

Rebuilding Social Skills During the Summer

There's no doubt that children's social skills have become rusty over the past year and not progressed as they should have. With more limited interactions than usual, children have experienced adverse effects on their social **development**. And while many children have had the opportunity to engage in some school setting and/or activity, there were still restrictions on what type of interactions they could have. Now, as reopening efforts continue, it's imperative we use the summer to help children regain lost social skills and build new ones. This will give them more social confidence when returning to school in the fall.

With all the changes to our lives in the last 12 months, **anxiety** surrounding social relations has increased and caused a sense of unsureness, especially for children. School settings and extracurricular activities have always been where children develop most of their skill set for social situations. With the lack of opportunities during the past year, progress has not only been halted, but many children have taken a step backward in their age-appropriate social **development**. Knowing this, parents and teachers can now begin helping children rebuild these skills. Providing opportunities this summer is the perfect opportunity to help children get a jumpstart before school starts.

Since we know that children need a refresher course to restore their social skill set, parents need to find opportunities to help their children do this. A few things can be done at home to get the ball rolling again. Opening a conversation for children to voice their concerns regarding expectations for social situations can help gauge what children are feeling. Role-playing scenarios can help children be prepared for how different types of social interactions may play out. This can lead the way to stimulate their social skills. But as with anything, real-world experience is critical in locking in the skills and confidence.

One of the best options for rebuilding social skills this summer is through the **SKILLZ** program. The fun, whole-child approach creates an environment that encourages social

interactions between children in age-appropriate groups. The engaging, game-based approach allows for quality social interactions but in a smaller group setting. In addition, the **Certified Pediatric Ninja Specialists** that run each class are supportive and encourage social interactions. And to help solidify new skills, the **Parent SKILLZ** program also gives parents quick tips on staying attuned to their child's emotions and behaviors so they can improve their child's social development outside of the classroom as well.

As we continue to navigate through the apprehension of social situations with our children, we must be **patient** and **attuned** to their reactions. Involving them in programs and activities that offer nurturing social environments will help build their social confidence again. This will ultimately help them regain lost skills while also building new ones to get them back to where they should be developmentally. Children can then return to school and activities with a rejuvenated sense of social appropriateness and support in the fall.