

Social Skills in Children With PWS



Social skills are about more than making friends.

They include communicating, taking turns in conversation, solving problems, managing emotions, and understanding another person's perspective.

Many children with Prader-Willi syndrome are socially motivated and want to connect with others, but may need more direct teaching and practice to build these skills.



Conversation

Trouble with back-and-forth or staying on a shared topic.



Social Cues

Trouble reading facial expressions, emotions, or other social cues.



Perspective Taking

Trouble seeing another person's point of view or how their words affect others.



Personal Space

May stand too close or focus on someone's mouth instead of their eyes.

Why do social skills tend to be harder in PWS?

PWS can affect several skills involved in social interaction, including:

- Speech and motor planning
- Emotional regulation
- Cognitive processing
- Understanding social cues
- Perspective taking

Hyperphagia may also make social interaction harder when thoughts about food compete for attention.

What Helps Build Social Skills?

Make social situations structured.

A game, craft, puzzle, or planned activity can be easier to navigate than simply being told to “go play.”

Practice with other people.

Create opportunities to practice with siblings, peers, adults, social groups, friendship clubs, or group therapy settings.

Teach skills directly.

Clear, concrete rules and reminders can help children understand expectations that other children may pick up naturally.

Practice recognizing emotions.

Use pictures, social stories, games, or everyday situations to talk about facial expressions and what another person may be feeling.

Use pretend play.

Pretend and imaginative play can help children practice perspective taking, flexibility, emotional regulation, and responding to another person’s ideas.

Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Children with PWS often benefit from repeated practice across different people and settings.

Start Interventions Early

Speech therapy and physical therapy can support skills that affect social development. As children get older, practicing social skills in a group can provide opportunities to use those skills with peers in real time.

Does PWS subtype matter?

Children with UPD or imprinting defect subtype of PWS may be more likely to have significant social challenges or autism spectrum disorder.

Children with all PWS genetic subtypes can benefit from social-skills support.



The Foundation for Prader-Willi Research funds innovative research and builds resources to accelerate treatments and improve lives.

Want to learn more about social skills in PWS?

<https://www.fpwr.org/social-skills-and-prader-willi-syndrome>

