Where can I go to improve poor ADHD social skills? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have ADHD, managed for a year now with medication. My social skills are very poor, and this is not bad self-esteem talking (I have no friends at all). Programs to learn social skills all seem to be for children, where can a student go to improve on this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) find social interactions and maintaining relationships to be difficult. Characteristics of ADHD, such as not being able to pay attention or control impulses, are some reasons for this. Because not every person you speak with will know you have ADHD, they could misinterpret your behavior as ill mannered, instead of realizing that it results from your symptoms. The good news is that it’s absolutely possible to practice and improve good social skills that will help you interact with people successfully and form lasting friendships. And the more you hang out with peers and get the chance to observe common social norms and interactions, the better your own skills will get!

You’re right that most social therapy programs are targeted at children, but here are some ways you can practice on your own:

- **Pay close attention when you’re in social settings.** Not only will paying attention to detail help you pick up on others’ body language, subtext, and tone of voice so you fully understand and are able to respond to what they’re saying, but it will also help you pick up on social norms and behaviors that you can use in future conversations.
- **Think carefully before acting and speaking.** Considering your behavior and words carefully can help you avoid making spur-of-the-moment decisions that seem reckless to others, or speaking out of turn or excessively in a conversation.
- **Stay focused.** By concentrating on your peers during social interactions, you will stay on topic, not get distracted, and become a better listener and conversationalist.

Talking with a therapist, perhaps one that specializes in working with individuals who have ADHD, could also be helpful and provide you with a safe space to practice these social skills.
Taking the proper medication (which you're already doing), reading books about ADHD and social skills to better understand areas where you could improve, and tackling one skill at a time may also help you reach your goal of improving your social skills.

Wishing you social success in the near future!

Alice!

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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
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