

Lauren 00:11

Welcome back to The LDA Podcast, a series dedicated to improving the lives and education of all learners. Today we sat down with Carolyn McGuire, the author of "Why Will No One Play With Me?", about the essentials of socializing, and how to teach a student those life skills.

Kristina Scott 00:34

Hello everyone, I'm here with Carolyn McGuire who is a coach, author, speaker and the director of ADD Coach Academy. She specializes in coaching parents to help their children. She has published a book, "Why Will No One Play With Me?" Thank you for being here, Carolyn.

Carolyn McGuire 00:50

You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Kristina Scott 00:53

So, in your book, you focus on social skill development. What are some red flags that parents would look for or maybe even teachers would look for in social skill development of their children?

Carolyn McGuire 01:04

So I think the first one is if a child is not invited to play with other children, they aren't having playdates, they aren't invited to birthday parties, they're not engaging with other children at school or being incorporated with other kids. That's a big red flag. I think another red flag is if they cannot play with other children in the same age appropriate way. Are you constantly intervening? Are you constantly kind of watching from the sidelines with your heart in your throat? Because if they can't share or play in the same way as their same-age peers, it's really going to not be something that they necessarily just pick up, they probably need more direct instruction, which isn't the end of the world, right? We have now "Why Will No One Play With Me?" We have other resources to teach them this. The other thing is, a lot of times when kids are struggling socially, they tend to opt out. So even at a very early age, I have parents writing to me from all over the country, about three year olds, four year olds, five year olds who are opting out, they don't choose to go to playgrounds, they don't choose to play with other children. They're so shy that they don't know how to mix in if they don't know every single person in the room. And that's okay, that's their personality, and that's where they are. But what it means is, they're going to choose to opt out going forward. So we need to create some intervention for them, because we don't want them to opt out in life, right? And when they're teenagers, we really don't want them to. So we want to make sure we get on top of those things and directly teach them those skills. Because when a kid refuses, it's usually not about, you know, willfulness, it's about 'I can't, I don't know what to do.' In the book, I talk about seven things that everybody needs to be able to do socially. And I think that's also something that parents can use. You can go to Why Will No One Play With Me and you can look at those seven things, I'm happy to describe them. And if your kid can't do them the same as sam-age peers, then that's a red flag.

Kristina Scott 03:18

So what are those seven things that you said you could describe for us?

Carolyn McGuire 03:21

Sure. One is how to manage your emotions. So we all have emotions, we're supposed to have emotions, we're supposed to honor them and process them. But there are some kids where their emotions flood them, overwhelm them, their anxiety is so much, they tend toward drama or those things derail them. We want to teach them those emotional coping skills, because you can't be someone who's 50 years old who cannot cope emotionally. And a lot of kids need that direct instruction. The next is to actually read the room, right? So we all have things that come up in life, situational awareness. And if you can't read the room, then you aren't necessarily going to pick up on one of the other ones, which is reading social cues and body language, right? So if you can't read social cues and body language, then it's a problem because you don't end up actually being able to interpret what other people are trying to tell you. And so much of communication is through body language. Another one is learning to walk in other people's shoes, right? So we talk about empathy so much in our society today. What is empathy? Empathy is really just the ability to walk in someone else's shoes, and to really understand what they're going through. And also to step into the shoes of your teachers and peers, right? When you canceled a meeting on your teacher nine times and then she stopped responding to you, you have to be able to say "Oh, well wait a minute. What's my part in this? I canceled nine times. Maybe she's upset. Let me step into her shoes." So some kids do that naturally and other kids don't. Another one is meeting people halfway, you know, sort of that cooperative play, that interaction, that sharing. But also this idea that, when you're working in a group, which we do a lot in our schools nowadays, there's that give and take. And there are kids who just don't naturally come to this. And we all know the adults who kind of, you know, you're always doing what they want, or they're very inflexible. And that's a problem. And then the other one is adaptability and flexibility. You know, employers have said that the number one thing that they want from people socially is not perfect social skills. It's being flexible and adaptive, which makes sense, right? And the final one I call reading your audience, because if you are communicating with someone, you have to look at them and realize who is my audience? Who am I talking to? So an example is, I had a little guy who wrote a teacher an email, and he started with Hey, and he said, hey, when will the homework be posted? And his teacher took umbrage with that, right? And didn't like it. And so I had to explain to him that, you know, you're in middle school now. And when you write an email to someone you can't start with Hey, and you know, let's look at the tone. So part of that is also a life skill, right? Because as you mature and develop, you're going to have bosses, co-workers, and you have to really realize who am I talking to, and adjust your communication. And it may sound so higher level, but if you look at some 5, 4, 6 year olds, they do know, you know, my friend likes to play Marvel. So that's what I'm gonna play, they know who their audience is.

Kristina Scott 06:51

So your book is "Why Will No One Play With Me?" And we think of play as something that happens, usually earlier in life, maybe tap out around age 10. So how does this kind of transfer throughout life, I guess?

Carolyn McGuire 07:04

Well I think it's not just play better, it's live better. So throughout our lives, we still use the cooperative skills that you have in play as a small child. And the idea of play is really that it develops those skills, and it allows children an arena to practice. So when kids are playing kitchen, or they're playing and making dirt piles and stuff like that, what they're actually doing is learning to meet people halfway,

cooperate with other kids, work out conflict. And so throughout life, you need these skills, and you continue to actually play with people, right? You're on team sports, you're interacting in a group. And so the play skills, or the title involving play, really just reminds all of us about those cooperative skills that we all need. And I have actually had CEOs and staff contact me and say that they're giving "Why Will No One Play With Me?" to board members and executives who don't play well with others. I mean, we use that phrase, and what we really mean is people who can't have those same cooperative skills that you have in preschool when you're playing with someone in the dirt.

Kristina Scott 08:19

So you talked about social thinking, is that the different perspective taking that you're alluding to earlier? Or no, it's something different?

Carolyn McGuire 08:25

Yeah, well, social thinking is actually an actual methodology developed by Michelle Garcia Winner. But I think, you know, the gist of any kind of social thinking is that we take perspective from others, we walk in someone else's shoes, we understand the inner emotional life of other people and what their motivations are, and we adapt to them. Or we just even operate in awareness of them. And so I think when we talk about developing these important play-based skills, we really are also trying to help children have the mindset where they understand the rules of the social world and how people operate.

Kristina Scott 09:11

So you talk about direct explicit instruction around some of the social thinking or some of these social skills. How do parents or how do teachers begin this direct instruction? What do they start with?

Carolyn McGuire 09:22

Sure. So "Why Will No One Play With Me?" literally leads you from here's a questionnaire you fill out to figure out what are the skills the child is missing, or that we need to develop? And it walks parents through how to have an initial conversation about this, how to talk about social skills and friendship skills so that children feel not that they're being put down, but they understand everybody's working on something, and then how to sit down and actually teach the lessons and the big thing is, I'll just take reading the room, we talk about reading the room, but when we teach it through a direct instruction, we're going to actually like bring a child to a box store or a food court. And we're going to have them do lessons where they watch people's body language and interpret that. Or where we go and they collect information at a family party secretly being a social spy, so that they can figure out, you know, who is frustrated? And how do I know that from their body and their voice? And you know, there are other body language factors. So we're giving children, these direct lessons, just like you would give a child a direct lesson about handwriting or reading, or not just sort of cajoling them, because as many parents listening to this know, we can talk at them all we want, but if they don't have the inherent skills, they need to develop those skills. And I'm sure many people listening are like "I say it all the time." And you do. But the problem is, they don't know how. And so because they don't know how we have to teach them, it's just not something that comes to them naturally.

Kristina Scott 11:05

So, you know that your book is a major resource. Would individuals that have gone through a teacher preparation type program already have these skills?

Carolyn McGuire 11:15

Some do if they've been through a special education teacher program, but a lot don't, because they don't have all the lessons. And I can say that, for years, part of what made me gather these 150 social skills lessons was that, you know, I was taking from this and taking from that, and it was time consuming. And I was having to sort of invent things every week for the kids coming to my social skills groups, or kids coming to my office. And so I think with teachers, they would benefit from having everything that "Why Will No One Play With Me?" offers like, right, they're fully baked for you, for all the different skills that they're going to encounter. And they can use them in the classroom even to build the skills of everybody. Because I mean, most kids need to work on some of these things.

Kristina Scott 12:12

So you said you have a private practice, are you seeing a rise in social skills deficits or areas of concern?

Carolyn McGuire 12:20

You know, I would say what I'm seeing a rise in is parental awareness. That by the teenage, pre-teenage years, a lot of parents are struggling with kids who will only do electronics, kids who are opting out. I'm seeing a rise in that. I've always really been the person who helps the kids who fall into this nether land where they are not on necessarily school services. And maybe they live in an area where they can't go to a social skills group, there just isn't anything offered, but they need help. And their parents know they won't be their best selves if we don't give them that help. But what I am seeing arising are the parents who are struggling with resistance from their kid. And some of that resistance goes back to these play-based skills that they didn't acquire as little kids. And now their sort of teenage way of dealing with it is to just say, I'm not going anywhere, I'm not doing anything. And the parents are in distress. And I think electronics do have a lot to do with that. And I think it's always been there. I think we've always had kids who are sort of awkward, but the electronics add to it. So I am seeing a rise in that. And I definitely would encourage parents to work on these things early. But I would also say it's never too late. I have many tweens and teens that I work with, and people who use the book, I have people writing to me from all over America saying, 'I'm using the book and it's working.' But it is, you know, if you have a first grader and you're in doubt, please, please, please, please start working on it because it's easier in that sort of K through second grade window.

Kristina Scott 14:11

So where could individuals purchase your book? Or what's the last final thought or resource you want to leave us with?

Carolyn McGuire 14:18

So they can purchase "Why Will No One Play With Me?" through Amazon, or if you just even type in Caroline McGuire or playbetterplan.com, it'll be right there to the links. And one of the resources I would love to leave them with is that on my website, CarolineMcGuireauthor.com, or playbetter.com would

work too, there's a ton of links to different resources that parents can use and can access as well, including videos of 'how do you do this?'

Kristina Scott 14:55

Which is really helpful for that...

Carolyn McGuire 14:58

It is really helpful and as a mom I know that, you know, there are things that I'm working on that are out of my knowledge zone. And I'm forever like, is there a video on this? So I wanted to make those videos. And they're based on real kids. They're not the kids that have been working with me because people didn't want to put all their kids to all of America, but every word that is said is a genuine word that a kid said. So they're real, and they feel real.

Kristina Scott 15:29

Thank you Carolyn for your time. I know you're a very busy woman, so.

Carolyn McGuire 15:32

Oh my god, no, I love LDA. I'm so happy to do this.

Kristina Scott 15:35

Thank you.

Lauren 15:42

Thank you for listening to the LDA podcast. This series was made possible by The Learning Disabilities Foundation of America. Our theme music is a little idea by Scott Holmes. In our next episode of the LDA podcast, we talked to Mark Halpert of 3D Learning about helping students to reach reading success by third grade. For more resources from LDA visit lda.america.org