

# Handy Handouts®

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## Unique Communication Needs of Teenagers

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Teenagers are individuals between the ages of 13 to 19. Another word for teenagers is adolescents. As a group, teenagers face unique challenges as they grow from childhood and prepare to enter adulthood. This can be a very stressful time. Also, school demands increase for teenagers, and they need to be more independent as they manage challenging assignments, interact with peers, and participate in extracurricular activities such as music, dance, sports, etc. To do all of this, they must communicate clearly and effectively. For a teenager with special needs (such as a language or learning disability), the struggle to “keep up,” “fit in,” or “say the right thing” can be even more difficult.

There are many different skills a teenager must acquire to be successful in both school and social situations. *Interpersonal communication*, or communication between people, is one of the most important skills. Learning interpersonal skills is a normal part of growing and developing. The more teenagers interact with their peers in and out of the classroom, the more opportunities they have to develop good communication.

### Classroom Communication - “Making the Grade”

*Classroom communication* includes reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Teenagers need to be successful with these tasks to do well in school. A deficit in one or more of these areas may result in poor grades and poor self-esteem. Some specific communication skills teenagers need to understand and use include: higher-level vocabulary, figurative language or “reading between the lines,” and pragmatics or social skills. Social skills in group activities include

turn taking, staying on topic, and requesting or giving information. Showing proper body language, expressing feelings, and being polite are other important communication skills that help a teenager succeed in the classroom.



### Social Communication - Making Friends

*Social communication* includes verbal (spoken) and nonverbal (unspoken) interactions. During the teen years, social communication is especially important. Teenagers strongly focus on relationships with their peers. They want to make friends and go out together. To do this successfully, they need to communicate socially. Some social-language situations include: making plans for the weekend, solving problems between friends, and working together on a project outside of school. All of these situations require certain language and vocabulary. Each situation also requires teenagers to use nonverbal communication like eye contact and respecting one’s “personal space.” A teenager who struggles to communicate socially—either verbally, nonverbally, or both—may appear shy, become angry, or have difficulty with confrontation, such as a bully.



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## Ways to Practice Communication Skills

There are many ways to practice classroom- and social-communication skills. Teenagers with special needs, in particular, may need direct teaching for these skills. Try these ideas to give teenagers opportunities to communicate with each other.



**Role-playing** – Put teenagers in small groups. Give them a situation like “Pretend you are standing at your lockers. You are making plans with your classmates to work on the science project outside of school. What would you say?” Have them practice the situation in their group then act out the situation in front of the class.



**Videos** – Let teenagers see video examples of individuals communicating in different situations both in and out of the



**Peer Mentoring** – Pair teenagers together for a variety of activities. A peer mentor can “coach” another student by giving advice about schoolwork, friendships, etc. Check with the guidance counselor, social worker, or school psychologist for further suggestions about ways in which peers can support each other.



**Extracurricular Activities** – Involve teenagers in activities like sports, clubs, or volunteer work.

These activities provide many opportunities for building communication skills—and friendships.



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