door to success for youth, no matter the setting in which they are taught. We hope these tools can contribute to and enhance your work as you bring about lasting change, instill hope, and prepare young people for the future that awaits them.
The Six Pillars of Character

(As described by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition)

**Trustworthiness**
Be honest. Don’t deceive, cheat, or steal. Be reliable — do what you say you’ll do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal — stand by your family, friends, and country.

**Respect**
Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the feelings of others. Don’t threaten, hit, or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

**Responsibility**

**Fairness**
Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Don’t take advantage of others. Don’t blame others carelessly.

**Caring**
Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.

**Citizenship**
Do your share to make your school and community better. Cooperate. Stay informed; vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

(In Appendix B at the end of this book, these character traits are paired with the specific Curriculum skills that can be used to teach and reinforce the traits.)
Skill Types

Social Skills
Skills in this category are related to most situations in which a person interacts with another person or other people. These situations might range from having a private, one-on-one conversation with a friend, to asking directions from a stranger, to being with a small group of people in a doctor’s waiting room, to being part of large crowd at a party. Social skills enable a person to appropriately communicate with, respond to, make a request from, and get along with other people.

Emotional Management Skills
Emotional management skills enable a person to find and maintain a balance between not feeling anything and letting one’s feelings control his or her behavior. These skills also help a person maintain self-control, stay calm in exciting, stressful, or frustrating situations, and make good choices under pressure. One major area where this is important is anger control. People who know which skills to use to prevent or control their anger and not become physically or verbally aggressive are able to stay out of trouble and solve problems or overcome obstacles in appropriate ways.

Academic Skills
Completing homework and turning it in on time, studying, taking tests, reading, doing learning activities, and taking notes during lectures are just a few of the areas where having good academic skills is necessary. And while we usually associate academics only with school, these skills are useful in any learning situation, whether it is with a teacher in a classroom or reading a book or working on a computer to expand one’s knowledge.

Ethical/Moral Skills
Skills that help a person learn positive ethics and morals contribute to building character and developing a conscience. A person’s ability to use ethical/moral skills provides the “moral compass” that helps him or her know right from wrong, good from bad, and prosocial from antisocial. Good character stems from knowing the right thing to do and following through.

Independent-Living Skills
People are able to perform the activities of life — cooking, shopping, keeping up an apartment or house, managing finances, balancing a checkbook, looking for a job, buying a car and making payments, and many others — because they have learned how to take care of themselves. Independent-living skills prepare people to be on their own and to contribute to society as a wage earner, a good neighbor, a productive citizen, and an independent person.

(In Appendix A at the end of this book, specific Curriculum skills are grouped according to these skill types.)
BASIC – SKILL 1

Following instructions

1. Look at the person.
   Rationale:
   Looking at the person shows that you are paying attention.
   Helpful hints:
   • Look at the person as you would a friend.
   • Don’t stare, make faces, or roll your eyes.
   • Look at the person throughout your conversation.
   • Avoid being distracted.
   • Looking at the person will help you understand his or her mood.

2. Say “Okay.”
   Rationale:
   Saying “Okay” lets the person know you understand.
   Helpful hints:
   • Answer right away.
   • Use a pleasant voice.
   • Speak clearly.
   • Smile and nod your head (if it is appropriate to do so).

3. Do what you’ve been asked right away.
   Rationale:
   You are more likely to remember exactly what you’re supposed to do if you do it right away.
Helpful hints:
• Complete each step of the task.
• Stay on task. Don’t let other things interfere.
• Do the best job you can.
• If you have problems, ask for help.

4.

Check back.

Rationale:
Checking back lets the person know that you have followed the instruction.

Helpful hints:
• Tell the person you have finished as soon as you are done.
• Explain exactly what you did.
• Ask if the job was done correctly.
• Correct anything that needs to be done over.
INTERMEDIATE – SKILL 22

Completing tasks

1. Listen carefully to instructions or directions for tasks.

2. Assemble the necessary tools or materials needed for the task.

3. Begin working carefully and neatly.

4. Remain focused on the task until it is completed.

5. Examine the product of your work to make sure it is complete.

6. Check back with the person who assigned the task.