

The perfect square



Specific Scholastic Issue

Social skills play a crucial role in our everyday life. Because we thrive on social interaction, developing our students' social skills can provide them with the tools they need to become more socially competent and effectively interact with family, friends, and peers. We use social skills to communicate our messages, thoughts, and feelings, as well as to interact with one another, both vocally and non-verbally. Being aware of how we communicate with others, the messages we send, and how communication methods might be modified to make communication more efficient and successful are all part of developing social skills. Speech, gestures, facial expressions, and body language are examples of verbal and nonverbal communication. When speaking with others, a person has good social skills if they know how to behave in social situations and comprehend both stated and implicit rules. Social skills are essential for establishing and maintaining positive interactions with people.

Many of these abilities are necessary for forming and maintaining friendships. For instance, when challenges in social relationships appear, an individual must be able to resort to suitable techniques, such as conflict resolution. Individuals must also have 'empathy' (the ability to imagine oneself in another's position and recognize their feelings) to respond to how others are feeling in a compassionate and understanding manner. As students grow, their social skills must be refined regularly through a range of activities and methods. With work and practice, these skills can be developed and strengthened.

Students with good social skills benefit from a variety of advantages, including:

- Improved ability to communicate with peers and adults
- Development of self-awareness



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- Improved cooperative collaboration (teamwork)
- Greater ability to create and attain personal objectives
- Improved persistence
- Better emotional management skills
- Improved active listening abilities
- A more positive atmosphere in the classroom
- A boost in self-esteem
- Increased ability to function in social situations daily
- Improved nonverbal as well as verbal communication
- Increased efficiency at school/ better academic performance
- Reduced anxiety, stress and tension in social situations
- An increase in personal pleasure and fulfilment
- Improved mental, social, and emotional well-being

Objectives

- Promotion of EU citizenship, EU and democratic values and human rights
- Development of empathic behaviour at school

Emotional Intelligence Areas

- Empathy
- Social skills

Learning Path

This activity is a good way to develop students' social skills and build cooperation and trust between students as well as communication skills. The activity involves low physical activity and a low degree of emotional stress so all students can participate. The activity can be carried out in the classroom or the schoolyard. However, before the activity check that the space you intend to use is safe. If the group size exceeds 12 students consider running the activity with several teams at the same time.

The activity is short and energetic and asks small teams to communicate and collaborate when they can't see one another or their progress. The task is easily achieved if most members in a group are on the same wavelength - with small amendments. The students find it easier to understand each other and they tend to agree when / if they know how to negotiate and empathise even when they do not share similar interests or opinions. They express themselves freely and openly as they know that their contribution is valued. The activity is also focused on leadership. The challenge is to turn a rope lying in the form of a circle on the ground into a square when they are blindfolded.

What you need: a suitable length of rope of 10 meters for each circle of students.



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1. Explain that this task requires good verbal communication and collaboration.
2. Get students into groups of 10/12 at most.
3. Tell the students to stand in a circle their faces looking towards the centre of the circle.
4. Give each group of students the rope and tell them to hold it with both hands so that it forms a circle. Once the circle is formed, they can place the rope on the floor/ground.
5. Then the students put on their blindfolds. Their task is to work together to pick up the rope from the ground and form a perfect square out of the circle while blindfolded.

When the team thinks that they have completed the task by forming a square the activity ends. Participants then take off their blindfolds and see the final result.

If you have time, you can carry out the activity a second time and give the team the chance to do better. If the task is too challenging one of the participants is not blindfolded and can guide his/her peers.

To make it more challenging, you can set a time limit or have some participants who are not allowed to talk during the activity.

If the team completes the square easily, you can also instruct them to make different shapes to challenge them.

How they interacted among them

The activity was carried out with students in the fifth grade; their team was not formed yet and didn't know each other too well. They didn't communicate too well: they didn't listen to each other nor did they manage to come up with ideas, promote and negotiate them. They found it difficult to negotiate and make common decisions on the strategy to follow. That was why they needed help and support. We helped them by allowing one of the students per each group not to be blindfolded (leaders). They stood outside their group and guided their peers on what to do. The groups were supposed to listen to their leader and follow their instructions. However, their success (achieving their task effectively: turning the circular rope into a square) depended on their leader's social skills (listening, understanding others' needs or views and valuing their input, his ability to guide or direct others) and communication skills. This involves both personal and interpersonal skills that are essential for guiding others and uniting individuals as a team. We noticed that the leader's ability to motivate and persuade the others affected the group's performance. Some of the leaders gained agreement and cooperation within their group which led to a common strategy; they were easily followed by the groups as they managed to keep their emotions in check, stayed focused on the bigger picture and displayed enthusiasm, confidence and an optimistic attitude. Other leaders couldn't give clear instructions, were confused and, therefore, their groups were not able to complete the task.

We also carried out the same activity with a class of 7th graders who had known each other for a long time since kindergarten and spent quality time together not only at school but also on holidays. They did not need any scaffolding to achieve the task. We were surprised to see how good they were at turning the circular rope into a perfect square. When asked how they managed it they answered that they had a strategy. They shared their ideas as to how to solve the task, negotiated those ideas and selected the most suitable one. They were a team based on trust and respect with good



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empathetic skills where each member's contribution matters. The activity also highlighted the role that such activities play in developing young people's emotional intelligence competencies.

Evaluation procedure to verify their efficiency

Discussing how each person felt participating in each activity is an important part of the process that helps build trust between students. At the end of this experience it is also a good opportunity to discuss how they felt being blind, some of the everyday problems faced by disabled people, how we can respond to the needs of disabled people, and promote empathy and solidarity.

Ask how they felt to be asked to carry out the task blind? Ask how they felt to carry out the task blind? What was most difficult? What was funny? What was scary? How did the leader try to help them? How did they receive the help?

Ask who were the leaders? Did you identify a leader? How was leadership demonstrated during the challenge? Ask the leaders how they felt?

Ask how each participant's confidence felt at the beginning of the task? What about the end of the task? How did you feel then?

If the group did not manage to do the task, you can discuss the following: Was it an impossible task? What were the main obstacles? Were the group not given long enough – would they have succeeded if given another 5/10 minutes?

What would they do it differently next time? How?

What problems did you encounter during the activity?

How well did you communicate during the activity?

(If the activity was done in two rounds) Did the team improve in the second round? How? What?

What did you learn from the activity and its challenges?

Encourage students to expand on the above questions to identify what led to rises and falls in confidence.

Good Practice Highlighted in the Area 2 (Teaching Source)

- [Sailing to a New Land](#)
- [Story Circles](#)
- [Sailing to a New Land](#)



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