

Social skills and children's well-being

Dear Parents

November 8th 2014 has been designated „the day against bullying“ (by... ???)Accordingly, Reykjavík's Department for School and Leisure has decided to stress the importance of parents, schools and leisure activities in supporting children's social skills. Undoubtedly social skills are a powerful preventive measure against mobbing and other violent behaviour.(compulsive)

Benedikt Bragi Sigurðsson, psychologist, emphasises the following points of view regarding the importance of social skills. It helps children to understand other children, to make friends and communicate with adults. Social skills help young people to stand by their decisions, to resist peer pressure, give them courage and knowledge to make new friends and to express their opinion in front of others. Social skills help adults to seek jobs, find partners, make new friends and bring up their children with confidence. It can also prove preventive against depression, make people feel better and help them adjust to different environment and situations.

In his presentation Benedikt Bragi mentions several issues concerning social skills and problems which children experience, their state of health and other conditions that he has dealt with as a psychologist and wants to share with others. His conclusions are aimed at parents but are of relevance to all professionals working with children.

His research will not be dealt with in depth here. Benedikt Bragi presents his theories in a brief and concise manner. The City of Kópavogur and Reykjavík's Department of School and Leisure sponsored his work.

Social skills and children's well being

Conflict and fighting frequently occurs in children's communications. It is expected and normal, children are children, and they are testing their boundaries and learning how to establish good relationship. Most of the time, the problems are perhaps minor and will be easily resolved without any interference from adults, and without having a lasting impact on the children. However, in many cases the relationship becomes problematic and difficult to control. Accordingly, it is important to contemplate what we can do better.

Benedikt Bragi Sigurðsson psychologist has presented following guidelines:

These are important for parents to keep in mind

- To intervene as soon as possible when things are going wrong.

- To act correctly
- To teach children social skills decisively

There is no need to consider the first entry too long. I simply urge parents to act immediately if the communications are going wrong. Communications problems in the classroom become constantly more severe over a longer period of time. It is easier to find a solution if they are confronted at an early stage. Ideally it has proved most effective when parents start to communicate at the beginning of school.

How to intervene successfully or incorrectly is probably a delicate subject but has to be dealt with. I know numerous examples of futile approaches by parents who make serious mistakes and the children's problem get worse. The parents are of course trying to help and doing their best but do not succeed. Following examples are, in my view, not likely to help the kids.

- To form parents 'groups within the class where some parents are excluded. I have heard people say „there is no use to contact Gunna and Jón, they just don't know how to bring up their children “or „this family is getting nowhere. “
- To reprimand other peoples 'children instead of speaking to their parents
- To choose the children's friends
- To send email containing slander about some parents, children or the class teacher
- To be unable to admit the need for improvement when they or their children are concerned but put the blame on others instead.

A short list of advice if there communications problems in the class

- Take part and discuss the problem. Don't be passive. It is your responsibility to help the children to solve the crisis.
- Contact everyone involved. It can be hard and opinions differ but the children lose if the parents are unable to find a solution.
- Be positive and constructive. Avoid pointing at culprits, specifically when dealing with young children. First of all, consider how to assist and solve the problem.
- Examine your child through the eyes of others. You are not doing your child a favor if you are constantly seeking someone else to blame.
- Keep the class teacher informed from the beginning. The teacher has the oversight and is in a key position to solve the problem

Children's social skills

To train children's social skills is, in my opinion, often neglected.

What are social skills?

Here are some examples:

- To show empathy

- Forgiveness
- Realise why people ask for forgiveness
- Share
- Participate in a play even though others have chosen it, not only according to your choice.
- Listen
- Help others
- Not to call people names
- No teasing
- No stealing
- No hitting others
- Keeping one's promises
- Know how to stop fighting, give in, surrender and forgive and forget
- Be responsible, admit one's own fault

Most children learn social skills by themselves, somehow. They play together, disagree and fight and solve their differences. They learn from experience and how to use that knowledge. However, children acquire this knowledge differently.

Parents can help. They can accelerate the process by sharing their knowledge and experience. Tell stories from their own childhood do role plays or discuss with their children at home.

Social skills are important. Enormously important. They help children understand other children, to develop friendship and communicate with adults. Social skills help young people to be assertive, resist peer pressure and gain courage and knowledge to make new friends and stand in front of a meeting.

Social skills help adults to find jobs, partners, make new acquaintances and bring up their children. They can prevent depression, improve health and wellbeing and adjust to different circumstances.

Social problems can, of course, make children anxious. Therefore I will end this by listing symptoms that indicate anxiety and depression. This is a short summary but will make it easier to recognise the signs and react accordingly.

Anxiety

Anxiety is displayed in many different ways. It can appear as irrational fear of spiders or similar things, being afraid of other's think, to speak in front of others or to communicate. Anxiety can be seen as fear of losing someone or not wanting to leave something or someone. Children often fear that they will lose their parents and want them with them all the time. Symptoms of anxiety are when you feel out of control, that you are choking, your heart is exploding, that you will faint and you fear that this will occur over and over again. Anxiety means that you worry all the time but not necessarily about the same things.

Anxiety symptoms sometimes reflect your behavioral pattern. For example postponing and cancelling some chores. Not going swimming, not putting up your hand in class, not calling a friend or avoiding

sleeping over with friends. Not be able to enter the classroom without parental support. Anxiety is sometimes displayed as physical symptoms like stomach pain and headache. Negative thinking is characteristic "I do not want to be late for school or put up my hand in class because everyone will stare at me, I am not save unless dad comes with me into the classroom, I do not want to sleep over with a friend because something horrible is bound to happen". Feeling bad all the time also indicates anxiety, sometimes described by the child but sometimes displayed as abnormal behaviour or thoughts, and physical symptoms.

In my work as psychologist, the most serious problem I encounter is when a child is in denial and those close to it back it up. For example when a child who fears school cries in the evening and morning (frequently on Sunday nights), describes stomach aches etc. Then it is very important to guide the child and help it meet its requirements and take it to school instead of staying at home. How parents react can make the child more anxious and therefore it is important to consider carefully which steps to take.

Depression

Depression is a serious condition which has to be dealt with as soon as possible. The reason for depression seems to be rooted in social problems so it is very important to establish social skills and good social life early on. More women than men suffer from depression.

Be aware of these symptoms

- Sadness
- Irritation, changes in diet and weight loss or gain
- Different sleeping pattern
- Loss of energy
- Loss of interest
- Loss of concentration
- Thoughts and expressions about death and suicide
- Feeling of guilt and insignificance
- Persistent negative thinking and negative self-image

In the case of depression, there are several things to take into account. It has proved useful to find new approaches to change the way people think, and underscore the positive things in life. If communications with the closest relations are difficult, try to put them right and also if different views and ideas are ruining normal communications and social lives. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyse how problems are solved or if they are solved at all. It is pivotal to encourage engagement, social life, family life and social skills. Moreover, sleeping pattern, diet, recreation and motion call for simultaneous consideration.

If signs of depression are apparent, consultation should be sought from a GP, a school nurse, a school counsellor or a psychologist. If depression or anxiety is confirmed, the disorder has to be treated. Treatments which have proved successful are cognitive behavioral therapy and medication, for example.