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“WHAT IF” GAME: A Social Skills Game for Children

Game Guidelines:

Give your child a specific social situation and ask what would be a good way to handle it. Praise your child’s good ideas for handling the situation. If your child suggests something that might not be a good idea, ask something like “What are other things you could try?” In order to keep your child interested and involved, try to avoid directly criticizing his suggestions. Instead through conversation, help your child find alternate possibilities.

- 1) After your child takes a turn, then he makes up a situation for you or picks one from the list below.
- 2) As you each give solutions, you can discuss together the pros and cons of the solutions using questions like the ones suggested below.
- 3) Make the game fun and low stress. A good time to play the game might be when you are driving somewhere or when you are eating a snack together.
- 4) Be careful of letting the game continue too long. If your child becomes bored by the game or feels criticized, he will be less likely to want to play it again. You may want to try just one or two situations each time you play.

Possible “What If” situations:

- Someone pinched you
- Someone called you a name
- Someone won’t give you a toy you want
- Someone stepped on your foot
- Someone hit you
- You want to ask someone to play with you
- Your friend just broke something of yours
- Someone called you a name
- Someone pushed you and you fell down
- Your feelings are hurt because you think 2 kids are whispering about you
- You notice someone is breaking a classroom rule

Possible Questions To Ask:

- Can you think of any other things you could do?
- What do you think would happen if you did that?
- How do you think your friend would feel if you did that?
- How do you think you would feel if you did that? Would you have any other feelings?

Tips about the game:

- Remember that your child will be able to verbalize good ways to handle social situations long before he will be able to actually carry out those ideas. Be patient. Knowing what to do is an important step toward eventually being able to do the right thing when upset or angry.
- Add fun to the game by role-playing situations or acting them out with dolls or puppets.
- Be careful not to lecture about the right way to act. Instead, draw out your child's ideas and praise the good ideas.

Margaret W. Neal, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Riverside, CA. Her work focuses on "helping young children and their parents." For more information, visit Margaret's website at www.margaretwneal.com.