



## Chapter 10

# Social skills



When people get along well with others, they have good social skills. People develop social skills as they relate to each other, learn about themselves, and consider other people's feelings.

Having good social skills is important for everyone. To be part of any group—whether a family, a group of friends, or even a class at school—it is necessary to have social skills.

Social skills are more than just good manners. Good social skills let people:

- give and receive attention, affection, or help.
- express their needs, feelings, and rights in an acceptable way.
- communicate effectively.

It is important for children who are deaf or cannot hear well to develop good social skills. Their ability to get along with other people will help them be less isolated.

Like hearing children, deaf children must develop social skills by watching and interacting with the people around them. This helps them learn to do things like treating older people with respect, asking permission to use things that belong to someone else, or waiting for their turn to participate in an activity.

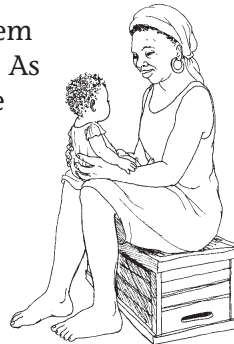


**Good social skills will help children make friends and relate to others in the community.**

## How children learn social skills

We are not born with social skills. We begin to learn them as babies, as soon as we become aware of other people. As children and adults, we continue to learn and use these skills throughout our lives.

At first these social skills are very simple. A baby learns to return his mother's smile or a child learns to take turns while playing a game. But as a child grows older, he needs more developed social skills to get along with other people.



### 2 years old

- asks others when she needs help
- plays alongside other children
- imitates caregiver



### 3 years old

- enjoys helping around the house
- likes to be praised for doing simple tasks
- is aware of other people's feelings



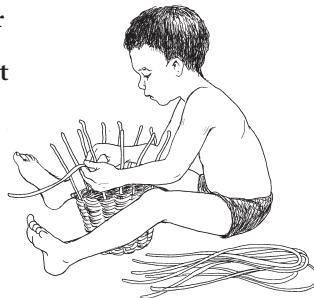
### 5 years old

- understands rules, and ideas like fairness and right and wrong
- expresses many feelings
- plays with other children



The "right" behavior for your child depends on his age. If you expect more than your child can do, you and he will both be unhappy. But if you expect too little from your child, he will not learn new skills. For more information on when children learn new social skills, see the child development charts that start on page 231.

Try to become aware of your attitude toward your deaf child's ability. Do you expect him to do less than he is actually capable of?



## CHILDREN LEARN SOCIAL SKILLS IN STEPS

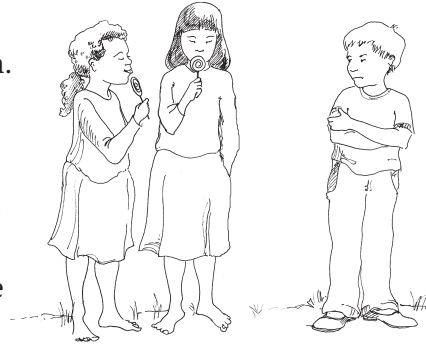
Like all kinds of development, children learn social skills in steps. To develop social skills, a child needs to become aware of other people's feelings. And she needs to learn how to share and cooperate with other people.



At first a child plays alongside other children. This means she enjoys being near them as she plays, but she does not actually play with them.

Then she learns to play with others. She learns to share toys and play games where everyone must cooperate.

As children get older, they need to understand rules and be able to control their behavior.



Even though Callam wants a sweet, he has learned not to grab it out of another child's hand.

## AT HOME

Children first learn social skills by watching how parents and family members behave with each other. Children copy what others do and what they say as they interact with each other.

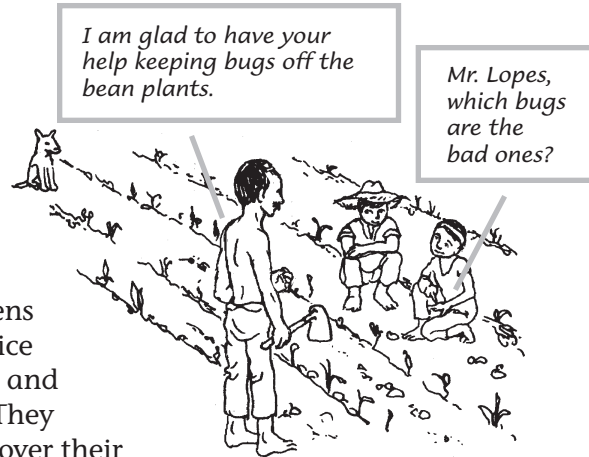


## PLAYING WITH OTHER CHILDREN

As they play, children learn to follow directions, cooperate, take turns, and share. Play helps young children understand their own emotions, feel proud of what they can do, and develop a sense of who they are.

## IN THE COMMUNITY

Outside their own homes and immediate families, children see how older children and adults talk, play, and work with each other. This is how children learn ways to relate to people outside their families. And in the wider world that opens to them, children learn to practice different responses to situations and different ways of doing things. They develop social skills as they discover their own strengths and weaknesses.



## Deafness makes it harder to learn social skills

Children who can hear learn a lot about the world by listening to what goes on around them. Many of the social skills they learn are never taught to them directly, but develop as they listen to other people talking with each other. Children who cannot hear miss a lot of this information.

A child who cannot hear well often finds it harder than other children to learn how to behave with other people. She does not understand the behavior she sees and the reasons why people behave a certain way.

This is true especially when a deaf child and her parents are not able to communicate well with each other. When she misbehaves it may be difficult to explain how she should act. She may become frustrated and misbehave even more. A child who misbehaves a lot may get left alone by other people.

A deaf child needs extra help learning how to communicate, how to cooperate with others, and how to control her behavior.



**Ramani wants a banana, but she doesn't understand that her mother must pay for it first.**

## How to manage your child's behavior

Deafness does not cause bad behavior, though it may seem like it does. A child who cannot hear well communicates mainly through his behavior—just like a hearing child whose communication skills have not yet developed.

Learn to recognize the signals that tell you problem behavior is about to begin.

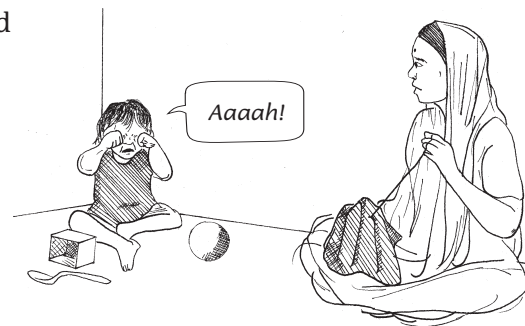


Since Paulo cannot hear well, he is surprised when his grandmother tells him they have to go home. Like Paulo, deaf children experience surprises all the time.

Parents need to pay close attention to how a child who is deaf or cannot hear well is behaving. It takes patience to understand what your child is communicating to you with his behavior and learn how to communicate your expectations.

Children who can hear learn good behavior more easily, and at a younger age, than children who cannot hear. Children may go through times when they say “no” to everything a parent wants them to do. These behaviors can be very frustrating to a child’s family, but they are normal and usually go away when a child learns better self-control.

It is much more difficult for a child who cannot hear well to learn self-control. When people cannot communicate with deaf children, the children become frustrated, upset, or angry. They cannot understand why they must do certain things or what is happening around them.

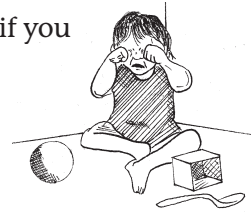


## TRY TO PREVENT PROBLEMS FROM STARTING

When your child behaves badly, ask yourself, “What is my child trying to tell me?” or “What does she need?” Remember that your child’s behavior is one of the ways she communicates with you. Because she cannot communicate in words or signs, she is often telling you something with her behavior.

You may be able to avoid certain behavior problems if you understand what causes them. Your child may:

- need attention. She may have learned that she gets more attention if she behaves badly.
- feel tired, hungry, or afraid of something.
- not understand what you want. Or she may want something but be unable to communicate it so you understand.
- have been teased or treated badly by another child or adult.
- be copying another child’s behavior.
- not be able to meet your expectations. Or she may be resisting limits that you have set, or showing you she does not want to do what you want.

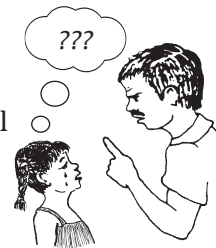


Even though you may understand why your child becomes upset, there will be times when she gets upset no matter what you do. But if you can see a child’s behavior as her way of communicating with you, you may be able to take care of the child’s need before it becomes a problem.

## HOW TO SET LIMITS

Even when your child behaves well, there are times when you have to tell your child “no,” and set limits on the child’s behavior. This may be to keep your child safe, or because he is misbehaving, or because he wants to do something you cannot allow him to do. Children of different ages need to have different limits. The limits you set will change as your child gets older and learns more about the world.

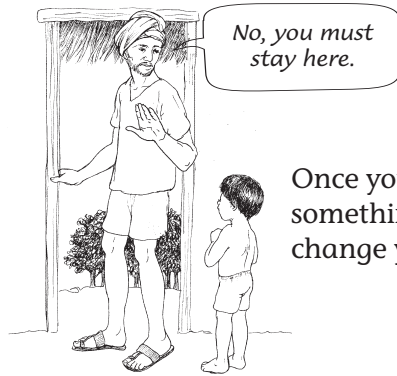
Because your child cannot hear well, sometimes she will not understand what you want. When you say “no,” or you tell your child what you want her to do, you may not have enough communication skills to make her understand. You may think your child is ignoring you or misbehaving, when in fact she does not understand what you want or do not want her to do.



**Anita does not understand what her father is telling her.**

When you want to limit the child's behavior or change what the child is doing:

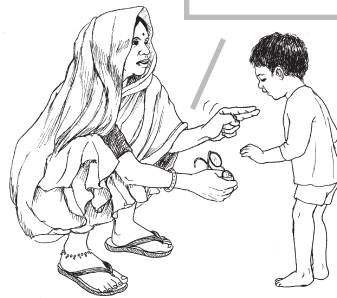
1. **Tell him.** Before you say "no," think about it carefully. When you say "no" you should be firm about it. If you let your child change your mind by his bad behavior, then he will learn to misbehave in order to get what he wants.



Once you tell your child that he cannot do something or have something, you should not change your mind just to stop his crying.

2. **Show him what you mean.**

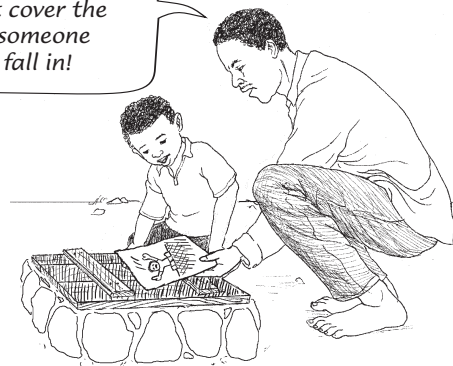
*These are Papa's eyeglasses, Sunil. They are not for playing with!*



3. **Use pictures to make the request clearer.**

*You must cover the well or someone could fall in!*

Pictures are especially helpful for things that are hard to communicate—like how a child's actions affect others.



4. **Help him do as you request.**

If the deaf child has trouble understanding what you requested, show him by doing what you mean.

## WAYS TO MANAGE BEHAVIOR THAT DO NOT WORK WELL

Families with deaf children may be faced with behavior problems they do not know how to handle. They sometimes use solutions that work for them at the moment—even if those ways do not help the child learn good behavior. Here are some examples of things that do not work well:

- Using commands without explaining the reasons for them or what they mean. This prevents the child from making good decisions by himself.
- Punishing a child who is deaf more than other children. Physical abuse can make a child depressed and violent.



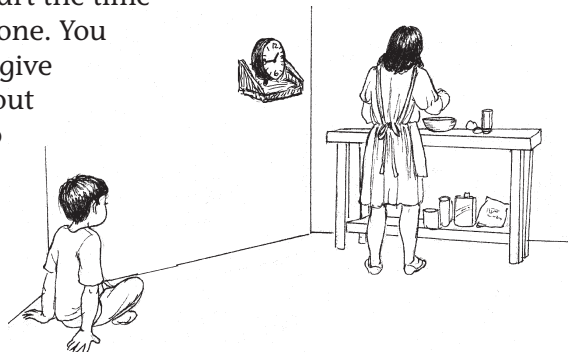
- Allowing the misbehavior of a child who cannot hear well to continue without correcting it. This makes the child more socially isolated.
- Keeping a child who cannot hear well at home more than other children. This holds back the child's social development.

While these methods may seem to work for the moment, they will not help a child learn how to behave well or interact with other people.

All parents want their children to behave well and grow up to be accepted members of the community. For your child to develop self-control, your own self-control can be a model. Show your child the kind of behavior that makes anyone a good person to live with.

### ► **How to help your child calm down when he behaves badly**

When your child is behaving badly, take him to a different spot and make him sit for about 5 minutes (less time for a very young child). If he tries to leave before the time is up, start the time over again. Do not leave him alone. You can use a “time out” like this to give your child a chance to think about his behavior and how he can do better. “Time outs” also give you time to calm down when you are frustrated and upset.



Before giving him a “time out,” hold him firmly and explain to him how you want him to behave. When he is calmer, communicate with him about why he needed a “time out” and about how his behavior affects others. Always remind him that you like him, but that you do not like the way he acted. Encourage him to talk or sign about what happened and why and how he could react differently. Help him understand why he needed the “time out.”

*Omar, kicking your brother is wrong. Let's think of another way you can let him know when you are angry.*

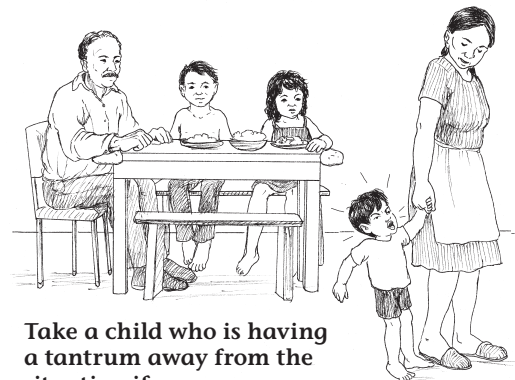


### What to do if your child has a tantrum

As with many other young children, your child's anger may become a “temper tantrum.” A tantrum is when a child completely loses control and screams, kicks, hits, or cries. Children who cannot communicate easily usually have more tantrums than other children, and it may be harder to calm them down.

It is important for you stay as calm as you can. Take a minute to decide what to do. Here are some useful ways to deal with tantrums:

- Do not try to explain things to him once he has lost control. This is not the time for a discussion.
- Do not respond to your child's screaming and kicking, but do not leave him completely alone. His behavior may frighten him and he needs you nearby for security.
- Do not spank, pinch, shake, or scream at your child. This will only make the tantrum worse. But do not let him hit you. You can hold him, but only to prevent him from hurting himself, hurting you, or breaking things.
- Try to distract a child during a tantrum. For example, if your child yells because you have taken something away from him, you can try to offer something else that he wants or show him something unusual. This works better with very young children.



**Take a child who is having a tantrum away from the situation if you can.**

If the tantrum is in response to a limit you have set, do not allow your child's behavior to change the limit. If you give in to your child's behavior, he will learn that he can get what he wants from you by having a tantrum.

### When your child misbehaves or has a tantrum in public

If a child behaves badly in public, pick the child up if you can and remove her from the situation. Try to act calmly and without anger. Take her out of the store, away from the market, or wherever the problem happens. If you can, find a private place for her to calm down. If necessary, have someone else stay with her while you finish what you need to do.

It may seem easier to keep a child at home than to worry about behavior problems in public. But it is important for all children to learn how to behave in public and to be part of the community.



### OUR ACTIONS ARE POWERFUL TEACHERS

As with any family, it is very important for a family with a deaf child to set a good example. The family must act the way they want their deaf child to act, and encourage their child by explaining what kind of behavior they like. But it is not easy to set a good example and encourage children to behave well.

Raising small children can often be frustrating. And when communication is difficult, it is even harder to teach a child how to behave. Because communication with deaf children is more difficult, parents and other caregivers may become frustrated with them and hit or shake them. See Chapter 14 for more information to help parents and caregivers.



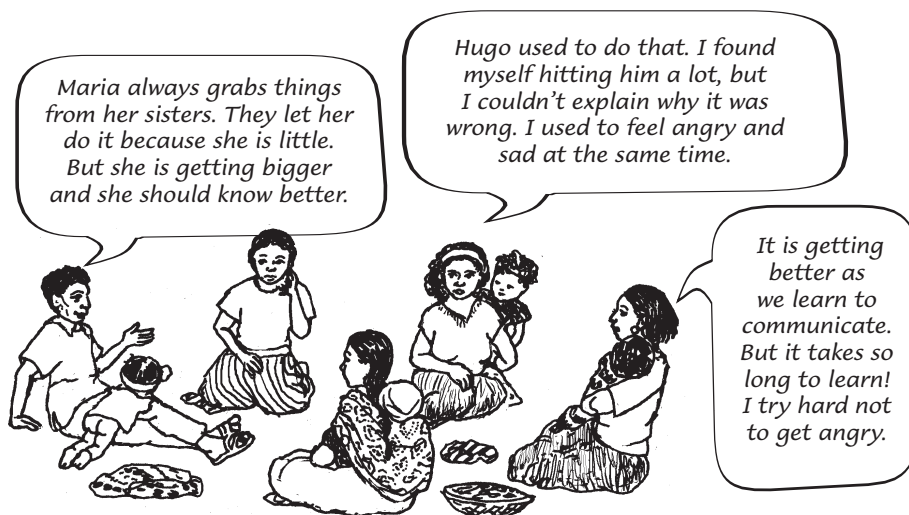
It can be hard for people to change the ways they discipline children. Most people discipline children the same way they themselves were disciplined as children. But when we handle our own frustration without becoming violent, we are sending our children a powerful message that they too can handle frustration without violence. Here is a story about how one group of parents worked to change the way they disciplined their children.

### Parents in Mexico find another way to discipline

In Oaxaca, Mexico, a preschool program for deaf children was started by a social worker and a teacher. Every day parents came to the program with their children. The parents participated in the activities with their children and they supported each other.

After a while, the parents began to notice how often they hit or shook their deaf children. They talked it over with the social worker and decided they wanted to find another way to discipline their children. The social worker explained the idea of a “time out”: taking the child away from the problem situation and having the child sit quietly for a few minutes.

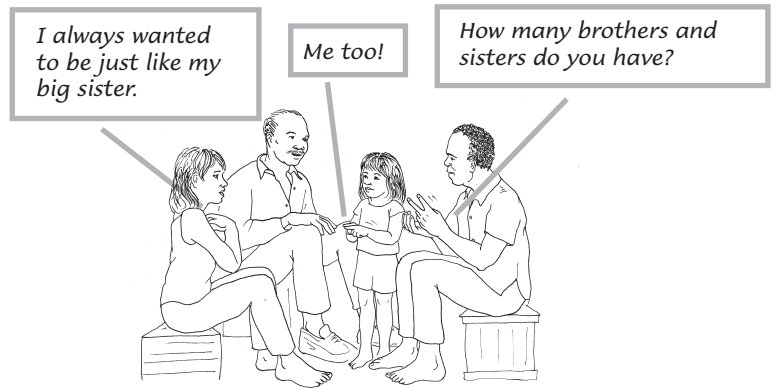
The parents decided it would help them to stop hitting their children if they fined themselves a few pesos every time they hit or shook their child. They put an empty tin can on a shelf to hold the money. At first, almost every parent was putting money in the tin can every day. But the fines helped them to stop and think before they hit or shook their children.



As they tried new methods and improved their communication skills, they noticed that their children were behaving better. At the beginning, it did not seem easy to change how they disciplined their children, but now they almost never hit or shake them.

## How to encourage a child's social development

Help your child get to know adults who are deaf or cannot hear well. This helps her learn that adults who cannot hear can still be successful, and will help her build confidence and self-esteem. If she sees them cooperating, asking questions, responding and expressing feelings, she will learn social rules and develop her social skills.



Encourage your child to become responsible and independent.

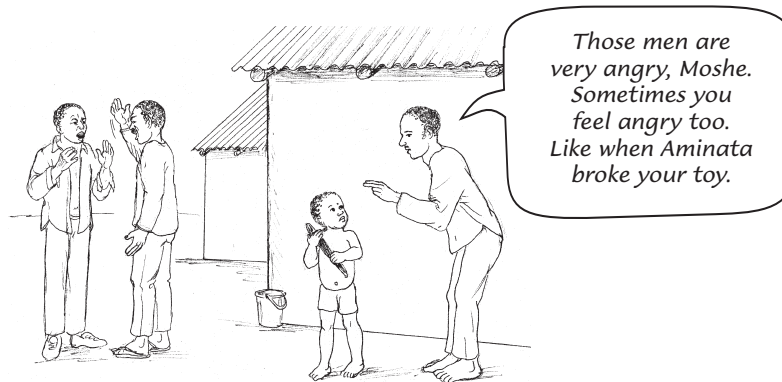


Help him be aware of skills he already has that are valued or useful in the community. Encourage him to develop these skills even more.

## HELP A CHILD COMMUNICATE ABOUT HIS FEELINGS

A child who cannot talk about his feelings may have no choice but to act them out instead. He may hit, scream, or kick when he is frustrated or angry because he has no other way to express those feelings. If your child is often frustrated, rude, or angry, you need to help him learn to express his feelings in other ways.

Look for opportunities to teach your child signs and words for strong emotions. This will help him know and understand his emotions. When he does, he will find it easier to talk or sign about his emotions rather than acting them out.



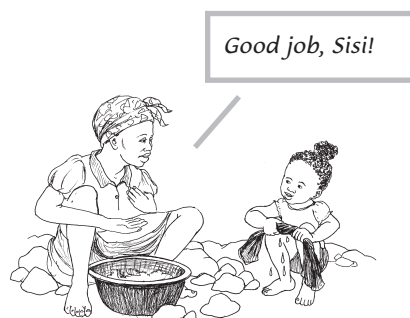
### REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR

When a child behaves well, he is treated well by the people around him. When your child is behaving well, praise him. A child wants the love and approval of his parents and others, and he will repeat the behavior that brings praise and attention. A few comments during the day, or giving him a hug or a treat, will go a long way to encourage good behavior.

Teaching a deaf child good behavior takes patience and hard work. But once he begins to develop social skills and behaves well, it will be easier for him to make friends, join the community, and eventually go to school.

- Praise her when she does something well.

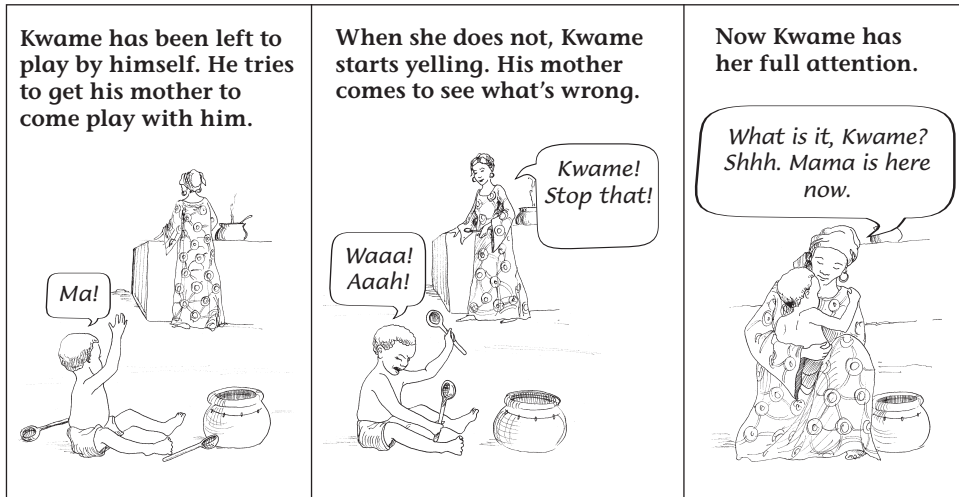
Mother encourages Sisi when she tries to wash her clothes.



- Reward good behavior rather than problem behavior. Give your child a smile or a loving pat when you like the way he is behaving.



Often a child continues a problem behavior because he has learned that it will get him what he wants. For example:

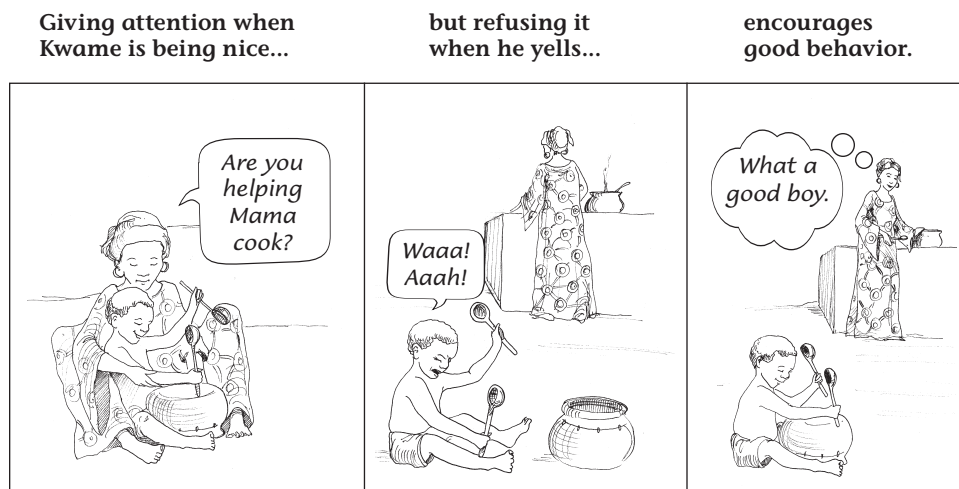


Refusing attention when Kwame is being nice...

and giving it only when he begins to yell...

encourages bad behavior.

But if you give your child attention when he behaves well and refuse it when he behaves badly, you can teach him that acting badly does not get him what he wants. For example, Kwame's mother learned that:



Giving attention when Kwame is being nice...

but refusing it when he yells...

encourages good behavior.

## LET A CHILD KNOW “WHY”

It is easier for children to do something you ask if they know **why** they should do it. But because young children who cannot hear well may not know enough words or signs to understand “why,” parents often find it easier just to tell them **what** to do. If children do not understand why they have to do something, they can become frustrated.

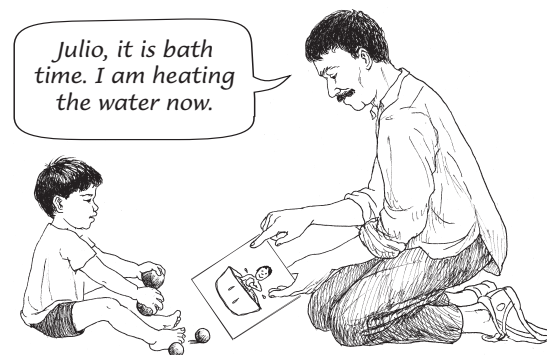


**Hoa might walk more quickly if his father could explain to him that dinner is waiting for them at home!**

## MAKE CHANGE EASIER

Transitions (changing from one activity to another) can be difficult for many young children. They may get upset at going from one house to another, or at having to stop playing in order to take a bath. They still have to get used to daily routines. Until they learn to expect a chain of daily activities and become comfortable with this, children may struggle with the ordinary routines of the day. And when they get used to a routine, even small changes can make children feel insecure.

It is easier for children to accept changes when they know what to expect. Pictures can sometimes help you communicate about transitions. For example, if your child is playing and it is time for his bath, you can show a picture of him taking a bath. Discussing what the picture communicates can give him a chance to prepare for the change and may make the transition easier for both of you.



To make going out in public easier, it may help if you explain to your child where you are going before you go. For example, show him your basket to help him understand you are going to the market.

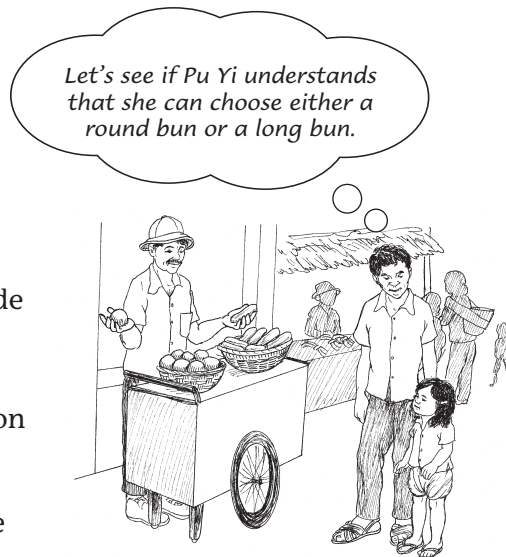
Remember—change will be easier as children get older.

## HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO MAKE DECISIONS

One of the most important things children need to learn is how to make good decisions. If you or others tell a child what to do all the time, she will not learn to make good decisions.

Being able to make good decisions helps children become confident. Being confident will help them participate fully in the activities of their communities and help them have better lives. Whenever you can, encourage your child to make simple choices about things that affect her. For example, sometimes she can decide what to eat or drink, what to wear, when to sleep, or choose what to do.

If a deaf child wants to make a decision but cannot tell you what she wants or likes, try asking her questions to help her communicate what she would like to do.



## Everyone can help deaf children develop social skills

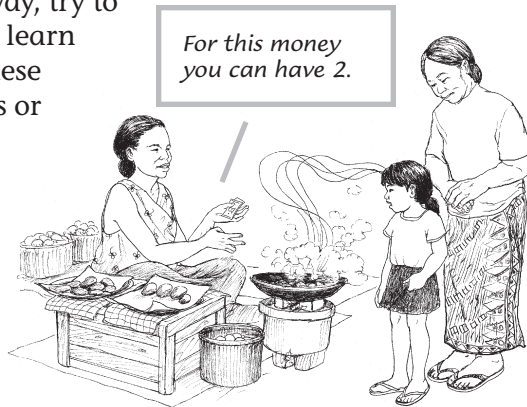
Children who are deaf can learn and practice their social skills best when they are part of a caring community, and when they go to school. When children interact and spend time in a social group outside the family, they make a big leap in developing their social skills. Some communities have child care centers or preschools, where groups of children can play and learn together. The children understand that expectations are different in a group setting. They learn to share, take turns, and think about the feelings of others.

## HELP A DEAF CHILD LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD

It is important for children who are deaf or cannot hear well to experience community events, take part in daily activities and discuss these with their families and friends. Parents, sisters, and brothers can help by taking a deaf child out as much as possible to public places and to visit relatives and friends. You can use every chance to teach the child how things work in the community.

Take her with you when you collect water, gather wood, or when you go to the market, to school, to places of worship, to festivals, or to community meetings and events. Along the way, try to notice what hearing children can learn just by listening. Try to explain these things to your child by using signs or words that you both understand.

By watching others, children can learn about the world around them. They can learn things like who grows the food they eat, and how people buy and sell at the market.



## HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS

As children begin playing more with each other, communication and the ability to get along with others become more important. Many deaf children are lonely and isolated. This is partly because they have not learned enough social skills to develop friendships. It is also because hearing children do not know how to include them.

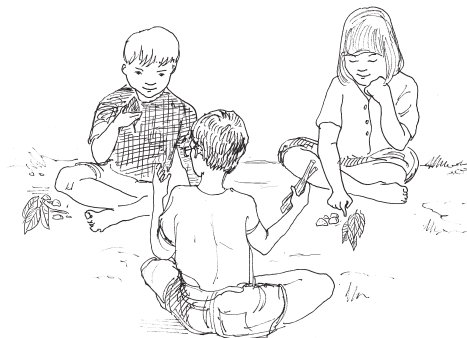
*Since Rina can't hear well, let's play a game where hearing doesn't matter!*

*We could use hand signals instead of saying words for "ready" and "out."*



You can help children in the community who are not deaf understand how to communicate with deaf children. When other children know how to communicate with a deaf child, they may be more willing to include her in their games.

Children often make up games of "pretend." If they include a deaf child, it can help him learn about what to expect in new situations and how to behave.



Simon's brother and sister are playing "store" to help him understand how people act in stores and how things are purchased.

To help your child make friends and play with other children, help her become aware of other people’s feelings, learn to share and cooperate, and understand rules. She may also need help communicating with other children.

Other children may become frustrated trying to play with a child who does not understand the rules of their game. They may start to leave the deaf child out of their games. You can help by showing hearing children ways to play that do not need words. You can explain the rules to your child and show her how to play the game.



## The “social skills” of the community

While teaching social skills to children is very important, that alone is not enough. Children learn social skills not only from how we teach them and treat them, but also from how they see people treating each other in their community.

When we teach children to be friends with children who are deaf, and to respect those who are different, we are helping them understand that we value compassion. We are teaching them that helping others is **everyone’s** responsibility.



When we teach children to play together in a group, we are helping them understand that we value solidarity and cooperation.

But we must take our own advice, and set an example by our own actions! If our children see us ignoring or rejecting those who have different abilities from ourselves, or those who look different, or who are poor, they will learn a very different lesson from what we mean to teach them.



*When we are kind and respectful to others, children learn that this is how people should treat each other.*

If we want our children to learn to respect themselves and others, they must see us putting these values into practice. We ourselves must show respect for people who are different. All of us must also

work to create a community that welcomes and supports all people, and acts on the values that are important to us.