

# 8 tips for helping kids with social skills challenges cope with the holiday season



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Holiday events are supposed to be fun. But when kids have **trouble with social skills**, these events can pose challenges and create stress. Use these eight simple tips to help your child successfully navigate this very social season.

## 1. Practice hellos and goodbyes.

The more you practice, the easier it will be for your child to call up the right words. It doesn't have to be a lot: "Hi, it's nice to see you!" and "Thanks for having me — I had a good time" will usually do it.

## 2. Tell your child what to expect.

Let your child know how the day will unfold. (If you're not sure, ask your hosts in advance.) You might say something like, "When we get there, the kids will be watching football or playing downstairs. After an hour, we'll have dinner. The kids will sit at their own table. Then it's dessert, and then we'll go home." Your child may feel more relaxed knowing what's going to happen next. You can also brainstorm **ways to handle certain situations**.

## 3. Script some conversation starters.

Help your child develop some general questions to break the ice with other kids. Some ideas: "Do you play any sports?" or "What shows do you like to watch?" With older kids,

come up with a few news items about sports or celebrities to talk about.

## **4. Help your child join a group.**

Before you head off to mingle with the adults, help your child get settled. If the kids are playing charades — and your child doesn't enjoy that game — ask if they need a timekeeper. Or if it's a game your child *does* like, you can help by saying something like, "Jamie would love to play too. Do you have room for another player?"

## **5. Role-play opening presents.**

If there's going to be a gift exchange, have your child practice opening presents and saying thank you. Rehearse the possible scenarios: Not liking the gift, already having one, or loving it. You can take turns acting out how to sound grateful whatever the situation.

## **6. Help your child make conversation with adults.**

It's natural for adults at holiday gatherings to ask kids what they've been up to. Kids with social skills challenges may not like talking about school or their achievements and activities. Set your child up to have something positive to say in response to these questions. For example, "Why don't you tell Aunt Emma about how you trained our new puppy?"

## **7. Go over hosting duties.**

Having the get-together at your house can be a plus. Your child may feel more comfortable at home. You may want to give your child a job, like answering the door and showing people where to put their coats. Remind your child to let the guests pick the movie or the game to play. And if it's an adult-oriented event, you may want to let your child wander off to do kid stuff after saying hello. Kids who have already attended several holiday events may have had enough.

## **8. Point out what your child did well.**

If your child did a nice job saying thank you, or had a nice conversation with cousins, be sure to mention it afterward. Recognition can mean a lot — and give your child more

**confidence** going into the next holiday event.

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