

Autism Parenting Magazine

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TOP 5 SOCIAL SKILLS TIPS

for Teens with Special Needs

By Kirt MANECKE

Social skills are especially difficult for teens on the autism spectrum, but many of these skills can be learned, and with practice, can become habit. Social skills are critical in order to make friends, get a job, and to live a fulfilling life. Research from Harvard University says social skills are the top factor for getting a job.



In my former life, when hiring for my specialty retail business, I looked for friendly teens with good social skills. The ones who smiled, made good eye contact, were polite, and could hold a friendly conversation were hired. I knew that they could engage customers and keep them happy and coming back. Often, we are drawn to making friends with people who have these same good social skills.

Symptoms of autism and their severity can vary widely. In cases of high-functioning autism, teens may be able to use all the social skills listed below effectively. In other cases, perhaps you can pick and choose skills you think would be a good fit for your child.

To help teens with autism succeed in school, work, and life, here are five valuable tips:

1. SMILE AND SAY HELLO

When you see a friend or a customer, greet them promptly and politely – just as you would greet a guest in your home.

Here's How:

- Smile. Make it a warm, genuine, heartfelt smile.
- Look your friend or customer in the eye and say "Hello!" Speak in a warm, upbeat, and friendly manner. If you feel uncomfortable or feel like you're staring, look at the person's nose (no joke!).

In the world of work, this may sound basic, but you'd be surprised how many businesses fail to greet their customers properly. Indifference is one of the biggest reasons people don't return to a business. If you are a teen who is working or volunteering, or if you own your own business, you'll be way ahead of the pack if you greet customers with a smile and a friendly "hello." Customer service is important to where you work or volunteer because first impressions matter...a lot!

2. INTRODUCE YOURSELF: MAKE A FRIEND

Friends are people you like and trust. It's important to remember the golden rule: treat people the way you'd like to be treated. Be nice, be polite, and smile. Don't be afraid to initiate a conversation with someone you would like to know. Make a friend!

Here's How:

- Greet people with a smile and a warm "Hello!"
- Introduce yourself and shake hands. Say, "I'm _____ (your name). It's nice to meet you."
- Engage them in an initial short, friendly conversation and pay attention. Find out how they're doing: "It's nice to see you. How's your day going?"
- Ask questions to get the other person talking about him/herself. "Where do you go to school?" and/or "Where have you been on vacation?"
- Listen carefully. Before long, you'll probably find common interests and experiences you can talk about.
- Once you have met someone, don't hesitate to speak to them the next time you see them. This

is how good conversations and friendships are created.

When you are comfortable making new friends, it will be easier to initiate conversations with people at work or when volunteering.

3. CALL PEOPLE BY NAME

One of the best ways to make a great impression on a person is to remember his/her name and use it!

Here's How:

- Smile.
- Look them in the eye.
- Enthusiastically say, "Hello _____ (their name)."

Don't assume it's alright to call adults by their first name unless they are close friends or family members who have given you permission to do so.

4. SAY "PLEASE" AND "THANK YOU"

Good manners never go out of style. They are expected in all social and business situations.

SAY "PLEASE"

Say "please" when you request something from your family, friends, or customers. For example, "Would you please unlock your gate so we can mow your backyard?" Be sincere and genuine.

SAY "THANK YOU"

Say "thank you" when someone does something nice for you.

If you are working or volunteering, when a customer leaves your business, thank them for coming in. Say "thank you" in a warm and genuine manner. Or say, "Thank you for coming in. I look forward to seeing you again."

SAY "YOU'RE WELCOME"

When someone says "thank you," answer with a smile and a polite "you're welcome." Don't answer with "no problem," "sure," or "yep." Always treat others with the utmost respect.

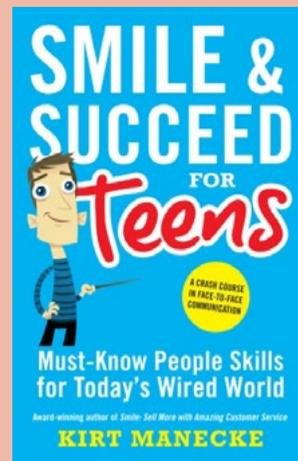
5. DRESS FOR SUCCESS

People form an opinion within the first few seconds of meeting you, and yes, they do judge a book by its cover.

At work or when volunteering, if you are not sure what you are wearing fits the dress code, it's safer to dress professionally. Keep your clothes, including uniforms, clean and neat. Wash them regularly. Keep your shoes clean and in good condition.

Pay attention to your grooming. In all situations, a neatly groomed, smartly-dressed look is best. Make sure you smell good! Shower or bathe daily. Avoid too much perfume or cologne – some people are very sensitive to smells. Keep your nails clean and hair neat. Have breath mints on hand to keep your breath smelling fresh!

These tips will ensure teens make a powerful first impression to succeed in school, work, and life.



Sections adapted from *Smile & Succeed for Teens* Copyright © 2014 by Kirt Manecke. Kirt Manecke is an award-winning author. His book *Smile & Succeed for Teens: Must-Know People Skills for Today's Wired World* is a crash course in social skills and job skills to ensure teens succeed. Teens learn to smile, make eye contact, shake hands, say hello, engage in conversation, interview and get a job, volunteer effectively, and more. For job skills training for adults with autism, Kirt's book *Smile: Sell More with Amazing Customer Service* is a crash course in customer service, people skills and sales. Contact Kirt at Kirt@SmiletheBook.com. Learn more at www.facebook.com/SmileandSucceedforTeens and www.SmiletheBook.com.

