



Social Literacy

Alderwood House School's social literacy curriculum

What is social literacy?

Social Literacy is essentially, the ability to read social situations and interact in social situations in a successful way. It includes the ability to successfully enter, communicate, negotiate, and participate with a social group. Social literacy includes:

- the ability to see from and take other perspectives

- the ability to socially navigate a variety of cultural contexts
- the ability to recognize and ask for help, resources and support
- the ability to establish and maintain positive peer relationships
- the ability to make positive and safe choices about one's own behaviour

Social literacy is contextual - the social norms of one particular group are different from another, and the individual's role within the group may also affect the expected social behaviour. For example, a child at a fancy restaurant lunch with parents and grandparents will be expected to socially behave and interact differently than the same child at a child's birthday party lunch. This is partially why social literacy can be difficult for a child to learn outside of a social, peer environment. Early learning centres are perfectly situated to support the development of social literacy, as children are able to be an active, peer community member in an environment where the children outnumber the adults!

Our social literacy program

Our social literacy program involves three key learning areas: our Problem Solving Protocol, our scaffolded dramatic play program (based on Tools of the Mind) and the WeThinkers program

Problem Solving Protocol

Step-by-step: how Alderwood children learn to solve social conflict

For Non-Verbal / Pre-Verbal Children

Step One: Identifying that there is a conflict (Please Stop)

Adult support moves:

1. Help the child identify there is a problem by modelling holding up a hand in a “stop” motion, and stating “Please stop, I don’t like it”.
2. Verbally prompt the child to say “Please stop, I don’t like it”
3. Verbally provide an observation of the conflict “I can see you don’t like it when they do _____. (turn to other child) I can see you don’t like it when _____. We have a problem!”

Step Two: Find a solution collaboratively

Adult support moves:

1. Verbally provide suggestions to problem solve.

“You both have the right to the toy. You both want the toy. _____, can you ask _____ how many minutes they need?”

“I have the right to be safe. When you hit my body I am not safe. Can you protect my right to be safe by asking if I need anything? (icepack, hugs, bandaids, soother).”

2. Check with the other child to ensure they are in agreement, when the conflict is a negotiation.

“_____ says you can have the toy when she is done. Is that ok?”

“_____ says they need a soother. Can you get that?”

For Verbal Children

Step One: Take a deep breath and make sure your body is calm.

Adult support moves:

State that they can see the child is feeling a big emotion, and identify the emotion if possible. The teacher will remind the child that they can make that emotion smaller by calming their body.

Prompt mindful breathing techniques if required

Ensure both children are staying within proximity and able to enter the problem solving protocol.



Step Two: “Please Stop”.

The child (ren) ask the other child (ren) to “Please Stop, I don’t like it when...”

Adult support moves:

If the child was unable to do this before becoming emotionally upset, the adult can go back to step one.

Often children will just say “Please stop”. The adult can help clarify what it is that they want to stop.

“Please stop, I don’t like it when you hit me.”

“Please stop, I don’t like it when you grab.”

Step Three: Say the Problem.

The children each identify the problem.

Adult support moves:

The problem is essentially the conflict between each child’s rights.

“You both have the right to play with that car.”

“You have the right to be heard; we are responsible to listen to one another.”

The adult can help prompt the child to say the problem to their peer, clarifying the problem if the child isn't using clear and concise language.

Step Four: Say the Solution.

The children begin to negotiate, stating possible solutions and then responding to the solutions offered, either with agreement or a counter-offer.

Adult support moves:

The adult can prompt: *"How can we solve these problems?"*

Often the children will make a suggestion at this point. If not, the adult can identify a variety of options, or ask the children to identify someone who could help think of solutions.

As each suggestion is made, check with the other child as to agreement. The adult can verbally comment on the conversation: *"I see that you don't agree to that suggestion. What solution do you suggest?"*

Scaffolded Dramatic Play

Adapted from the Tools of the Mind program



Alderwood House uses a specific part of the Tools of the Mind program: Scaffolded Dramatic Play and Play-planning. The tools of the mind website -

www.toolsofthemind.org - does a great job of offering resources and materials explaining how this approach to learning teaches executive function, delayed gratification, social communication skills and the development of understanding diverse roles and perspectives.

From the Tools of the Mind website:

“In a Tools PreK classroom, a play theme unifies the room. The year begins with adaptable play themes close to children’s lives, and over the course of the year, as children’s levels of make-believe play, self-regulation and executive functions develop, the play themes develop as well. In a classroom in Maine, a lobster pound was a favourite center; in another classroom in Washington D.C., a convenience store with a ‘Redbox’ and an ATM machine was a favourite center.”

In an Alderwood classroom, teachers follow a Reggio-inspired, project-based philosophy, where the play topic is selected based on the children’s interests. The children then help make the props and materials needed for the play topic, and teachers read books, arrange field trips and special guests to build children’s knowledge of the roles and expectations within these real world environments. The play topic becomes a long term project, lasting for weeks and sometimes months, as the children deeply explore the roles and environment that the topic offers.

Over the school years, children have built a full-sized boat, a castle wall (with mortar!), a wild-west farm, a pizza shop, and airplane and airport, a rocket ship...whatever the play topic, the children become deeply involved, and the classroom quickly reflects their work!

Prior to play, children will play plan their play - working on demonstrating organized, pre-planned social interactions, and thinking about potential problems that might arise. As children become more adept in their play, the play plans become more complex, and the play itself begins to reflect more sophisticated social skills.

We Thinkers

Teaching social behaviours

The We Thinkers program consists of 10 books along with activities that the teachers use throughout the classroom. Alderwood brings the We Thinkers concepts into our dramatic play, and uses the language introduced in the books to support children in developing a stronger social awareness, and to provide language to talk about social literacy that everyone can understand.

Concepts that this program teaches includes:

Thinking thoughts and Feeling Feelings - distinguishes between thoughts and feelings

Group Plan - helps to describe the difference between a group/shared plan and an individual plan and how to communicate with others about plans

Body in the Group - helps to teach body language and verbal expectations for working within a group

Thinking with your Eyes - talks about using social and environmental cues to understand how another person is feeling or thinking

Whole Body Listening - focuses on active listening skills

Hidden Rules and Expected and Unexpected Behaviours - helps children to decipher the “hidden” rules of an environment, and to differentiate between an expected and unexpected behaviour.

Smart Guesses - encourages children to use environmental and social clues to make a guess about expectations

Flexible and Stuck Thinking - supports the idea of adapting to new ideas and using new / different perspectives

Size of the Problem - defines the differences between small, medium and large problems, socially appropriate reactions to each problem “size” and when to seek help

Sharing an Imagination - this deepens the earlier introduced idea of a group plan, specifically looking and dramatic play

