

Social Skills for Younger Children

with Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum

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I. Social Behavior in Young Children

A. Motor Skills

Important for physical play and self-help skills.

B. Communicative Competence

Verbal skills (speech)
Nonverbal skills (gestures, facial expressions, body position)
Pragmatics: conversational turn-taking, staying on topic, and maintaining a topic of conversation.

C. Social Competence

Being able to interact with others successfully.

Social competence includes:

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

Important: 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 mistakes and misjudgments as part of the learning experience.

II. Young Children with ACC

Social characteristics may vary from child to child due to individual differences and physical or neurological conditions. However, patterns have emerged from research data and 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 peers.
- Slower to develop self-help skills such as feeding, dressing, and personal hygiene.

2. Communicative competence

- Early speech delays are common, but many go on to develop language and communication abilities.
- Parents often report that their children understand much more than they can express verbally.
- May learn rote communication skills (greetings, common expressions, or “topics of interest”) yet have difficulty sustaining a conversation.
- Difficulty integrating others’ nonverbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice) with words.
- Pragmatic skills—the “rules” of conversing—can be challenging.

- May make unrelated comments or engage in meaningless or repetitive conversation.

3. Social competence

- Difficulty using physical space appropriately.
- May lack eye contact.
- Difficulty taking turns.
- Perseveration (verbal or behavioral).
- Difficulty initiating, maintaining, and ending play with others.
- Difficulty taking the perspective of others.
- Humor may be very concrete.
- Social cognitive skills can be a growing challenge.

4. Emotional regulation

- Low incidence of behavioral diagnoses in young children with ACC (ADD, ADHD, OCD).
- Unusual fears.
- Occasional temper tantrums or stubbornness.
- Some compulsive behavior.
- Upset by changes in routine.
- Occasional self-injurious behaviors (picking, hair pulling).
- Difficult to “know” how they are feeling.

As children get older: Errors in social cognition are often overlooked in young children because this is a developing skill. As children get older, however, increased expectations from peers and others can make these challenges more noticeable.

III. What Can Parents Do?

A. Early Intervention — Seek appropriate early supports and services.

B. Opportunities to play with peers and siblings — Provide supervised opportunities for social play.

C. Instruction in natural settings — Pay attention to social cues and conventions, explore multiple perspectives, and practice social situations beforehand.

D. Continued challenges — Continue offering opportunities to build skills while keeping expectations developmentally appropriate.

Remember to allow your child time to just “be a child.”

IV. Some Things to Think About

- Friendliness with others (including strangers) — consider safety concerns.
- Easily swayed — children may be vulnerable to suggestions or influence from others.