

**Social Skills for Younger Children with Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum**  
by Donna R. Doherty, M.S., R.N.

**I. Social Behavior in Young Children**

A. Motor skills- important for physical play and self help skills

B. Communicative competence-

- i. verbal skills (speech)
- ii. nonverbal skills (gestures, facial expressions, body position)
- iii. pragmatics (conversational turn taking, staying on topic, maintaining topic of conversation)

C. Social competence- being able to interact with others successfully

- i. prosocial behavior- smiling, greeting others, making eye contact, sharing, showing empathy, helping others, using space appropriately, telling the truth, being able to initiate, maintain, and end play with others
- ii. social cognition- understanding the social and emotional world around you, taking the perspective of others, understanding humor, complex thinking and adapting

\*Children are initially very concrete thinkers, and young children are not expected to meet all the demands of communicative and social competency. Many times they are “forgiven” for their mistakes and misjudgments as part of the learning experience.

**II. Young Children with ACC**

\* although social characteristics may vary from child to child due to individual differences and physical or neurological conditions, patterns have emerged from the research data and from anecdotal parent reports

A. Strengths

- happy mood
- easygoing personality
- cooperative
- rarely exhibit aggressive behaviors toward others
- enjoy being with others
- enjoy physical contact with others

\*Very few young children with ACC are diagnosed with behavioral disorders

## B. Challenges

### 1. Motor delays

- may slow their ability to “keep up” with their peers
- slower to develop self help skills such as feeding, dressing, and personal hygiene skills

### 2. Communicative competence

- many young children with ACC experience early speech delays but still go on to develop language and communication abilities
- parents often report they feel their children can understand much more than they can express verbally
- many are able to learn rote communication skills (greetings, common expressions, or “topics of interest”) yet have difficulty sustaining a conversation
- difficulty integrating the nonverbal communication of others (facial expressions, gestures, or tone of voice) with the words they hear
- pragmatic skills (the “rules” of conversing) are a challenge
- make unrelated comments or engage in meaningless or repetitive conversation

### 3. Social competence

- difficulty using physical space appropriately
- lack eye contact
- difficulty taking turns
- perseveration (verbal or behavior)
- difficulty initiating, maintaining, and ending play with others
- difficulty taking the perspective of others
- humor is very concrete
- social cognitive skills can be a growing challenge

\*Errors in social cognition are often overlooked in young children as this is a developing skill, yet as children get older and they cannot meet the increased expectations of peers and others, it can become more challenging

### 4. Emotional regulation-

- low incidence of behavioral diagnoses in young children with ACC (ADD, ADHD, OCD)
- unusual fears
- occasional temper tantrums
- occasional stubbornness
- some compulsive behavior
- upset by change in routine
- occasional self injurious behaviors (picking, hair pulling)
- difficult to “know” how they are feeling

### **III. What can parents do?**

- A. Early Intervention
- B. Opportunities to play with peers as well as siblings (supervision)
- C. Instruction in natural settings- paying attention to social cues, conventions, multiple perspectives, practicing social situations beforehand
- D. Continued challenges

\*Remember to allow your child time to just “be a child”\*

### **IV. Some things to think about**

- A. Friendliness with others (strangers)- safety concerns
- B. Easily swayed- vulnerable to suggestions of others