

Teaching Social Skills at the Large Group Level: “Cool Tool of the Week”

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The Cool Tool is a social skills training format used to teach school-wide and classroom level behavioral expectations or rules. The following material includes examples that were developed and used at Shasta Middle School to improve student social behaviors.

TO: All Shasta Middle School Staff
FROM: Special Services Team
RE: Social skill of the week (A.k.a.: *Cool Tool of the Week*)
DATE: March 4, 1996

Overview and Purpose

In an effort to improve the social skills of all students at Shasta Middle School, the EBS and special services teams have developed a two pronged approach to school-wide social skills instruction. The first prong involves the systematic and comprehensive training of our school-wide rules and expectations. We will be proposing some activities to try this year and a larger-scale implementation at the beginning of next year. Information about this activity is forthcoming, and will involve an intensive and school-wide effort.

The purpose of this note is to describe the second prong which is less formal but focuses on the use of brief tactics for addressing specific problem behaviors. We will focus on teaching and encouraging kids (a) how to get adult or peer attention (e.g., instead of using harassment, disruptions, and arguing), (b) how to get help for difficult tasks and responsibilities (e.g., instead of displays of acting out and noncompliance to escape work), and (c) how to succeed in the classroom (e.g., instead of being late, unprepared, or absent). This activity will be called "**Cool Tool of the Week**" and will have the following features:

- A brief strategy to promote a specific social skill (i.e., "Cool Tool") will be e-mailed to each staff member every other Monday morning. A hardcopy also will be distributed.
- The description of the strategy will include (a) the name of the Cool Tool, (b) a set of examples that illustrate the Cool Tool, (c) a recommended activity for discussing the Cool Tool, and (d) a list of strategies for promoting the Cool Tool throughout the day.
- All staff will be asked to assist us by spending 15 or so minutes at the beginning of each week to present the Cool Tool lesson, and to give positive attention to kids who display the Cool Tool throughout the day and week.
- The special services team and building administrators will assume responsibility for regularly reminding staff to implement the Cool Tool lessons and strategies and acknowledging staff participation and success.
- The special services team will be available to co-present lessons, or to assist in the development of other supporting activities.
- This approach is designed to assist the majority of students in classrooms...it will take more to assist kids with more chronic problem behaviors. Also, we must remember that many kids have the Cool Tool, but require extra practice and feedback to encourage more use of the Cool Tool at the correct times and places.
- The special services team will assume responsibility for encouraging staff members to share successful materials and examples and for collecting and organizing this information.

Cool Tools

The following is a sample of the skills that we are thinking about developing into lessons. A draft of the first Cool Tool of the Week lesson also is attached. Please let us know if you have other skills that you would like to have included.

Getting Help (how to ask for assistance on difficult tasks) (draft attached)

Buddy Builders (how to get attention from peers)

Teacher Attention (how to get attention from adults)

Being There (how to get to class on time)

Being Ready (how to be ready for class activities)

Getting There (how to get to school on time)

General Teaching Strategies

Regardless of the Cool Tool being taught, you can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of your lessons by incorporating the following teaching strategies into your interactions with students:

- Focus on the presentation of positive examples of the use of a Cool Tool. Avoid spending too much time on inappropriate behaviors and the negative consequences for those behaviors.
- When a student displays inappropriate behavior, give attention to other students who are engaged in appropriate use of Cool Tool.
- Whenever possible, use positive examples from your own classroom and school experiences to illustrate the application of a Cool Tool.
- Throughout the day, focus on giving positive feedback to kids who display the Cool Tool. Positive feedback might consist of social attention, positive office referral, verbal praise, extra privilege, and the like.
- If the student has never displayed the Cool Tool behavior (i.e., doesn't "know" how), provide teacher demonstrations or models of the tool, use multiple examples of the tool, and provide lots of opportunities for the student to practice the tool.
- If the student has displayed the Cool Tool behavior but not at the right times, in the right places, or at high enough rates, arrange opportunities for the student to use the Cool Tool, and be sure to provide positive acknowledgements when the tool is used.
- The Cool Tool strategy is designed for the general student body....not the individual student with severe problem behavior. So, avoid basing the success or failure of the Cool Tool strategy on the response of the student who displays the most severe problem behavior.

COOL TOOL OF THE WEEK

Skill Name	
Getting Help (How to ask for assistance for difficulty tasks)	
Teaching Examples	
1.	When you're working on a math problem that you can't figure out, <i>raise your hand and wait until the teacher can help you.</i>
2.	You and a friend are working together on a science experiment but you are missing a piece of lab equipment, <i>ask the teacher for the missing equipment.</i>
3.	You are reading a story but you don't know the meaning of most of the words, <i>ask the teacher to read and explain the word.</i>
Kid Activity	
1.	Ask 2-3 students to give an <u>example</u> of a situation in which they needed help to complete a task, activity, or direction.
2.	Ask students to <u>indicate</u> or <u>show</u> how they could <i>get help</i> .
3.	<u>Encourage</u> and support appropriate discussion/responses. Minimize attention for inappropriate responses.
After the Lesson	
(During the Day)	
1.	Just before giving students difficult or new task, direction, or activity, ask them to tell you how they could <i>get help</i> if they have difficulty (<u>precorrection</u>).
2.	When you see students having difficulty with a task (e.g., off task, complaining), ask them to indicate that they <i>need help</i> (<u>reminder</u>).
3.	Whenever a student <i>gets help</i> the correct way, provide <u>specific praise</u> to the student.

COOL TOOL OF THE WEEK

Skill Name	
Teacher Attention (how to get attention from adults)	
Teaching Examples	
1.	You want to let the teacher know that you are done with your in-class social studies assignment, so you <i>go to the teacher's desk and ask the teacher to check your answers.</i>
2.	Your group is done with its art activity and you'd like to ask the teacher for permission to visit the library, so you <i>raise your hand.</i> When the teacher sees your raised hand, the teacher asks what you want. <i>You say your group is done with their project and would like permission to go the library.</i>
3.	You are walking down the hall with your friends and you see one of your teachers. When you get <i>close to the teacher, you say "hi"</i> and introduce your friends.
4.	Your teacher is talking to another teacher before school. <i>You want to ask your teacher about an assignment. You stand within view so your teacher knows you are waiting.</i>
Kid Activity	
1.	Ask 2-3 students to give an <u>example of a situation</u> in which they <i>wanted attention from an adult.</i>
2.	Ask students to <u>indicate or show</u> how they could <i>get attention from an adult.</i>
3.	<u>Encourage</u> and support appropriate discussion/responses. Minimize attention for inappropriate responses.
After the Lesson (During the Day)	
1.	Just before students are about done with a task, direction, or activity, ask them to tell you how they could <i>get your attention</i> (<u>precorrection</u>).
2.	When you see students are using inappropriate ways to get your attention, wait until they are quiet, then ask them to tell you a more appropriate way to <i>get your attention</i> (<u>reminder</u>).
3.	Whenever a student <i>gets your attention</i> the correct way, provide <u>specific praise</u> to the student.

COOL TOOL OF THE WEEK

Skill Name	
<i>Buddy Builders</i> (how to get attention from peers)	
Teaching Examples	
1.	Your best friend is talking to two other kids. You want to talk to him, so you <i>wait for a break in their conversation, and you say your friend's name.</i>
2.	You are done with your written work and are getting bored. <i>You wait until your friend is done with hers written work, and say "what's happening?"</i>
3.	Everyone is listening to a student tell about a recent music concert. You want to say that you went to the same concert, so you <i>look for someone who isn't listening to the student, and begin telling her about the concert.</i>
Kid Activity	
1.	Ask 2-3 students to give an <u>example of a situation</u> in which they <i>wanted attention from a peer/kid.</i>
2.	Ask students to <u>indicate or show</u> how they could <i>get attention from a peer/kid.</i>
3.	<u>Encourage</u> and support appropriate discussion/responses. Minimize attention for inappropriate responses.
After the Lesson (During the Day)	
1.	Just before students are about done with a task, direction, or activity, ask them to tell you how they could <i>get attention from a peer/kid</i> (<u>precorrection</u>).
2.	When you see students are using inappropriate ways to get your attention, wait until they are quiet, then ask them to tell you a more appropriate way to <i>get attend from a peer/kid</i> (<u>reminder</u>).
3.	Whenever a student <i>gets attention from a peer/kid</i> the correct way, provide <u>specific praise</u> to the student.

SKILL OF THE WEEK

Skill Name	
Being Ready (how to be ready for class activities)	
Teaching Examples	
1.	Class is about ready to begin, you get out the materials you will need for your first assignment. <i>Before you sit down or visit with your friends, you collect your binder, pencil, and book.</i>
2.	The teacher gives you a break between math and science; <i>so you go to your locker or open your bag and get out the book, folder, journal, or whatever you need for the next class. After getting ready, you visit with your friends.</i>
3.	You have <i>all the things you will need from your bag</i> to complete your work, <i>so you put your bag on the floor</i> to give you more space on your desk.
Kid Activity	
1.	Ask 2-3 students to give an <u>example of a situation</u> in which they <i>need to be ready for class activities.</i>
2.	Ask students to <u>indicate or show</u> how they <i>could get ready for a class activity.</i>
3.	<u>Encourage</u> and support appropriate discussion/responses. Minimize attention for inappropriate responses.
After the Lesson (During the Day)	
1.	Just before students are about done with a task, direction, or activity, ask them to tell you how they could <i>get ready for the next class or activity</i> (<u>precorrection</u>).
2.	When you see students are using inappropriate ways to get ready, wait until they are quiet, then ask them to tell you a more appropriate way to <i>get ready for that class or activity</i> (<u>reminder</u>).
3.	Whenever a student <i>gets ready for a class or activity</i> the correct way, provide <u>specific praise</u> to the student.

"COOL TOOL" Review Activity

TO: Shasta Middle School Staff
FROM: Kathy, John, Betsy, and Susan
RE: Review Activity for Cool Tool
DATE: May 17, 1996

We are pleased with everyone's efforts to enhance student awareness about the importance of social skills at Shasta Middle School. Students are discussing "Cool Tools" with us, we have been able to incorporate "Cool Tools" in our discussions with students who have displayed problem behaviors, and we have seen staff integrating "Cool Tools" into their daily activities.

To date, four social skills (a.k.a. "Cool Tools") have been introduced: Getting Help, Getting There, Asking for Help, Teacher Attention

Rather than introducing a new skill on Monday (5/20), we thought it would be helpful to have a fun review activity. We call it the "Mystery Cool Tool of the Day." In general, students will be asked to guess the "Mystery Cool Tool of the Day" based on hints provided by staff. Here are the details:

- On Monday 5/20 you will receive the name of the Mystery Cool Tool. **Do NOT tell** any student the name of the skill.
- During the first period of the day (5/20), read/tell the students the following (5 minutes):

Today we are going to play a game to help us review what we have learned so far, called the "Mystery Cool Tool of the Day," All staff members know what the Cool Tool is, and will acknowledge you when they see the skill being used....but they won't name the skill. Your job is to figure out which skill is the "Mystery Tool of the Day."

Tomorrow morning, we'll have a short class discussion, and decide what we think the mystery skill is. We'll submit this name to the office. I've heard that the office will provide some kind of special acknowledgment for those classrooms that guess correctly.

- Throughout the day in your classroom, in the hallways, in the cafeteria, etc., look for kids who display the “Mystery Cool Tool,” and acknowledge that you saw it. For example, you might say the following: (a) *That was it...I saw you doing the Mystery Cool Tool of the Day!* (b) *Cool Tool, right there!* and (c) *You did it! Hmmm, I wonder what Mystery Cool Tool that was? **Do NOT name the skill,*** just acknowledge its occurrence. We will be out acknowledging students and asking them if they have any idea about what the skill might be.
- During the first period of the next day (5/21), ask students to (a) nominate what they believe was the Mystery Skill of the Day, (b) describe where they were and what they were doing at the time, and (c) arrive at a consensus (or vote) for one nomination that can be sent to the office. After a choice has been made, have one of your students deliver the class nomination to the office on the form below.

Thank you, in advance, for you efforts and participation.

-----Tear along line-----

“Mystery Cool Tool of the Day:” Nomination Form

Date _____ Teacher’s Name _____
House _____ Classroom _____

We believe that the Mystery Cool Tool of the Day is _____.

Teacher’s Signature: _____

Student Representative Signature: _____



WILLIAM M. HABERMEHL
County Superintendent of Schools