8 Ways to Help Your Child Pick Up on Social Cues

Does your child have difficulty “reading” other people’s body language? Do they misunderstand what’s happening in social situations? Are you unsure on just how to help them get through the “social” events at school and in the community? Below we have compiled a few things that you can do to help your child pick up better the common social cues they may be missing.

Remember some of these things MAY not be something they can fully achieve due to the way they process the environment!

1. **Practice making eye contact**
   
   Encourage your child to look at your eyes when you two talk. When they are focused on your face, they can see your expressions change. (Make sure your eyes are on them when they speak to you, too.) Ask them to tell you what they think your expressions mean. If they don’t know, explain the message you were sending.

2. **Encourage attention**
   
   Give your child your full attention when you’re talking to them. By doing so, you’re setting a great example. Save texting and checking your email for another time. Try not to let your mind wander. If you notice your child spacing off when you’re speaking to them, gently guide them back to you and the conversation by saying something like “Can you please look at my face when I’m talking to you?”

3. **Observe your child’s expressions**
   
   Help your child realize how expressive their own face can be. This can help them notice other people’s facial expressions. When you see an expression on their face, take this time to say something like, “Your eyebrows are raised. Are you feeling surprised?” or “That’s a big smile. Tell me what you’re so happy about.”

4. **Notice others’ body language**
   
   Help your child begin to see what the people around them are “saying” with their bodies. Playing charades can be a fun way to get kids thinking about communicating through their bodies. Also, point out the behavior of people you see: “The man in that line is tapping his foot and fidgeting. How do you think he feels?” Talk through how characters on TV are feeling based on their body language.

5. **Discuss what’s expected in different situations**
   
   How your child talks on the playground to friends shouldn’t be the same as how they would address the principal. Kids who have trouble with social cues might not realize this. Talk with your child about the different people they interact with regularly. Who might get a high five? Who can you joke around with? Who gets a formal hello? Who do you need to show respect towards?
6. **Point out pitch and tone**

Some kids have trouble noticing changes in voice, this is otherwise known as inflections. When that happens, your child might miss a bigger message because they are taking the “speech” too literally. So help them notice nuances in pitch and tone. Talk through how the same statement (for example, “Can you please turn off the tv”) can be a simple request or an angry demand, depending on how you say it.

7. **Practice inflections**

If your child is learning to or even can read well aloud, have them read to you or with you regularly. Choose stories that have lots of dialogue. That way they can practice changing their voice or hear how you change your voice, depending on how the character is feeling or what they are trying to say. If your child doesn’t read well or struggles with reading, feel free to read the whole story to them especially if the book has lots of dialogue. Or you may want to get an audiobook so they can hear how the characters change their voices and you can then discuss it with them.

8. **Role-play common scenarios**

Kids who have trouble with social cues can benefit from practicing everyday interactions. Try role-playing different situations with your child. Respond to things they say or do using body language and expressions. Ask your child what messages you’re sending out and how they might react to them.