

EXERCISE: "SPILLING THE BEANS"

These exercises relate to developing social skills when sharing meals with others.

Exercise A: For Parents

Which social skills listed below do your children display during meals?

- following directions
- understanding the kind of physical behavior that is appropriate at the table (e.g., eating with silverware, chewing with the mouth closed)
- listening attentively
- listening without interrupting
- making periodic eye contact when listening or talking
- talking so that others can understand
- answering questions when asked
- taking turns in conversation
- reading nonverbal cues
- showing appropriate concern for others

Choose a skill from the list that your children have yet to master, or choose one of your own skills. Pick a skill that your children are ready to tackle. How might you introduce the topic at your next shared meal? Think of ways you can model the desired behavior, and then think of gentle, fun, and accepting ways to introduce this behavior.

Exercise B: For Anyone

Think about the last time you shared a meal with someone. Was it a routine meal or a special occasion? Where did you eat? What was the environment like? What did you eat? What did you talk about? Was the flow of communication easy, difficult, or somewhere in between? How could you tell how your companion was feeling--through words, body language, vocal inflection and tone, or some combination? Sit for a few moments and remember what the complete experience was like.

Now, on a piece of paper or in a word-processing file, describe the parts of the interaction that were socially successful. Did you, for example, pick up on the fact that your companion was worried about something, even though she didn't say so, and ask her about it? Did you feel as though your companion understood exactly what you were saying?

Now describe the parts of the interaction that were socially unsuccessful. Were there times when

you felt as though you had nothing to say? Were there uncomfortable silences? Did your companion behave in an obnoxious manner or eat self-consciously?

Finally, identify one social skill you would like to improve--whether listening more attentively or actively, following nonverbal cues as you explain an idea, having plenty to talk about, sharing your feelings, or anything that comes to you. List some simple ways you might practice to improve this skill the next time you share a meal.

Exercise C: For Anyone

Who among your friends and acquaintances is the one person with whom you would most like to share a meal? What makes this person such a great mealtime companion? What social skills does this person have that you admire? Consider inviting this person to share meals with you on a regular basis.