

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Soft Skills Can Be Hard!

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Jack and Jill, two recent college graduates, applied for the same job. Jack was the student body president and graduated at the top of his class. Jill played on the school's softball team and had average grades. During their interviews, Jack spoke about the time and effort he

invested in his campaign to defeat his opponent to become the student body president. Jill shared about her work as part of a team to establish a peer mentoring program at the college. Jack left his interview confident that his accomplishments and resume would win him the job. Jill felt like she communicated well during the interview and connected with her interviewer. One week after the interviews, the company called and offered Jill the job. So how did Jill land the job over Jack's impeccable resume? Jill had better soft skills.

### What Are "Soft Skills"?

Simply put, soft skills are your people skills and intuition. More specifically, they are the social and communication skills you use when you interact with others. Soft skills include your personality, attitude, and habits – all of which come together to make up who you are. Soft skills determine how effectively you can get along and work with others. Examples of soft skills include communication, cooperation, leadership, self-motivation, integrity, responsibility, critical thinking, positive attitude, flexibility, and more.



Why are soft skills important? Soft skills are often the key to determining how successful you will be at a job. Hard skills, such as how to operate a piece of machinery or how to calculate an interest rate, are easier to teach than soft skills because soft skills are determined more by a person's personality than by knowledge. Since soft skills can be hard to teach, employers often look for individuals who already possess the soft skills they need to be successful.



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## Ideas to Cultivate Students' Soft Skills

If soft skills are hard to teach, how do you teach them? Here are a few ideas you can use to foster students' development of soft skills:

- **Start early.** Soft skills are easier to learn when students are exposed to them before they become "set in their ways."
- **Help students identify skills to work on.** Provide students with suggestions for skills to focus on. Suggestions can be part of a student's individual performance evaluation or recommendations for your entire class or family.
- **Explain the importance of individual skills.** Have a discussion about why a particular skill is important. Consider what might happen in situations if the skill is lacking.
- **Encourage students to set goals.** Once students have identified skills to work on, urge them to think about how they will demonstrate they have learned the skill. Help them develop a plan for achieving their goals and a way to measure progress toward their goals.

- **Give students opportunities to practice skills.** As students practice their skills, their confidence increases. The more confident they are in their abilities, the easier it becomes to continue to use the skills they are practicing.
- **Be a role model.** If you model the soft skills you would like your students to develop, they will see the effectiveness of the skills.



While soft skills can be difficult to teach, they are not impossible to teach. By starting early and demonstrating the importance and value of soft skills, we can prepare our students for future success.

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