



# Contents



INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS X

HELLO, FRIEND! XII

## 1 CHAPTER ONE: WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS (AND WHO CARES ABOUT THEM, ANYWAY)?

Activity 1: Decode Your Social Skill Superpowers 2

Activity 2: Going Blindfolded 4

Activity 3: When to Use Your Superpowers 5

Activity 4: What's the Story? 7

Activity 5: My Superpower Score 11

Activity 6: What Holds Me Back? 14



## 17 CHAPTER TWO: HOW TO TALK TO ANYBODY . . . AND EVERYBODY!

Activity 7: Conversation Starters 19

Activity 8: Goldilocks and the Three Questions 21

Activity 9: Throw It Back! 23

Activity 10: Keep the Conversation Ball Moving 25

Activity 11: Interruption Experiment 27

Activity 12: No One's the Boss of Us! 30

Activity 13: Spiderweb Talks 32

Activity 14: I'm Interested! Giving Body Language Clues 34

Activity 15: Time to Say Goodbye—Already? 36



## 40 CHAPTER THREE: LISTEN UP!

**Activity 16:** Body Bubbles 42

**Activity 17:** Practicing Patience 44

**Activity 18:** I Get It! 46

**Activity 19:** Are They Interested? Decoding Body Language Clues 48

**Activity 20:** The “Spreading Care” Experiment 51



## 55 CHAPTER FOUR: MAKING FRIENDS

**Activity 21:** Word Salad 56

**Activity 22:** Reframing Thought Bubbles 58

**Activity 23:** Finding My Awesomeness in Threes 61

**Activity 24:** What Do I Tell Myself? 63

**Activity 25:** How Do Others See Me? 64

**Activity 26:** What Ingredients Are in a Friend? 66

**Activity 27:** Map It Out! 68

**Activity 28:** Dos and Don'ts for Making Friends 70

**Activity 29:** Double Dutch 72

## 77 CHAPTER FIVE: KEEPING FRIENDS

**Activity 30:** How Sensitive Am I? 78

**Activity 31:** Common Social Rules vs. Sensitive Rules 81

**Activity 32:** When Three's a Crowd 84

**Activity 33:** The Friend Playbook 85

**Activity 34:** Did You Hear? 88

**Activity 35:** Let's Compromise! 90

**Activity 36:** But We're All Doing It! 93

**Activity 37:** What Do I Stand For? 96

**Activity 38:** To Tell or Not to Tell? 98



## **102 CHAPTER SIX: IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL**

**Activity 39:** I Spy With My Little Eye **103**

**Activity 40:** I Double Dare You! **105**

**Activity 41:** Connect the Dots **107**

**Activity 42:** Random Acts of Kindness **109**

**Activity 43:** Who, What, When? **111**

## **115 CHAPTER SEVEN: AT HOME AND IN OTHER HOMES**

**Activity 44:** Sharing Experiment **116**

**Activity 45:** The Should or Shouldn't Game **118**

**Activity 46:** Privacy, Please! **122**

**Activity 47:** I Aim to Impress! **123**

**Activity 48:** Serving Up Good Table Manners **125**

**Activity 49:** Can I Give You a Hand? **127**

**Activity 50:** Collage of My New Talents **130**

**RESOURCES 133**

**INDEX 134**



# *Introduction*

# FOR PARENTS

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As a parent, you know that **EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE**. They all come with their own amazing talents, skills, and personalities. Some kids are awesome at math, while other kids might need a little tutoring. Some kids can pick up a pencil and draw from their imagination, while other kids could use some coaching.

Just as with language, math, or art, kids have different abilities when it comes to social skills. Some children can intuitively sense how other people are feeling, while other children might need to develop those skills. Some kids naturally make friends, while others need to be taught skills on how to develop friendships. You are probably very much aware of where your child stands in this area, and where they could use some help. I'm here to tell you that this stuff can be learned—and it can really change a kid's confidence level and success in social situations.

And as with teaching math concepts or reading comprehension, social skills can be broken down into bite-size pieces that your child can digest and learn from. With this book and you as a supportive guide, your child can develop the essential social skills needed to be socially successful at school, in family situations, and out and about in the community.

Like any other skill, practice makes perfect. So I encourage you to read along, then help your child learn the skills outlined in this book and do the activities with them. Your child may be able to do them alone, but the skills taught in this book will become more solidified if you partner with your child to help them along the way.

Your child didn't learn how to read overnight—you remember how it took time and practice. They had to learn their letters before they could learn their words. Social skills are very much the same way. Your child will learn the building blocks of social interactions one step at a time, and each block will build on another.

It's also important to remember that kids learn at their own pace. Some kids will take these skills and run with them, while others might take some more time. Don't forget to celebrate the small steps along the way with high-fives, fist bumps, words of encouragement, and hugs! These small steps lead to big changes over time.

If your child continues to struggle even after working through the activities in this book, don't be afraid to consider professional help. A good child therapist can offer ongoing support and guidance to help you and your child navigate through these issues.

Now let's stop all this chitchat and get busy arming your child with social skills for confidence and success, shall we?

# *Hello,* **FRIEND!**

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**MAKING FRIENDS CAN BE HARD.** I know—really hard. It can be frustrating watching everyone around you make friends while you continue to struggle. I get it! When I was a child, my family moved around often. I found myself constantly in new schools, surrounded by new faces. I didn't know how to make friends. I waited hopelessly, wishing someone would approach me and try to be my friend. It rarely happened, so I often felt awkward and alone.

I don't want that to be your story. I wish someone had helped me build my confidence. I wish someone had encouraged me to make some brave moves. I wish someone had taught me how to start and keep conversations going, even with people I didn't know.

People with great social skills aren't in a secret club that you can't be a part of, even though it can feel that way sometimes. You can learn social skills! I didn't have this book, but eventually I learned how to grow my social skills. I learned what things were holding me back and how to fight through my fears. I even learned how to start conversations and finally, thankfully, how to make and keep friendships going.

Luckily, you don't have to wait as long as I did to get your social skill wings! I have written this book to teach you all the social skills you'll need right now to thrive in school, at home, and around the neighborhood.

First, I will teach you how to figure out what skills you already have, and what skills you will want to develop. I'm going to help you learn how to make friends and keep friends, and how to handle all the strange things that can happen in between (like when to tell on others, how to

handle gossip, and tons more). And the best part? We are going to do it in a fun, sometimes silly way, because learning new skills should never be boring!

One thing: It is important that you go through this book in order. Have you ever built a tower of blocks? Each block holds the other one up, right? Well, the same is true about this book. I've included 50 activities, which are things you can do on your own or with a family member. You will also find bonus activities that will help you test out your social skills in social situations. Each skill you learn builds on top of another. So if you want your tower to be strong and solid, don't skip any of the building blocks in this book. Do one activity at a time and then move on to the next one.

Okay, one other thing: You can't be a great ninja if you practice your ninja moves only once a month, right? Well, you also can't rock your social skills if you don't practice them. Practice makes perfect. So don't forget to do all your activities and practice the skills I teach you in each one.

Do you want to know who is awesome? You! Because you want to supercharge your social skills, and you are taking a giant step in the right direction.

Are you ready to get started? Let's do this!





## *Chapter One*

# WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS

(AND WHO CARES ABOUT THEM, ANYWAY)?

Do you ever wonder why it is so easy for some kids to make friends? Does it seem like everyone has a secret handbook on how to behave and act—except you? Trust me, there is no secret handbook and no secret sauce. The real trick is to know and understand *social skills*. Social skills are like superpowers, except that anyone can use them if they know how. Social skills help you know how to talk to people and how to behave at home, in school, and around your neighborhood. To answer the question, “Who cares about them, anyway?” you will soon learn that the answer is *pretty much everybody!* As with any skill, sometimes people need to learn and practice social skills to become a social skills master. And that’s exactly what we are going to do in this book. So let’s get started!

## Activity 1

# DECODE YOUR SOCIAL SKILL SUPERPOWERS

Why are social skills like superpowers? Because they can tell us so much about what is going on in any particular situation. Our social skill superpowers are always at work. We just need to pay attention to them! There are three main ways our superpowers get information—through what we *see*, *hear*, and *feel*.

Our superpowers help us understand what is happening, so we can decide how to act.

Let's learn how your superpowers work. Once you see how they work, you'll want to try them in new social situations as well.

## Directions

Look at the picture and answer the questions that follow.



**What do you see?**

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**What do you hear?**

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**What do you feel?**

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**Based on what you see, hear, and feel, what do you guess is going on in this picture?**

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**What do you think the girl sitting down needs right now?**

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**If you were on the field with her, what would you do?**

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## **BONUS ACTIVITY**

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Start thinking about your social skill superpowers. When watching kids at school or in the neighborhood, pay attention to exactly what you think is going on through what you see, hear, and feel.

## Activity 2

# GOING BLINDFOLDED

Have you ever tried to walk around blindfolded? If you did, you probably bumped into a lot of things. You might have even guessed you were in a completely different room! Not having social skills is kind of like being blindfolded. We need social skills to help guide us when we're with other people and talking to them. Social skills also help us know what to say, when to say it, and even how to say it. Can you imagine not having the skills to do any of that? Without social skills, we'd be lost!

Do you want to see what I mean?

## What you need

- Someone in your family
- Something to cover your eyes

## Directions

Cover your eyes and walk around your room. Try to find the doorknob. Make sure that someone is in the room watching you to make sure you don't get hurt.

Was it easy to get around your room?

Did you bump into things?

Did you feel lost?

That's kind of how it would feel to not have any social skills. Luckily, you already have some social skills, and throughout this book you are going to develop, grow, and sharpen your social skills even more. There will be no blindfolds for you when it comes to social skills—in fact, you will learn to use all your senses to know what to do!

# WHEN TO USE YOUR SUPERPOWERS

The cool thing about social skills is that we are using them even when we don't know we are using them. That's weird, right? We are constantly watching, hearing, and feeling what is going on around us. What you see, hear, and feel can give you clues about what to do next.

Let's see how these clues help you out.

## Directions

Read the following social situations. In the column next to each one, write which social skill superpower will help you the most: seeing, hearing, or feeling. (Hint: It can be all three!)

SOCIAL SITUATION	SOCIAL SKILL SUPERPOWER USED [WRITE SEE, HEAR, AND/OR FEEL]
You are sitting in class and someone is crying behind you.	
You are playing with three friends. One friend has his head down and a frown on his face.	
You are at lunch and a bunch of kids are talking about your favorite video game.	
A student is asking everyone around her if she can borrow a pencil.	
A bunch of girls are teasing a boy. His face gets red and his eyes tear up.	

## WHEN TO USE YOUR SUPERPOWERS, *continued*

SOCIAL SITUATION	SOCIAL SKILL SUPERPOWER USED [WRITE SEE, HEAR, AND/OR FEEL]
You call out the answer in class without raising your hand, and your teacher scolds you in front of everyone.	
Your teacher's hands are full, and she is trying to open the door.	
Everyone is playing tag except the new girl sitting alone on the grass.	

Look at your responses. Which social skill superpower do you use the most? Do you pay attention to what you see the most? Hear? Or feel? Maybe you do all three, or a combination of two of them?

Write down which ones you use the most in social situations, and which ones you want to develop and grow.

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## WHAT'S THE STORY?

The more you use your social skill superpowers, the better they will become. I want to teach you how to be more observant, aware, and tuned in to what's happening around you. When you spend time watching, listening, and sharing the feelings of those around you, your superpowers will explode!

You can practice sharpening your skills all the time, even when you're just sitting somewhere. One of my favorite things to do is "people watch." People can be so interesting. Why are they making that face? What is making them run so fast? Are they late? What is that couple arguing about? Why is that little girl crying? Trying to figure out why people are doing what they're doing is a good way to practice your social skill superpowers.

### Directions

Let's practice tuning in to what is going on. Below are situations that cause different emotions. Copy them onto small pieces of paper, fold each one, and put them in a bowl. Ask a few family members to play Emotion Charades with you. Pick out a situation from the bowl, but don't tell anyone what you got. Act it out without using any words. Can they guess what is going on? Did they guess the right emotion? Take turns being the one acting and the one guessing.

You are scared because you are lost.	You are angry you can't go to the party.
You are excited you got a present.	You are upset you lost your favorite book.
You are sad because your friend moved to a different school.	You are stressed out about a project.
You are happy you got a great grade on a test.	You are hurt that you weren't included in a playground game.
You are surprised by your grandparents' visit.	You are annoyed that you have to clean your room.

## WHAT'S THE STORY?, *continued*

There are mysteries and stories all around us, all the time.

If you want to grow your powers to notice what is happening around you, play this simple game.



### BONUS ACTIVITY

Go to a public place. This can be the park, a restaurant, your school—practically anywhere will work. Sit quietly in one spot and open up your eyes, ears, and heart.

Find a person or people to watch and observe.

In your imagination or on the lines provided, make up a story about what you think is going on.

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**What did you *see* that helped you make up your story?**

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**What did you *hear* that helped you make up your story?**

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**What did you *feel* that helped you make up your story?**

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When you become observant and really notice what is happening around you, you will become a better friend. If you see a friend who is in a hurry, you won't keep them waiting. If you notice a friend who isn't playing at recess, you will take the time to make sure they're okay. The more observant you are, the more tuned in you'll be to those around you.

## TOP 10 EVERYDAY SOCIAL SKILLS

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It may seem like there are an awful lot of social skills to learn. Some you'll use every now and then, and some you'll use all the time. Here's a quick list of the top 10 social skills that you can use every day:

1. Be friendly and smile at others.
2. Be considerate and thoughtful of those around you. This includes not touching others without asking.
3. Share and wait your turn.
4. Be calm and control your emotions, especially anger.
5. Don't talk unkindly about other people.
6. Ask people questions about themselves.
7. Ask other people to play with you.
8. Have good manners and be polite.
9. Make good eye contact and don't mumble.
10. Don't hog the conversation. Take turns talking and listening.



## MY SUPERPOWER SCORE

By now you should have a good idea about what all the fuss is around social skills. Just as in math, writing, or art, we all have our talents. Some of us are great at math, and some of us (like me!) have to really practice. Some of us are awesome at drawing, and some of us have to be taught how to draw well.

Social skills are the same way. Some people have great social skills, and some of us have to learn how to improve our superpowers. Either way it's okay, because learning these skills is fun and really easy to do.

Let's figure out how you feel about your own social skills right now, so we can discover where you want to grow. This will also help you see all the superpowers you stand to gain by the end of our time together in this book.

### Directions

Read each social skill superpower and put a check mark where you think you are. Don't worry if you have some areas you need help on—that's what this book is for! If you can think of other social skills not mentioned here, fill them in at the bottom.

SOCIAL SKILL	NEED HELP	PRETTY GOOD	DOING GREAT!
Talking to kids I know			
Talking to kids I don't know			
Talking to adults I know			
Talking to adults I don't know			

## MY SUPERPOWER SCORE, *continued*

SOCIAL SKILL	NEED HELP	PRETTY GOOD	DOING GREAT!
Starting a conversation			
Entering a group conversation			
Keeping a conversation going			
Ending a conversation			
Making new friends			
Playing/hanging out with others			
Keeping friendships going			
Making plans with friends			
Raising my hand at school			
Asking for help			

SOCIAL SKILL	NEED HELP	PRETTY GOOD	DOING GREAT!
Standing up for others			
Talking to a friend's parent			
Feeling comfortable at a friend's house			
Feeling comfortable at sleepovers			
Fill in:			
Fill in:			

Look at your results. You may have areas you're doing great in, and others you're not comfortable with yet. That's fine! In this book, you will find activities that focus on skills you already have, and some that will target skills that you may need help improving. But even if you don't need help in a certain area, it's still a good idea to do all the activities. A little extra practice is always useful, and you may learn something new anyway—even if you're already good at it! However, be sure to pay extra-close attention to the activities where you need some help. In fact, it can even help to go back later and revisit those activities from time to time to continue to grow and strengthen those skills.

## Activity 6

# WHAT HOLDS ME BACK?

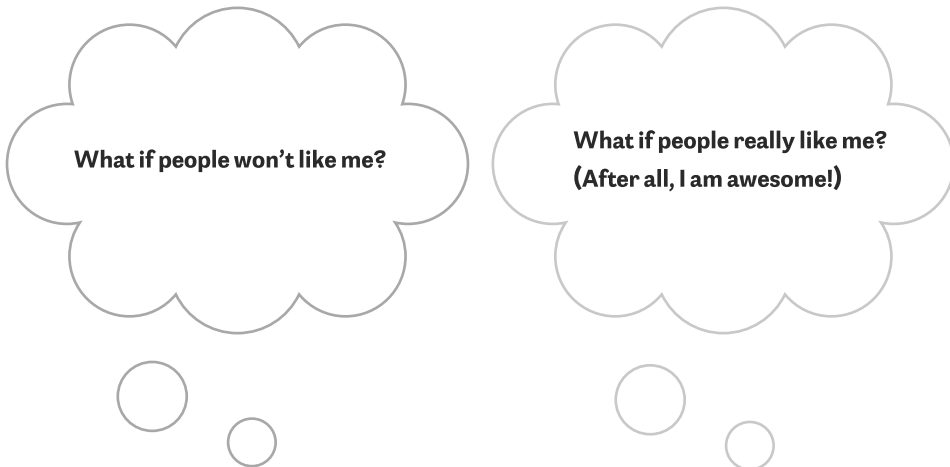
Have you ever told yourself, *I can't do this!*? Many of us lose some of our superpowers because of the things we tell ourselves. What we tell ourselves can have incredible power over us. It can make us scared in situations that aren't really scary and, worse yet, it can make us give up before we even begin.

What kinds of situations make you feel doubtful? What situations do you avoid? What do you think might be holding you back from joining conversations, being in social situations, or even making friends? Do you have fears that are bubbling under the surface?

## Directions

Fill in the following thought bubbles with some of your biggest worries around social situations or making friends. Write your worries in red. Now go back and write a positive thought in green. Sometimes when we change the way we look at things, we can make ourselves feel much more confident.

### Example:





## YOU CRACKED THE CODE!

Hey, awesome sauce! You just finished your first chapter and, believe it or not, you are well on your way to creating some amazing social skill superpowers!

Think about what you've already learned. You now know that:

- Social skills are like superpowers that help us wherever we go
- Social skills involve what we see, hear, and feel
- Social skills can be learned and practiced

You also know some new things about yourself:

- What social skills you have that are already strong, and which ones you want to grow
- What fears you may have around being social and making and keeping friends, and how you can shift your thinking from negative to positive

But this party is just getting started! In chapter 2, you're going to learn how to talk to everybody and anybody. That means exploring how to:

- Start a conversation
- Keep a conversation going
- Know what questions to ask
- Keep from being bossy
- End a conversation

Conversation skills can be tricky for many kids, but I'll walk you through them, one step at a time.



## *Chapter Two*

# HOW TO TALK TO ANYBODY . . . AND EVERYBODY!

Learning how to talk to people is a bit like riding a bike for the first time. It can seem tricky. With a bike, you might need some training wheels, so you can practice riding while building your confidence. As you go, you might worry you'll fall off and get hurt. You might get frustrated that it seems as if everyone around you can ride with ease. You might even want to give up or just completely avoid it! But just be patient—once you master how to do it, riding a bike becomes super easy.

Guess what? The same goes with learning how to talk to people. It can be scary at first. You might be thinking, *How do I start a conversation? What should I ask? How does a conversation end? What if my feelings get hurt?*

But when you learn how to talk to people one step at a time, one small pedal at a time, it won't seem as scary. Before you know it, you'll say, *What was all that worrying about? I can totally do this!* When you do things in small bites, building skills of any kind can lead to big changes and awesome progress. So let's go take some small bites and get you on your way!