

AngelSense

**Help Your Child
with Special Needs
REACH THEIR FULL
POTENTIAL**



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INTRODUCTION



When you have a child with special needs, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed by the constant struggle with what professionals refer to as delays, disabilities and challenges. When children with special needs spend most of their time working on their area of weakness, you will invariably see improvement over time, but this doesn't encourage engagement and motivation to learn and achieve more.

There are many things we as parents can do to help our child make the most of his or her abilities and interests. We know better than anyone else what our child is capable of and can make their future brighter by helping them reach their full potential.

This guide was created to provide practical tips for promoting success in three areas: **Social Skills, Learning Skills and Emotional & Physical Health**. I hope you find them useful and easy to implement with your own child.

Happy reading!

Sincerely yours,

Sharon Scharf
Editor In-Chief



ACQUIRING SOCIAL SKILLS

10 Easy to Implement Strategies to Help Develop Your Special Child's Social Skills

Social skills are essential for every child's development, and can impact how they perform in the classroom, workplace and later on in life. For children with special needs these skills are crucial for personal achievement and mental health. If they don't develop these skills at an early age they are more likely to feel isolated and lonely as adolescents.

Can social skills be taught?

Parents hoping to develop their special child's social skills need to understand that each child has unique strengths and weaknesses. Techniques that may work for one child may be ineffective for another. It's also worth remembering that social skills tend to be among the most nuanced and complicated to learn.

While there isn't an easy to follow checklist to help your child navigate social interaction, there are many practical strategies you can teach your child at home which can be effective if practiced regularly.

1. Use social stories to help your child understand social norms

[Social stories](#) are one of the most powerful ways to help a child with special needs better understand social situations. These are written or visual guides which turn everyday social situations into stories. These stories should be told in a way that's easy for your child to understand and relate to. The idea is that that this helps a child understand social cues and teaches them to see social situations from another person's perspective. See details on recommended [Stories2Learn](#) app for creating social stories [below](#).

2. Create comic strip conversations to emphasize social cues

[Comic strip conversations](#) can help improve a child's understanding of social situations. The cartoons are used to turn abstract aspects of communication, like pauses and turn-taking, into visual representations. To illustrate the importance of not interrupting others, you can draw two speech bubbles that overlap. You could then draw two separate bubbles that don't overlap to emphasize the importance of not interrupting in conversation.

3. Teach your child the 'hidden curriculum'

Many of the rules which govern social interaction, such as expressing sympathy to someone who is crying, are taken for granted. For children with special needs, however, these are the hardest rules to master because they may not pick them up naturally. If your child is struggling with these unwritten social conventions, it's important that you teach them as rules.

A good example of this is if someone puts a jacket over a chair in a public space as a way of claiming it. While most people will understand the significance of this, a special child could easily misunderstand and snatch the chair. In certain settings such as the classroom, this may be problematic and could result in your child being accused of stealing someone else's seat.

4. Practice and role-play with your child

A great way to prepare your child for social situations is to rehearse different scenarios with them. This is the perfect opportunity to practice any social cues your child may struggle with. For example, if your child tends to dominate conversations you could practice turn taking and asking questions. This is also a good way to teach your child about how conversations work.

Some parents like to use social scripts as a way to rehearse different social situations. These help the child learn a scripted question which enables them to engage others in conversation such as: "What did you eat for lunch?" Once the child has memorized the script, they should be encouraged to use it spontaneously.

5. Teach your child to recognize context clues

Paying close attention to what others are doing can help a special child fit in. Context clues can help your child understand what's expected in different situations. A good example is if everyone in the class stands, your child will know they have to stand too.

6. Teach your child to be empathetic

Empathy is key for effective social interaction as it's an indicator that one has the ability to see things from another's perspective. Children with special needs often struggle to express empathy, but can be taught to respond in an empathetic manner. You'll need to teach your child to be aware of others' feelings and emotions as well as how to react to them.

7. Teach your child to respect social boundaries

The ability to understand and respect social boundaries is an integral part of effective social interaction. It's important that your child understands that certain topics are appropriate to talk about in specific situations but not appropriate for others. For example, your child may need to learn not to talk about what they do in the bathroom while at the dinner table. Your child also needs to learn to maintain personal body space during conversations. Ideally your child should maintain an arm's length between them and the person they're having a conversation with.

8. Use video modeling to teach specific skills

Video modeling is seen to be a simple and very effective way to teach a special child a specific social skill. The child watches a video which demonstrates the skill and is then encouraged to imitate the behavior. If done properly, video modeling has been found to improve social, communication and play skills.

9. Focus on your child's interests

By focusing on your child's interests, you can make social interaction a positive and enjoyable experience. If your child is particularly interested in trains, for example, you can organize an outing for your child and a few other kids to a nearby train museum. This can help make the interaction less stressful and will also give your child the opportunity to shine.

10. Find a buddy for your child

Find a student in your child's class with good communication skills that is willing to spend some time with your child during recess. This will help teach your child about appropriate social interaction and will also give them someone to model.

Read more about [developing communication skills](#).

Children with special needs struggle with social skills. However, with a lot hard work and patience these strategies can give your child the tools they need to become more socially adept.



DEVELOPING LEARNING SKILLS

Tips from a Special Ed Teacher on How to Make the Most of Your Child's School Experience

Advice for parents on helping kids with special needs thrive in their education, offered by **Jayne Clare**, a thirty-year veteran teacher in special education.

1. What are the most effective learning strategies you have used with children with special needs?

I believe that all children need to know that you care. Taking the time to get to know your students and making connections is paramount. I always try and pinpoint a specific interest(s) that individual students have and tailor their program around that. By accommodating the range of abilities, prior experiences, needs, and interests of each student, the ultimate goal of bringing every student to a higher level of achievement is attainable.

Technology has been a tremendous tool in working with children with special needs. Tech provides the opportunity to personalize learning for each student's day and approach by allowing for differentiation of instruction and learning outcomes.

Digital devices are advancing rapidly and smart tools are more sophisticated than ever. The days of the old traditional file folders and bulky assistive tech are over. For children with cognitive and physical disabilities, technology can give access to learning opportunities previously closed to them. For the language impaired, voice-adaptive software has changed lives, giving many children a voice they never had before. Many children are experiencing a less restrictive school day and the learning opportunities available are of a much higher caliber. Here are a few learning apps I recommend:

- [5 Apps for Autism & Communication](#)
- [iDo by C.E.T \(The Center for Educational Technology\)](#) is a new series of 5 apps for teaching and learning about activities of daily living.
- [7 Reading Readiness Apps for Special Needs Students](#)

For more learning apps go to [5 Mom-Approved Apps to Help Develop Your Special Child's Skills](#)

2. How can parents support their child with special needs and help them succeed at school?

As a veteran teacher in a public school, I know that communication with families is essential. As a parent, I would suggest asking to have a meeting with your child's team at the beginning of the school year to make sure that your child's program is completely understood, share strengths and trigger points and ask questions. Letting the team know that you are an involved parent and available, is key.

The techniques used to foster a school-home connection have been changing rapidly, where once writing in a home-to-school journal was popular, technology has changed all that via email, skype, or texting. Some schools have built-in communication procedures through apps that provide a complete learning management system.

3. What can parents do to promote learning at home?

Instead of asking your child questions like "What did you do in school today?" ask open ended questions that require specific answers. For example "Who did you sit next to in circle time?" or "What story did the teacher read today?" Talking about their experiences at school can reinforce learning. Remember to take advantage of teachable moments. Recognizing teachable moments in everyday life may not come naturally to all parents. They can happen anywhere - in the supermarket, driving your child to school, when walking through a park or making dinner. Chances are many of the valuable conventional lessons that you learned from your parents as a child were not consciously taught at all.

4. What are the techniques you recommend for behavior management at school that parents can implement at home?

Teachers and parents can be proactive in preventing behavior problems, by incorporating positive strategies that support behavior improvement. This can be as simple as a technique called Planned Ignoring. This happens when the teacher/parent intentionally ignores a behavior, and does not give in to it. For example if a child screams to get ice cream, you ignore the behavior to the best of your ability. But, be sure to give them the ice cream when they ask for it in an appropriate way, to give positive reinforcement. Be aware, when you are ignoring a behavior that the child has used successfully in the past to get their way, it may worsen before it gets better. Additional techniques include:

- **The look** - cues or signals from the teacher/parent that communicate disapproval to the child, could include “the look” or some other predetermined action that has been agreed upon with the child.
- **Interest boosting** - engaging the student in a conversation about something they’re interested in (such as sports), or going over to the child and demonstrating an interest in whatever they are doing at that moment can also deter undesirable behaviors.
- **“Kidding the youngster out of it”** - may reduce the severity of inappropriate behavior, as long as the humor is not sarcastic or used in a way to demean the child.

Fritz Redl coined many of these terms in the 1950’s and you can read more about them [here](#).

5. What are the most important things you would like parents to know about your work as a Special Ed teacher?

I would like parents to know that this teacher puts children first and that **parent-teacher support and cooperation is essential**. If we aim to help our students achieve success, we must provide them with a personalized learning program. Teachers and parents can cooperate, creating the child's IEP together. Finding the right balance of involvement is critical, trust your child's teacher, keep the door open for communication, but at the same time don't abuse it. If we all work together your child will be given the best opportunity to reach their potential. To sum it up, I always share my favorite quote by Melvin Konner (author of *Childhood: A Multicultural View*): "In order to be treated fairly and equally, children have to be treated differently."



Jayne Clare, a thirty-year veteran teacher in special education, has been a leader in introducing educational technology into the classroom. She is co-founder of TeachersWithApps, an NSBA "20 to Watch" Leader Advancing Education Technology, and weekly host of EdAppTalk, an open table Facebook Group. She has worked with Brainpop facilitating webinars, served as an educational curator for many organizations and is an avid blogger. School reform, diversity, and reading readiness are among her favorite topics.

5 Mom-Approved Special Needs Apps to Help Develop Your Child's Skills

For special needs parents, apps are an invaluable resource which can be used to support a special child's emotional and social development. Apps can be a highly effective and engaging way to help a child with special needs develop a range of new skills.

Apps are particularly useful for nonverbal children in improving their ability to convey ideas clearly while at the same time also improving their language skills. In fact, one study found that the use of an [iPad significantly increased the communication abilities](#) of a minimally verbal child with autism.

What you need to consider before downloading an app

There's such an extensive selection of apps available for download that sometimes finding the ideal app for your child can be overwhelming. Before you decide on an app, here are a few considerations that should help you narrow down your options.

What are your child's unique needs?

Every special child has their own set of developmental challenges. It's important to keep this in mind when choosing an app. By selecting an app which addresses your child's specific needs, you can ensure your child gets the most out of the learning experience.

How credible is the app?

Because anyone can make an app, it's important to check that the app is suitable for a child with special needs. It's a good idea to do some research on the app creators and the other apps they've released.

Does your child's teacher approve?

For best results, it's recommended that you use apps which are already being used in the classroom. This ensures that learning happens consistently. The other option is to have your child's teacher review the app before you let your child play with it.



To help you get started, we asked parents from the AngelSense community to share their favorite apps with us. These do more than simply keeping a child entertained. Each app focuses on developing a specific skill set, such as organizational or communication skills.

1. Learn with Rufus



This is the ideal app for teaching a child to recognize and understand different facial expressions. Using this app, a child learns to make the connection between different expressions and emotions such as sadness, happiness and anger. The app has a selection of different games that can be customized to suit your child's unique needs.

- **Skills developed:** social skills
- **Level of difficulty:** easy; medium; hard
- **Ages:** 4 and up
- **Devices:** iOS; Android; Kindle Fire
- **Price:** \$4.99

2. Stories2Learn



Parents and teachers can use this app to create engaging social stories using photos, text and audio. These social stories make it easy to teach a child social skills and can also be used to improve literacy. The app comes preloaded with 12 social narratives ideal for teaching playground rules, turn-taking and non-verbal communication. It's also easy to create your own social story to emphasize something a child is learning such as making eye contact.

- **Skills developed:** social skills; literacy
- **Level of difficulty:** easy; medium; hard
- **Ages:** 5 and up
- **Devices:** iOS
- **Price:** \$13.99

3. First then visual schedule



This app helps you create visual schedules that are a great way to create structure and help a child with special needs understand what is expected of them. It's easy to create visual schedules for everything from daily routines to specific activities. Using an app like this to break down aspects of the daily routine such as brushing teeth, brushing hair and getting dressed, will help your child deal with transitions.

- **Skills developed:** organizational skills
- **Level of difficulty:** easy
- **Ages:** 5 and up
- **Devices:** iOS; Android
- **Price:** \$9.99

4. Communicate Easy



This app is specially designed to help children with autism who struggle with communicating clearly. There is an extensive selection of features which include the option to create communication cards from photos, video and sound effects. These cards can be used to teach new concepts, such as table manners, as well as new vocabulary.

- **Skills developed:** communication skills, vocabulary
- **Level of difficulty:** easy
- **Ages:** 5 and up
- **Devices:** iOS
- **Price:** \$2.99

5. [The Monster at the End of This Book](#)



Created by Sesame Street, this app is a fun and highly engaging way to teach basic reading skills and to teach children about emotions. The app also helps get across the idea of cause and effect as children will learn that by touching certain buttons they can interact with it. The app comes with pointers for parents such as: encourage your child to mimic the monster's movements and gestures.

- **Skills developed:** literacy; fine motor
- **Level of difficulty:** easy
- **Ages:** 6 and up
- **Devices:** iOS
- **Price:** \$4.99

Get more recommendations for learning tools:

[Mom-approved toys](#)

[Books for special needs families](#)

Apps are a great way to keep a child with special needs engaged while also teaching them new skills. However, as useful as they are, it's important to understand that they're only one of the many developmental tools available to your child. Be sure not to become overly reliant on an app to keep your child occupied, and remember that nothing can replace real interaction with other children.



PROMOTING EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

10 Mind-Body Therapies That Can Improve Your Child's Health and Well-Being

The mind-body connection explores the link between feelings and thoughts and one's overall health. This relationship is complex and tends to be overlooked when it comes to helping children with special needs cope with everyday life. However certain mind-body practices have been found to relieve stress, anxiety and give special children a sense of control. In fact, one study found that after eight sessions of Nei Yang Gong, a traditional Chinese mind-body exercise, children with autism had more emotional control and fewer temper tantrums.

How can mind-body therapies help your special child?

Alternative therapies are likely to make it easier for your child to manage difficult situations such as social interactions and transitions. These therapies are designed to give your child the tools they need to cope with emotional overwhelm and social anxiety. The hope is that in doing so they'll also have an impact on your child's overall health and well-being.

Keep in mind that there are many different alternative therapies for children with special needs, and not all of them will be suitable or safe for your child. It's important to thoroughly research a new form of treatment before taking your child for a session. You may also want to check with your child's doctor beforehand. This will give you a good idea of any unusual behavior to look out for, as well as risks you should be aware of.

Why many parents are excited about this type of therapy

Many special needs parents are proud advocates of mind-body therapies. This is largely because in addition to helping special children manage anxiety, this form of therapy is the ideal opportunity to develop new skills. Here are just a few of the skills your child is likely to work on:

- **Communication and social skills**

Certain therapies, such as dance therapy, give a child the chance to interact with others. This teaches them valuable skills like sharing, making eye contact and turn-taking.

- **Motor skills**

Therapies, like art therapy, are the ideal creative outlet for children with special needs. This enables them to work on their fine-motor and visual perception skills while also letting them hone their artistic expression.

- Self-esteem

Because many of these therapies rely on a child's ability to act independently, they are the perfect way to build self-esteem.

Some of the best mind-body therapies for children with special needs



1. Art Therapy

Art therapy is a unique form of treatment which gives children with special needs an outlet for thoughts and feelings they struggle to convey verbally. A child generally works with a therapist to create something based on their strengths, weaknesses and interests. In addition to serving as an outlet for creative expression, art therapy can also teach the child to interact with others. This form of therapy tends to be very relaxing and helps children with attention difficulties to focus. Many children also find the sense of accomplishment after completing a creative project very rewarding.

2. Dance Therapy

This form of therapy relies on different movements and dance routines as a form of creative expression and nonverbal communication. One of the most appealing things about dance therapy is that it gives special children the opportunity to express themselves in a safe and relaxed environment where almost anything goes. It can be done one-on-one with a therapist or as a group. Either way, it's a very effective way to teach a child to interact and bond with others.

“ **Christina Devereaux Ph.D, BC-DMT, dance therapist, shared her experience:**

I worked for several years with a girl on the autism spectrum that was non-verbal...I remember a day very vividly when we were moving together in a dance/movement therapy group with other children and we were warming up our torso, twisting from side to side... At one point, in our twisting dance we actually began twisting towards each other spontaneously, and then away. As we twisted towards each other, I put my hand up and non-verbally offered to connect with her hand. She took me up on this offer and touched her hand with mine. This spontaneous greeting that occurred non-verbally then turned into a wave, then grew spontaneously into a high five, and culminated in a verbal expression, she said, “Hi”.

”

3. Equine Therapy

Equine therapy uses horses to help children with special needs develop physical, emotional and cognitive skills. This form of therapy is very useful for improving a child's coordination as well as their muscle

tone. Many therapists also use this as a way to help children form emotional bonds. During a therapy session, a child may be encouraged to touch, brush and hug the horse. This teaches the child to care for another living creature and be considerate of the feelings and needs of others.

“ **A mother whose son, 11, has been participating in therapeutic riding for years said:**

It's been good for so many reasons, Adam happens to be deaf with autism. He started riding when he was 3. He didn't have a lot of core strength, and his gait was a little unstable. Since then, his strength and gait have improved, among other things. She believes therapeutic riding helped her son by stimulating his senses of sight, smell, touch, and movement or motion. It opens up their brain and neurology to communication and ultimately has an impact on their self-esteem.

”

4. Yoga Therapy

An increasingly popular form of treatment for both adults and children alike, yoga has been found to have numerous benefits for children with special needs. Yoga incorporates different rhythmic movements, postures, breathing exercises and other meditative exercises. In addition to increasing the body strength and flexibility of children, yoga has also been found to alleviate pain, anxiety and other aggressive behaviors. It has even been effective in helping some children deal with their emotions better and make new friends.

5. Horticultural Therapy

Horticultural therapy exposes children with special needs to gardening-related activities to achieve specific therapeutic goals. This is a very effective form of therapy for overcoming sensory issues as gardening introduces a child to new sensations without overwhelming them. In addition, this develops a child's fine-motor skills, coordination and listening skills. Some gardening activities rely on group work, making them perfect activities for improving social skills like eye-contact and turn-taking.



6. Ecotherapy

The idea behind ecotherapy is to immerse children with special needs in nature so as to alleviate stress, anxiety and aggressive behavior. The therapy is tailored to the specific needs of the child, and may involve everything from simply sitting in a quiet park to exploring a forest. Some studies suggest that children who are given structured

time outdoors showed improved [cognitive function, memory and an increased attention span](#). Green spaces tend to have a calming effect on special children as they're quieter and help them avoid sensory overwhelm.

7. Drama Therapy

Using performances and acting, drama therapy gives children with autism a safe space to develop social skills and serves as a creative outlet for their feelings. Depending on the specific needs of the child being treated, the therapy may include aspects of everything from storytelling and role play to mime. Typically the therapy is given in groups, making it the ideal way to work on a child's social interaction. It is also seen to be an effective way to develop a child's self-esteem, communication skills and imagination.

8. Tai Chi

Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art which incorporates slow movements and places an emphasis on deep breathing and meditative focus. In addition to having a calming effect and helping alleviate stress, Tai Chi can be used to improve balance, coordination and motor skills.

9. Aquatic Therapy

For children with sensory issues, aquatic therapy may be the ideal option. This includes a series of water exercises which a therapist tailors to suit a child's specific needs. Water not only decreases body weight

but also helps relax muscles which makes it easier for a child to work on things like posture, balance and coordination. The pressure exerted on the child's body by the water has a calming effect and also helps in reducing excess energy while improving appetite and sleeping habits. Aquatic therapy has been found to be effective for improving a child's cognitive abilities including attention span, impulse control and the ability to follow instructions.

10. Dolphin Therapy

There are many different types of dolphin therapy. It's seen to be quite a controversial form of treatment with many remaining skeptical about its efficacy. However, some children who've undergone this treatment are noticeably calmer and have an increased attention span and improved communication skills. During treatment, a therapist encourages children to touch, feed and pet the animals. While it does vary from child to child, most of the treatment focuses on improving speech, motor skills and other behavior.

Read more about alternative therapies:

[Music Therapy](#)

[Pet Therapy](#)

For many parents, mind-body therapies are seen to be a promising alternative to riskier treatments. While there is no guarantee that they'll alleviate all your child's difficulties, they're likely to have a noticeable impact on their stress levels and overall well-being.

SUMMARY

As parents, we can help our child with special needs achieve more if we make sure their learning experience is tailored to their interests and areas of strength, not only to areas in which they experience difficulties. In this guide, we detailed tools and programs designed to help your child reach their full potential in various areas. The key is to pinpoint the specific ones that are right for your child, drawing him or her in, helping them stay engaged in the learning process and ultimately helping them achieve more success at school and in life.

ABOUT US

- **AngelSense** is the Only GPS and Voice-Monitoring Solution designed specifically for the special needs community.
- **AngelSense** provides protection from the dangers of wandering, bullying and mistreatment.
- **AngelSense** gives parents & caregivers peace of mind knowing that their loved ones can be protected, heard and found, no matter where they are.



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