

# social maturity

## the problem:

The social maturity of children with AD/HD may be a few years behind that of their peers. In addition, they have difficulty reading verbal and physical social cues, misinterpreting remarks, or not getting jokes or games. Thus, their responses and reactions are often inappropriate, and they may have trouble making and keeping friends their own age.

## the reason:

AD/HD is a developmental disorder in which brain maturation is delayed. The student's development may also be uneven. Students may behave appropriately in some situations but not in others, leading some unenlightened adults to believe "they can behave when they want to."

## the obstacles:

AD/HD children are usually not aware of how immature or off-base they may seem to peers and adults. They cannot adequately "read" other people's responses to their behavior. Desperate for positive attention, they may try behavior that is outrageous, funny, or negative, mistakenly believing it will gain them friends and respect. They may be ostracized by their peers and singled out by teachers, which hurts their self-esteem.

## SOLUTIONS

### IN THE CLASSROOM:

**Understanding the developmental level of your AD/HD student is critical. While a child's academic performance may be up to par, socially he or she may lag several years behind the rest of the class.**

- + **Do not expect the child to behave as responsibly or rationally as his classmates.** Thinking of him as two or three years younger than the group will help you better understand and respond to his needs.
- + **Never embarrass or humiliate an AD/HD child in your classroom** for off-target social behavior. Whatever their maturity level, children with AD/HD often don't learn social skills "naturally." These skills have to be taught.
- + **Work privately with the student to provide appropriate words and phrases** to use with peers, and practice them one-on-one repeatedly. Provide opportunities for the student to work with small groups, and monitor interactions closely to minimize difficulties with peers.
- + **In some special-needs classes and schools, teachers post "emotion" drawings or photos**

**on the wall**, displaying a variety of facial expressions with words describing what they mean ("Angry," "Sad," "Surprised"). These visual reminders help AD/HD students interpret situations that occur in life. The rest of the class does not have to know that the drawings are only for your AD/HD students.

- + **Praise the child in front of peers for work that's well done.** Increased self-esteem and peer recognition can occur when a student's special skills or talents are highlighted and shared with the group. The child will not have to resort to antics and off-target remarks to get the attention he needs.

**AT HOME:** **Adjust your expectations to recognize that your child's understanding and behaviors are often those of a much younger child. With this knowledge in mind, try to give your child directions or instructions that a child perhaps two years younger could understand and accomplish easily.**

- + **Identify your child's strengths and interests** by providing

opportunities to explore special gifts and talents. Expose him or her to music, various sports, art, cooking, or any other hobby that can lead to mastery and a greater sense of self.

- + **Be a coach to your child by role-playing and rehearsing everyday situations and appropriate responses.** Exhibit appropriate behaviors yourself, and discuss with your child social situations in your own life and how you decided to respond.
- + **If possible, locate a social skills remediation group in your area** and enroll your child so he can practice in a "safe" environment.
- + **Children with AD/HD are often great playmates and babysitters to younger children.** In such situations they can exercise their positive caring traits while not being threatened by peer relationships that don't match up.
- + **Get involved in your child's activities** if the adults in charge don't understand the reason for your child's immaturity. Many parents of AD/HD kids volunteer to lead Scout troops, coach Little League, or supervise community service efforts to be with their child.