

# The Social Rules Nobody Teaches

## Making the Invisible Expectations Visible

Many children struggle socially not because they lack interest in connection, but because they are expected to follow rules that were never explained.

This reflection helps adults notice the invisible social expectations operating in a classroom environment. Inclusion is not only about academic access - it is also about understanding the social landscape children are expected to navigate.

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### Step 1: What Social Rules Are Being Assumed?

- When it is appropriate to join a conversation
- How long to wait before speaking
- When humour or sarcasm is being used
- How loudly to speak in different settings
- How to recognise when someone is joking or serious
- How to enter or exit group interactions

*Reflection: What social rules might this child be expected to understand without instruction?*

**Social expectations often exist long before they are explained.**

### Step 2: Conversation Timing

Conversation has rhythm. Some children respond quickly while others need time to process and organise their thoughts.

When timing differences are misunderstood, children may be labelled as interrupting, disengaged, or socially awkward.

*Reflection: Is the environment allowing enough time for different communication styles?*

**Conversation timing is a skill that can be modelled - not just expected.**

### Step 3: Tone, Sarcasm and Hidden Meaning

- Sarcasm
- Humour
- Subtle criticism
- Indirect instructions
- Facial expression and tone cues

*Reflection: Are adults assuming understanding of tone and sarcasm - or explaining those signals?*

**Hidden meaning requires shared understanding.**

### Step 4: When 'Awkward' Is a Signal

- The rules were never explained
- The child processes cues differently
- The environment assumes observation equals understanding
- Expectations change between groups

*Reflection: Is the child struggling socially - or struggling with rules that were never made visible?*

**Labels rarely build belonging. Explanation does.**

### Step 5: Reducing Social Guesswork

- Model how to join conversations
- Explain sarcasm or humour when misunderstandings occur
- Clarify when someone is joking or serious
- Gently narrate social expectations
- Create safe ways for children to ask social questions

*Reflection: What is one social expectation that could be explained more clearly?*

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**Belonging should not depend on guessing the rules.**