

# Foster social interaction

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Key areas of support' from the Guide: [Autism and learning](#)

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## **Includes:**

Understand social norms, diversity and masking

Respond to needs

Teach conversation skills

Support and develop social skills

Teach students about their autistic peers

Use the social skills tool kit

Create exemplars of social scenarios

Useful resources

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Autism and learning](#)

Strategy: [Key areas of support](#)

Suggestion: [Foster social interaction](#)

Date

04 June 2026

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/autism-and-learning/foster-social-interaction](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/autism-and-learning/foster-social-interaction)

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## Understand social norms, diversity and masking

Encourage and value diverse ways of interacting rather than expecting all learners to socialise in the same way.

For some students, pressure to adhere to social norms and mask or hide individual differences can cause anxiety, stress and exhaustion. Consider the ways that communication varies across cultures and contexts.

For example, eye contact may be an inappropriate social skills goal for some autistic people and people with anxieties. It is disrespectful in some cultures.

Appropriate social skills are those that support the individual's strengths, needs, personal goals and values. Work with whānau and ākongā to identify appropriate goals.

## Respond to needs

Sometimes students may need targeted teaching of interpersonal skills. For example, autistic students often need specific teaching to learn how to initiate interactions, share, and take turns.

Decide on goals and values with the student and their team.



Describe the goal in measurable terms.



Use a range of teaching techniques (for example, structured discussions, social stories).



Support mastery and generalisation through role-playing and applying skills in different scenarios.



Transition from structured teaching to everyday situations – the student may need support to achieve this.



Check for social validity – can the student use the new skills in different situations?

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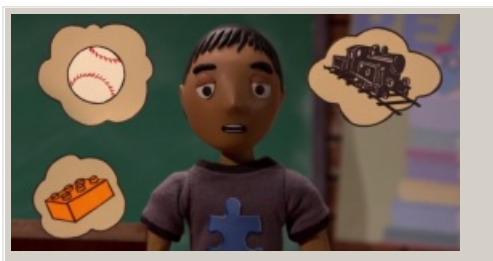
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# Teach conversation skills

Autistic students can get stuck on one subject, find it difficult to read facial expressions and miss social cues.



Video hosted on Youtube [http://youtu.be/C\\_OovRTkaaY](http://youtu.be/C_OovRTkaaY)

No captions or transcript

**Source:**

[Autism Speaks \(US\)](#)

[http://youtu.be/C\\_OovRTkaaY?t=1m58s](http://youtu.be/C_OovRTkaaY?t=1m58s)

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## Support and develop social skills

Support the development of social skills and foster positive social interactions.

- ✓ Foster tuakana-teina relationships where students support each other.
- ✓ Help autistic students to observe and notice others so that they can learn from their interactions.
- ✓ Support social engagement with peers and adults.
- ✓ Teach skills associated with social interactions, such as joining a group, taking part in two-way conversations, and reading non-verbal cues.
- ✓ Structure social supports, particularly for situations where the rules or conventions are not clearly spelled out, such as at break times.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for peers to understand the perspective of the autistic student.
- ✓ Encourage whole-school awareness and understanding of autism.

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## Teach students about their autistic peers

Develop approaches to teach peers and others about autism. The **Kit for Kids program** is an American resource to teach primary school students about their autistic peers.

Involve ākonga and whānau and gain permission to share student specific information.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/mtRYKjucDHk>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Organization for Autism Research](https://researchautism.org/educators/kit-for-kids/kit-for-kids-activities)

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## Use the social skills tool kit

Explore free social skills resources.

- ✓ [Nonverbal prompts](#)
- ✓ [Listening prompt sheets](#)
- ✓ [Green zone worksheets](#)
- ✓ [Pie chart visuals](#)
- ✓ [Using balance for reciprocity](#)
- ✓ [All about me signs](#)
- ✓ [Chain and building visuals](#)
- ✓ [Talk to family picture sheets](#)
- ✓ [Conversation box](#)
- ✓ [Validating word cards](#)
- ✓ [Compliment maker](#)
- ✓ [Words hurt / Words help sheets](#)
- ✓ [Self-control meters](#)
- ✓ [Dealing with losing panels](#)

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## Create exemplars of social scenarios



### Inviting play

Source:

Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

[View full image \(14 MB\)](#)

Use photos to identify characteristics of an interaction, such as physical space or facial expressions.

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## Useful resources

Apps to support autistic learners, includes social stories on a wide range of topics. These are available individually or as four bundles.



### Touch Autism (Apps)

Apps to support autistic learners, including social stories. For Apple devices

Publisher: Touch Autism

[Visit website](#)

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