

# After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



## Lesson 2: Joining in

*After the Buzz* presents ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social skills and the social thinking the children have learnt in the session. Children rely on our commitment to consolidate these skills by modelling them, and emphasising the language and the ideas used in the lesson. Here are a few practical ideas parents can do at home to support the quality of their child's social thinking based on Lesson 2 "Joining in". If your child struggles to join in, or struggles with social skills in general, a sensible response is to gradually coach them how to use particular skill sets. There are many ways to coach.

If your child struggles to 'join in', or struggles with social skills in general, a sensible response is to gradually coach them how-to use particular skill sets. There are many ways to coach. Let's explore a few ideas;

### Being a great coach

Be sure to catch your child when they are feeling receptive. Great coaches always pick responsive moments. They keep it brief, engaging and move on. Remember that for children to experiment with new ideas, skills and behaviours, they need to feel connected to and accepted by you. With this in mind, consistently chip away to help your child move from old and unhelpful habits to new and improved versions. So often a behaviour that appears as unfriendly, too highly spirited or aggressive is more a measure of immature, clumsy social thinking. So persist and go gently.

### The 'art' to improved social skills and better behaviour

There is an 'art' to coaching and effectively moving towards the behaviours you want. It is a style where you are determined to catch your kids doing the behaviours you value, and praising them for those actions and positive attempts. Giving praise to children in this way is like fertilizing the behaviours we want! The behaviours you give attention to are the behaviours that will grow.

### Big books and video diaries

Continue to develop a *Big Book* or video diary at home with your child and reinforce key learning points from each lesson. For Lesson 2, take photographs of your child role-playing with family members, using a few of the role-play ideas from the lesson. Add captions and speech bubbles to highlight vital social messages. This is an appealing way for your child to re-experience and strengthen the key social principles from each lesson.

### Toy and puppet play

Another fun alternative to follow up on a few of the role-play ideas from the lesson is to create a play about joining in. Get your child involved by using their favourite toys, puppets or homemade sock puppets as characters.

### Secret signals

When you are working on encouraging a new set of skills invent a secret signal to prompt this new behaviour. It may be as simple as quietly saying, "Sam, do you need a tissue?" Or, the prompt might be a light squeeze of their hand or



a ruffle to their hair. In this case the prompt would mean, 'Remember what you need to do to 'join in'? Now is the right time to do it.' And, when they respond positively by using their skills, praise them! Direct instruction and praise, in the company of patience, is the most valuable behaviour shaping tool.

### **Raise your child's social contacts**

Sometimes a child's social confidence can be boosted by increasing their frequency of interaction with other children. This is certainly not a plan to overwhelm them. Rather a calculated and stepped idea to gradually increase their social contacts, confidence and independence. Start small and be prepared to directly supervise the interactions. Younger children certainly require greater direction and supervision. Begin by having just one friend over.

#### Start with a short, highly supervised playover

Arrange something for your child and their friend to eat and drink, then immerse them in a short structured activity together. Stay in close proximity especially when they are sharing resources. You might help them share by clarifying what their goals are. Ask, "Are you building one big thing together or a small one each?" When an impasse arises, frame the dispute; "Do you both want the same toy? Got any ideas about how you can share it?" Express your willingness to help them come up with a great sharing idea. If they struggle to share simply state that you will remove the toy until they come up with a plan to share it. Do your best to manipulate an enjoyable time and take the friend home after just thirty minutes. That's right - start by creating short, very structured playovers.

#### A cook-up after school

Set up a visit so your child and their friend cook something and eat the spoils afterwards. Once again keep the visit short, structured and happy.

#### Head off to the park or playground

Take your child and their friend to visit a nearby park or playground for just twenty minutes. Then take the friend home. Make it short and memorable!

#### Sports practice

Whether it's in the backyard, at the local oval or courts, structure a time for your child and their friend to practice their sporting interest together. Continue to keep the playtime short, structured and happy.

#### Go to the local shopping centre

Get your child and their friend a drink and something to eat at a café. Sit with them for a while and encourage conversation. After a while let them know you have to go to a shop nearby. Suggest that when they have finished they head to a particular shop they know for a look around; the bike shop, the newsagency or pet shop. Tell them that you will meet them there. In truth, keep a close eye on them, but allow them the freedom to brose independently for a while.

#### Go on, go a little further

Take your child and their friend to a place they are both likely to enjoy – swimming pool, beach, a recreational centre, bike riding, tadpoling, frog hunting or some other structured activity. Pack a snack or lunch, and be sure to tell them their play has to be fairly brief - it's surprising how quickly so many interesting things can be found to do when time is at risk!

#### Invite a friend over for a meal, a movie together and then take them home!

This obvious structure guarantees a delightful win for all. Plan ahead - it may be a good idea for the younger brother or sister who often has 'nuisance value' to be placed into the care of a relative or one of your friends while the friend visits.

### **Practice makes perfect**

The safest place for your child to sharpen their 'joining in' skills is around family members. Expect everyone to use the right language and the right moves when it comes to joining into a conversation. When you walk up to several family members who may be playing or are in conversation model the 'joining in' skills yourself. Your own modelling is a powerful influence on your children! As you see their confidence grow, start to raise your expectations. Expect these skills to be used when they're at family functions, and then at school.

As an incentive for your child to continue using these skills, or any other skills you may wish to develop, create a token chart or token system over a month or so until the skill becomes embedded. A token system gives progressive, positive feedback to kids about what is valued. It establishes a desirable behaviour by 'charting' their success on to something like a traditional 'star chart'. Star charts, or similar, provide a motivating way to help children to stay excited about a goal. Then, as they succeed, they can see their effort nudging them towards the agreed incentive. When used cleverly token systems are always great little helpers.

## Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from [www.whatsthebuzz.net.au](http://www.whatsthebuzz.net.au)