About The Allen Adventure

Chapter 1 The New Kid

Allen arrives at his new school on Earth. The other children find his stories from Goopiter fascinating, including the pictures of his six legged dog.

But when it comes to play time, Allen doesn't know how to join in the children's games. He hovers around, he gets frustrated, and then he gets sad because he feels left out. One of the other children notices, and tells Allen what to say when he wants to join in a game.

Learning how to join in - why it's important

Children need your help to learn how to play with other children. You can teach them about joining in, sharing, taking turns, waiting for a turn, saying what they want, and also saying what they do not want to do.

If children do not know how to play with others, they may become withdrawn or do things like barge in and take over, hover around too close and get annoying, or even hit the other child or destroy the game. This can make them unpopular with other children.

What to talk about with children

To help children learn how to join in:

- Teach words to use to join in: When you want a go, you can say:
  - Can I have a go?
  - Can I play too?
  - Can I do that with you?
  - That looks like fun. Can I play with you?
- Remind children to wait for the other child to say 'yes'.
- Explain that sometimes the other child might say 'no' and that is okay too. You could say something like, 'If he doesn't want you to play right now, he will another time. You can find something else to do for a while.'
- Point out that when you join in, you play the game without taking over or changing things straight away.

You are a powerful role model of how to get on with other people. If you want to see positive social skills in children, provide everyday examples of sharing, compassion, helping others, compromise, respect for others, physical affection, cooperating, including others, giving a compliment, comforting others and empathy.

For more information and additional reading about promoting pro-social skills, read Role of parents and educators and Teaching social and emotional skills.
Chapter 2 The Rocket

Allen finds a rocket in the sandpit which becomes his favourite toy. He loves the rocket so much he keeps it all for himself. He does not understand how this is affecting the other children because he cannot tell what they are feeling.

Then Allen plays a game called I Get the Feeling where he learns there are clues to people’s feelings in their faces, their voices and their bodies. When he learns about feelings, he works out he has been upsetting the other children. He wants to be their friend so he shares the rocket.

Recognising other people’s feelings - why it’s important

Reading feelings is every bit as important as reading books.

Children experience the same range of emotions as adults, but they can find them confusing or overwhelming. You can help by teaching children the names for feelings and talking about feelings in your everyday activities. Respect and accept children's feelings. The message you want to send is that all feelings are okay, but not all behaviour is okay.

Try to stay calm if children are expressing strong feelings, like jealously, anger or guilt, and talk about what they can do to deal with these feelings. Over time, this helps children learn to trust, understand and manage their feelings.

When a child can name and understand feelings, they can start to recognise how other people feel. This is a key part of building empathy and getting on with others.

Children who are unable to recognise other people's feelings do not understand how their behaviour affects others. Other children often do not like them or want to play with them.

What to talk about with children

It is never too early to talk to children about feelings or to help them see the link between feelings and behaviour.

Teach children the names for feelings in every day experiences. Talk about the whole range of feelings, without suggesting any are 'good' or 'bad' feelings.

You can say things like:

- I can see you’re feeling very frustrated by that hard job.
- It is exciting waiting for Nana’s present, I feel excited too.
- Are you feeling a little bit jealous of the new baby?
- I think that little boy is feeling shy; he doesn’t want to play right now.
- You did it all by yourself! Yay! You must feel very proud.

Teach children to notice how others are feeling by pointing out the 'clues' in children's faces, posture or voice:

- Look at her sad face; she’s feeling upset that you took her hat.
- I think your friend feels very pleased that you gave him a turn with your game.
- See how his body is all pulled in small? I think he’s feeling hurt that no one will play with him.

Ask your child how they would feel in the same situation. This helps to build empathy.

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Chapter 3 Kinda Mean

In Chapter 3, Allen is very excited to eat grapes for the first time, but he does not know that keeping them all, and not sharing, is a 'kinda mean' thing to do.

Allen does not hear the other children telling him to stop. So one child does what the teacher has taught them to do if someone is mean to them and they can't sort it out themselves, and gets the teacher. But Allen doesn't know what being 'mean' means or how it makes other children feel.

The other children explain through the Kinda Mean song. Then Allen understands and shares the grapes with the other children.

Knowing what to do if someone is mean - why it's important

Very young children tend to hit out, cry or hide away if they are upset. Over time, you can teach children more effective ways to deal with other people's behaviour if it upsets them.

Children who do not know what to do, are overly sensitive, or blame themselves if someone hurts or upsets them are less likely to defend themselves. This may make them more likely to be picked on by other children.

Teach children what to say and how to get help if other children do things which upset or hurt them.

If children know what do to they are also more likely to stand up for others. Most children do not like to see another child being hurt or picked on, but they may not know what to do.

What to talk about with children

Give children a chance to sort out social problems and conflicts, but also be aware of when to step in.

Teach them to use words and cooperation rather than physical aggression to solve problems.

If a child comes to you with a problem about getting on with others, talk with them about:

- What is wrong (help them identify exactly what the problem is) and how they feel
- What they think should happen
- What they can do about it
- Other options for what to do (suggest some options for the younger child or ask prompt questions for children over about 5 years 'I wonder what else you could try')
- The possible consequences of each option.

Allow the child to select their preferred option after talking it all through with you. Allow the child to learn through trial and error, and experience the consequences of their choice (although do not allow children to try options that are dangerous).

A problem solving approach teaches children they have choices, and that some choices are better than others. They also learn they can try something else if the first option does not solve the problem.

For those social problems or conflicts they can't sort out, provide children with words to say, for example, 'Stop it. I don't like it'. Teach simple steps to take, for example:

- Tell them to stop
- Walk away or ignore them
- Tell a teacher (or other adult)

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Chapter 4 Earth to Allen

Allen enjoys learning at school on Earth. But he also sometimes finds his feelings are a bit too big for him.

When he has overwhelming feelings, he does silly or unpleasant things that affect the other children. One of the children explains to Allen that when this happens there are things he can do to calm down.

Dealing with strong emotions - why it's important

Children need to learn to manage their feelings with your help. Children can do inappropriate things when they are overwhelmed by strong feelings.

Avoid suggesting some feelings are 'bad', but do point out that some actions, like squealing, breaking things, hitting, etc., are not okay. Feelings are not right or wrong – it is what children do that matters.

Teach children simple techniques, like breathing or counting slowly, to calm down. These techniques help them bring an overwhelming feeling down to something they can deal with.

What to talk about with children

You will probably notice when a child's behaviour is starting to escalate out of control. You can say things like:

• You’re super excited, I know, but you’re getting a bit too noisy now. I think you need to slow down a bit.
• I can see you’re getting very, very frustrated with that toy. It’s very tricky. Do you need to have a little break to calm down before you try again?
• I know you’re angry, but you cannot bite other people. First you need to sit here for a minute and settle down, and then we will talk about what happened.

Help children to notice the 'signals' in their bodies that go with strong feelings - shallow breathing, tight chest, hard shoulders, etc. This gives children a sense of being able to ‘take charge’ of their feelings.

Suggest a few different ways for children to calm down so they feel in control again. Some ideas are:

• Go to a quiet or special place to wait for the strong feeling to go
• Take some slow deep breaths in and out
• Count slowly to 10
• Find a really quiet sound to listen to for 15 seconds (like a bird outside)
• Think of something or somewhere that makes them feel safe and calm
• Jump up and down somewhere on their own for 1 minute
• Go for a run around the house 2 times and then try some slow breathing (for a child who needs to expend some physical tension)
• Put the toy/object that is the source of the strong feelings in a special place for a 'rest' (for a child who is struggling to do a task, or for children who cannot resolve sharing something).

In particular, teach children how to deal with feeling angry. Learning to effectively manage anger – accepting it, but calming down before acting – is a great thing to learn.

Try to stay calm, which can be difficult if you feel angry or upset yourself.

Once you and the child are calm, talk about why the child feels what they do, and what they can do about the situation.

For more information and additional reading about promoting pro-social skills, read Role of parents and educators and Teaching social and emotional skills.