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# 2 Essential TOOLS for Playground Happiness

By Helen Davidson and Claire Orange

TOOLS that every parent can teach and every child can learn

- ✓ Joining In
- ✓ What to do if kids say, "No!"

The playground is a tough place to grow up – so let's teach kids TOOLS that really matter.



# Welcome

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The playground is a place of many joys and sorrows. A place of mostly good, many great, sometimes bad and occasional ugly connections and relationships. Each social experience in the playground is laying down learning that a child will draw on as their 'social template' over a lifetime.

The ability to co-operate, negotiate, to share, to be empathetic, to join in, to be assertive – these are skills that are often learned and honed in the playground. For some children with a strong sense of self and well-developed social skills the learning is easy. For others, some skills are simply never learned or even worse, maladapted social skills develop in their place. Think about the child who struggles to get along so he runs away with the ball – how is he going to behave in the workplace one day?

**What we know:** Not one parent or teacher in this world wishes for a child to be friendless, left out of games and ignored. But this is exactly what *does* happen for many kids who struggle to find their place socially. But it doesn't have to be that way. All children can learn social and emotional TOOLS that will impact profoundly on their ability to experience positive relationships with others – and also with themselves.

These TOOLS are like so many others – they need to be taught specifically and explicitly and they get better with practise. No expensive equipment, no fancy titles needed – just an investment of time and the wish to have a go.

Building those TOOLS is a lifetime investment in any child's happiness, and we are excited to be able to spread this message, and share with you these 2 Essential Playground TOOLS – and what's even better - there's another whole 31 TOOLS waiting for you to discover in BEST Program's 4 Kids related resources.

We know that children love and soak up this knowledge and in turn they experience a positive difference on the playground – which is sensational. And parents and teachers feel empowered through knowing how to teach the skills required in easy, step-by-step ways. Actively teaching these skills to children will make a difference right now – and all the way through their lives.

Best wishes,

*Helen and Claire*

*'Empowering every child, every day in every playground'*

## Contents – 2 TOOLS

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## Disclaimer

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# TOOL 1: How To Join In

Being included in games is part of a child's daily life. They either have to be invited to join in, or else invite themselves into the game. And as we know, the latter takes some skill – what words to use, and the body language that means you've got a greater chance of hearing *"Yes, sure you can join in!"* Many children struggle with getting included; they might be too shy to ask, or they do so in a way that doesn't exactly 'sell' their chances of being a fun and co-operative play mate. Or they might be too exuberant and bossy, and the play group gets the idea that they might take over and wreck the fun.

Doing role plays with a child is the perfect way to practice the TOOLS. Practise with siblings at home is useful or in small, trusted groups at school – so that re-playing them out there in the playground is much easier. Two key points to teach a child are 1) What to say and 2) How to say it – the body language to use.

## 1. What to say

Most kids ask the standard question of: *"Can I please play?"* Now that serves the purpose, but it's not very interesting. So encourage the child to experiment with a number of different questions. Brainstorm ideas and write them down. Score them out of ten for interesting to boring. Here are some suggestions:

- *"Hey, that looks fun, do you have any room for me?"*
- *"When you've finished that round, could I please join in?"*
- *"Do you need anyone else for that game? It looks great!"*
- *"If I watch today, can I play tomorrow?"*

## 2. How to say it – body language

Experts say that 55% of communication is about body language – posture, facial expression, tone of voice and hand movements. Here's some areas to focus on:

- Stand tall, shoulders back
- Stand still
- Hands by your side
- Chin up and look at the kids
- Use a loud enough voice so they can hear you
- **Smile** so you look fun and friendly

Role play combining the words with the body language and practice with siblings and small groups. It will make a huge difference to the child's confidence – and acceptance into games.

## TOOL 2: What To Do If The Kids Say ‘No!’

Every child, sooner or later, will get the response of: *“No, you can’t join in!”* when they ask if they can join in a game. This includes popular kids and not so popular kids because it’s part of playground life. We call it a FOPL – a Fact Of Playground Life. Knowing what to say - and do - is therefore very important, because if the child treats it as a major personal affront and over-reacts with anger or misery, their reputation as someone who can be fun, is going to suffer.

Now that doesn’t mean that it’s easy to accept that you’re not allowed into the game – and so it’s important that when you are teaching these TOOLS, you let the child know that you understand that. No-one – adult or child - likes to be left out or rejected. It hurts. However, the reality is that it happens more in the world of the playground than at any other time of life – and growing some TOOLS to manage this difficult situation, is the best solution.

Just as in ‘How To Join In’ – where the child’s words and body language are both important – the same applies to responding to a rejection. It’s what the child does and says that will **make a big difference** to whether the refusal is something that happens occasionally – or all of the time.

Doing role plays is again the key to making sure the TOOLS stick, so set one up with siblings or a few other children – but if that’s not possible, a child/parent pair is fine. Mimic some sort of game – throwing a ball to a group is ideal – and ask the children to take it in turns to approach the group and ask to join in – using the same questions outlined in ‘How to join in’ and with the same confident body language. Then practice giving these replies to the refusal:

- *“Okay; but if you change your mind I’m over there.”*
- *“Too bad; it looks so much fun.*
- *“Oh well, perhaps tomorrow there’ll be room for me.”*
- *“Ok. Have fun!”*

The body language that goes with those confident replies is the same as in Skill 1:

- Stand tall, shoulders back
- Stand still
- Hands by your side
- Chin up and looking at the kids
- A loud enough voice so they can hear you
- A smile so you look fun and friendly

And then walk or run towards another group of kids - and don’t look back.

The last piece of the skill is to talk about what the child is thinking while they are confidently moving away. This is the running internal dialogue we all have happening all the time – which can be either Supa Thinkin or Stinkin Thinkin -they speak for themselves don’t they?

‘Supa Thinkin’ such as, *‘Oh well, at least I’m a friendly kid for asking’* or *‘Tomorrow it may be different’* are going to be much more soothing than ‘Stinkin Thinkin’ such as, *‘I hate those kids; everyone is always mean to me’* or *‘I’m going to have a rotten time now!’*

Incorporate these terms of 'Stinkin' and 'Supa Thinkin' into your daily chats with children – believe us, they get it – and they love having a way to describe the sorts of thoughts that they know can make a difference to whether they stay in a grumpy mood or have the answer for working their way out of one.

It's also taking a difficult situation such as being left out, and using it to teach a child a coping strategy – not drowning in Stinkin Thinkin. And that's the key to building resilience – grabbing those 'down' emotional moments and saying 'You know what, you can change this by how you think about it!' What a winning outcome to learn as a kid. Don't you wish you'd been taught that way back when? We sure do.

## Conclusion

These 2 TOOLS cover some common playground situations that require skills and knowledge – about oneself and others. But they're not only TOOLS for the playground - they are for 'Life'. The playground is a child's introduction to the 'Game of Life' – forming relationships, making good choices, choosing your friends, problem solving and dealing with difficult things – and building the TOOLS that will have a profound influence on their happiness and success in life. We know that's true, because we've seen it happen in thousands and thousands of families, and we want more families to get that message.

**Would you like to learn more about helping your child develop the TOOLS to become an emotionally strong, capable teenager and adult, who copes with what life sends their way?**

Find out more about BEST Programs 4 Kids resources and special events at [www.bestprograms4kids.com](http://www.bestprograms4kids.com) or email [info@bestprograms4kids.com](mailto:info@bestprograms4kids.com)

Best wishes, and thanks for dropping by!

## Claire and Helen



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