

SOCIAL SKILLS



What teachers tend to look for

BY SHAUN DREISBACH

1st Grade:

Patience

In the classroom, being patient means waiting your turn and paying attention without fidgeting — no easy feat for the average wiggly kid. “A child who gives her full attention is going to hear and learn so much more from her teacher and classmates,” says Ashley Button, a kindergarten teacher in Atherton, CA.

How to teach it

Give your child lots of opportunities to entertain herself without your help. The next time she wants your attention when you’re busy doing something else, say you’ll be there in a few minutes and have her sing a tune or draw a picture to pass the time. Reading is also a great way to improve kids’ concentration. “As your child gets better at being patient, stretch out the amount of time she has to wait for you, or choose a slightly longer book to keep improving her focus,” says Michele Borba, Ed.D.

Assertiveness

Kids need to speak up for themselves by making eye contact and using “I” messages (“I felt sad when you cut me in line”). “I practice with my class, so kids learn to go to an adult only when they can’t work it out on their own,” says Julia Seligman, a first grade teacher in Essex, VT. Assertive kids excel because they aren’t afraid to ask questions.

How to teach it

Practice “I” messages, like saying “I feel frustrated when you leave your backpack in the middle of the hallway” or, in your kid’s case, “I don’t like it when you nag me to make my bed.” They not only help your child become more assertive, they beef up her body language, so she’s less likely to be bullied.

Resilience

“Many kids need to be taught it’s OK to make a mistake. It’s how we learn,” says Seligman. “When the classroom feels safe, kids let go of ‘What if I get it wrong?’ and take chances.” Gaining this skill now — when mistakes are small — pays off in a few years when, say, he’s called on to do a wicked calc problem.

How to teach it

When you mess up, point it out to your child, says Seligman. Then talk about what you learned for next time. “And compliment your child when he takes a chance — whether it pans out or not,” says Button.

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