Using Puppets to Teach Social & Emotional Skills

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Puppets are MAGIC! Children relate to puppets and are interactive with them in special ways. They are perceived by young children as “real” people. Using puppets is a great way to teach children about feelings, being friendly, solving problems positively, calming themselves down, and many other important social skills.

In a paper on “Social Skills and Positive Mental Health,” Dr. Lynne Namka writes that **play** is an integral part of growing up and is based on specific skills. Play offers the child an opportunity to learn to deal with the adult world. Play helps stimulate the neurons at the synapse level to strengthen brain function. In play, children learn to express their emotions as called for by the rules of the social setting. Children use play to distinguish between real and imaginary situations. They use play-fighting to practice skills of physical contact and competition. Most children naturally learn to read facial gestures and other nonverbal communication so that they can respond with the appropriate skill required of the situation. Playing with puppets is a fun way for children to play and practice problem solving, expressing emotions, and social skills.

Here are some guidelines that have worked well for me:

1. Start with one puppet and become comfortable with it. Practice using a “voice” and then stick with it. You do NOT have to be a ventriloquist—children are very accepting. As you become more comfortable, you can add to your puppet family.
2. Don’t let kids play with the puppets you teach with—have extra puppets for them to use for play. When you set the puppet down, do so respectfully. When I introduce a puppet, I do it just as I would a real child. I also don’t let kids punch or pinch the puppets; I teach them how to be “friendly” to a new person.
3. I check with the classroom teacher to see what the current “issues” are in the classroom and use one puppet to introduce this issue. This way, a child isn’t put on the spot and children can identify with the puppet who has the same kind of problems that they have.

**Helpful Resources:**

Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning at Vanderbilt University – [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel)

Puppet Universe – [www.puppetuniverse.com](http://www.puppetuniverse.com)

\*Let’s plan a sample lesson!

**My Favorite Books that help Teach Social/Emotional Skills**

Important Lesson Modules to teach to young children:

1. Following Rules
2. Emotions/Feelings/Self Calming
3. Solving Problems – ( Ex: Share, Use Your Words, Ignore, Walk Away, Take Turns, Kindness, Get Help from an Adult)

\*I usually teach 6 – 8 lessons in each module.

**\*Books dealing with Feelings**

**TITLE AUTHOR**

Little Beaver and The Echo Amy MacDonald

Ruby Maggie Glenn

How Are You Peeling? Saxton Freymann

When My Worries Get Too Big Kari Buron

Nobody Notices Minerva Wednesday Kirwan

I Am Not A Crybaby Norma Simon

When Sophie Gets Angry Molly Bang

**\*Books dealing with Friendship**

Bubba & Trixie Lisa Ernst

I Wish I Were A Butterfly Ed Young

Best Friends for Francis Russell Hoban

How To Lose All Your Friends Nancy Carlson

Do You Want to Play Bob Kolar

We Share Everything Robert Munsch

Rosie & Michael Judith Viorsh

**\*Books dealing with Behavior**

David Goes to School David Shannon

David Gets in Trouble David Shannon

No, David, No David Shannon

Toads & Diamonds Robert Bender

Mean Soup Betsy Everitt

The Recess Queen Alexis O’Neill

\*There is an extensive book list on the CSEFEL website: *www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel*