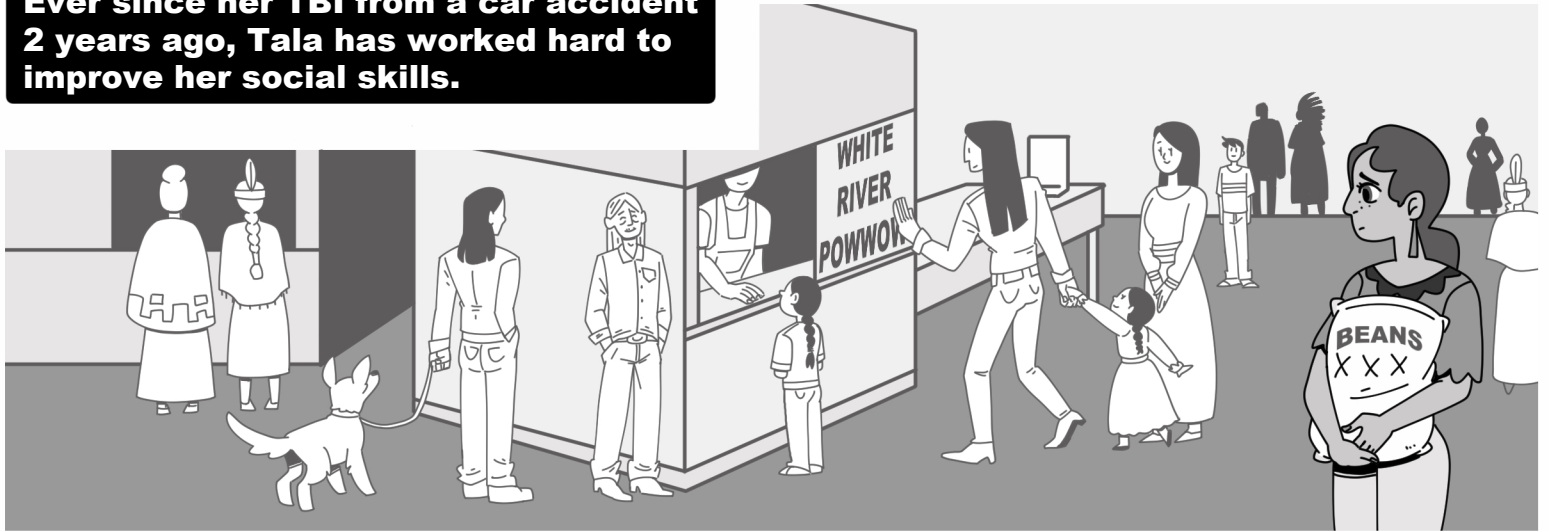


Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Bundle for American Indians

Social Skills After Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Ever since her TBI from a car accident 2 years ago, Tala has worked hard to improve her social skills.



What Are Social Skills?

Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with others. These skills include what you say as well as your body language, eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, and other actions.

Examples of social skills include...

Tala, let's go watch the grand entry. Nodin is a fancy dancer! It should be starting in 10 minutes.

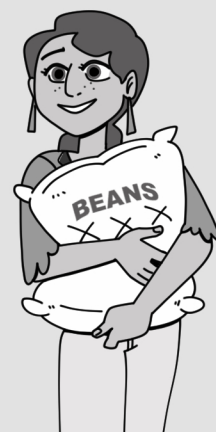
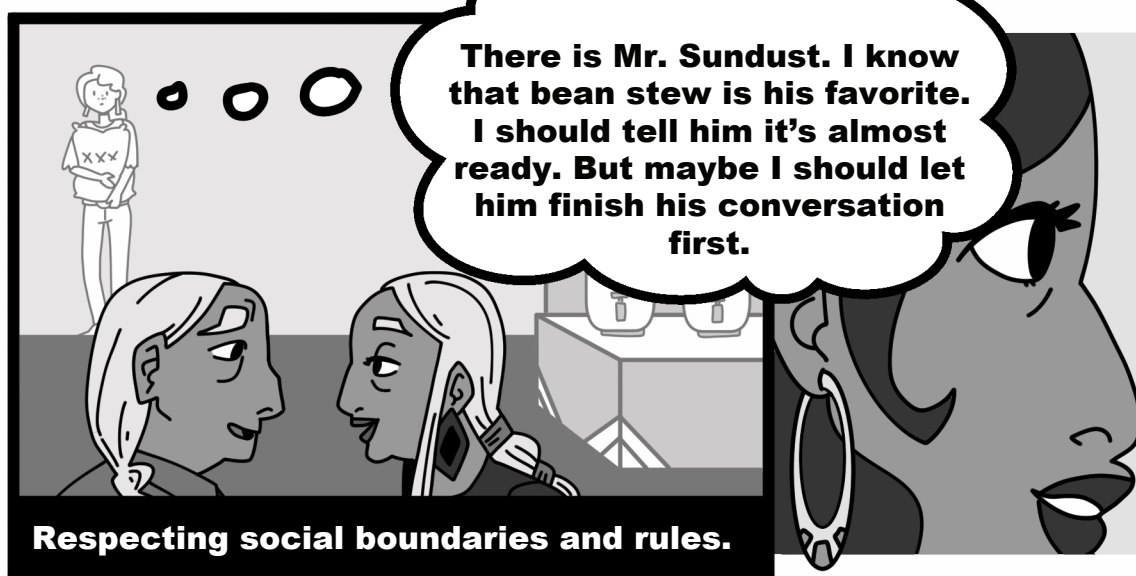
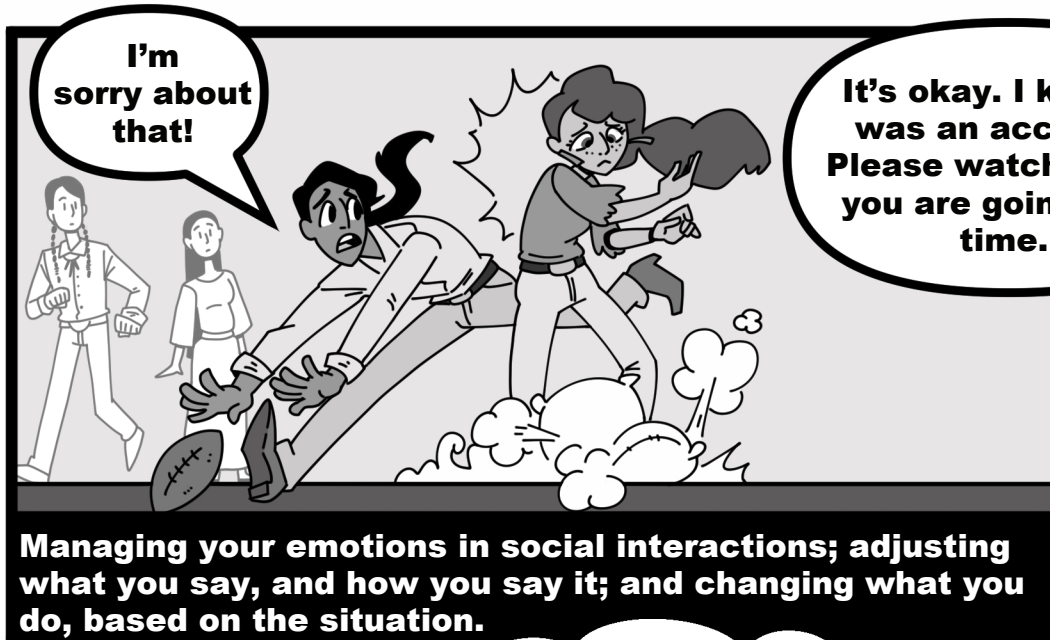


Listening to and understanding what people say.

Yes! But I need to deliver these beans to my mom's bean stew stand first. I will meet you there.

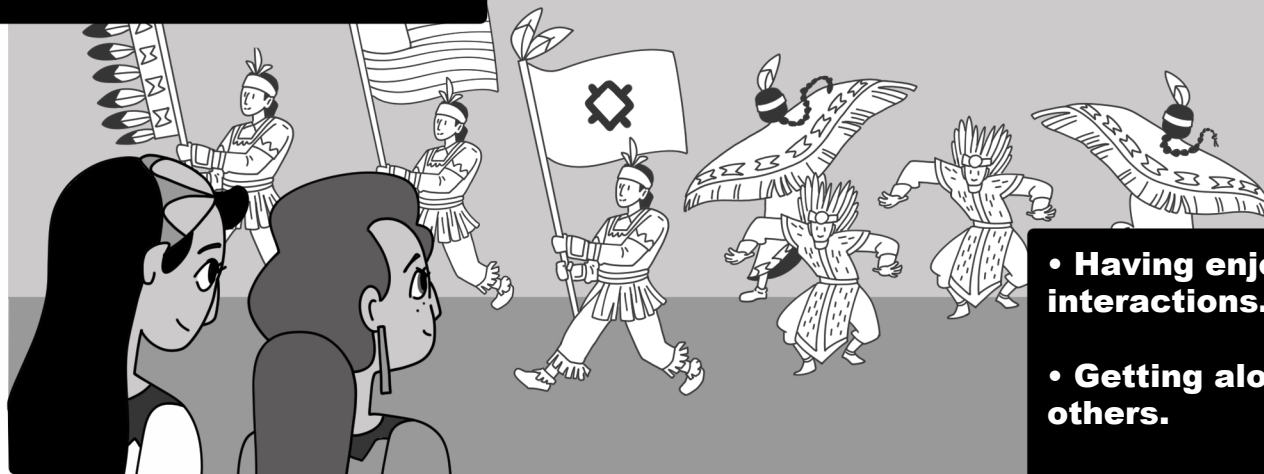


Communicating thoughts, needs, and feelings through words and actions.



Why Are Social Skills Important?

Good social skills help with ...



- Having enjoyable interactions.
- Getting along with others.
- Keeping old friends and making new ones.

- Feeling confident socially.

- Success at school, at a job, or in a volunteer position.



Yes, I was supporting my friend who is a fancy dancer.

How Can TBI Affect Social Skills?

Tala has done a great job managing her social skills after her TBI. But it hasn't always been this way. Earlier in the recovery process, she often struggled in social settings, including...

- Difficulty starting conversations or expressing thoughts and feelings.

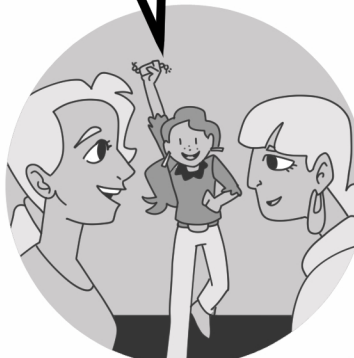
- Interrupting conversations.

- Losing focus during a conversation.

Do you need something?



Hey, look at my new beaded earrings!



Are you even listening to me?



Are you mad at me?

You look angry to me.

No. Why do you think that?



Why is Serena spending so much time with Megan? They're both getting on my nerves!

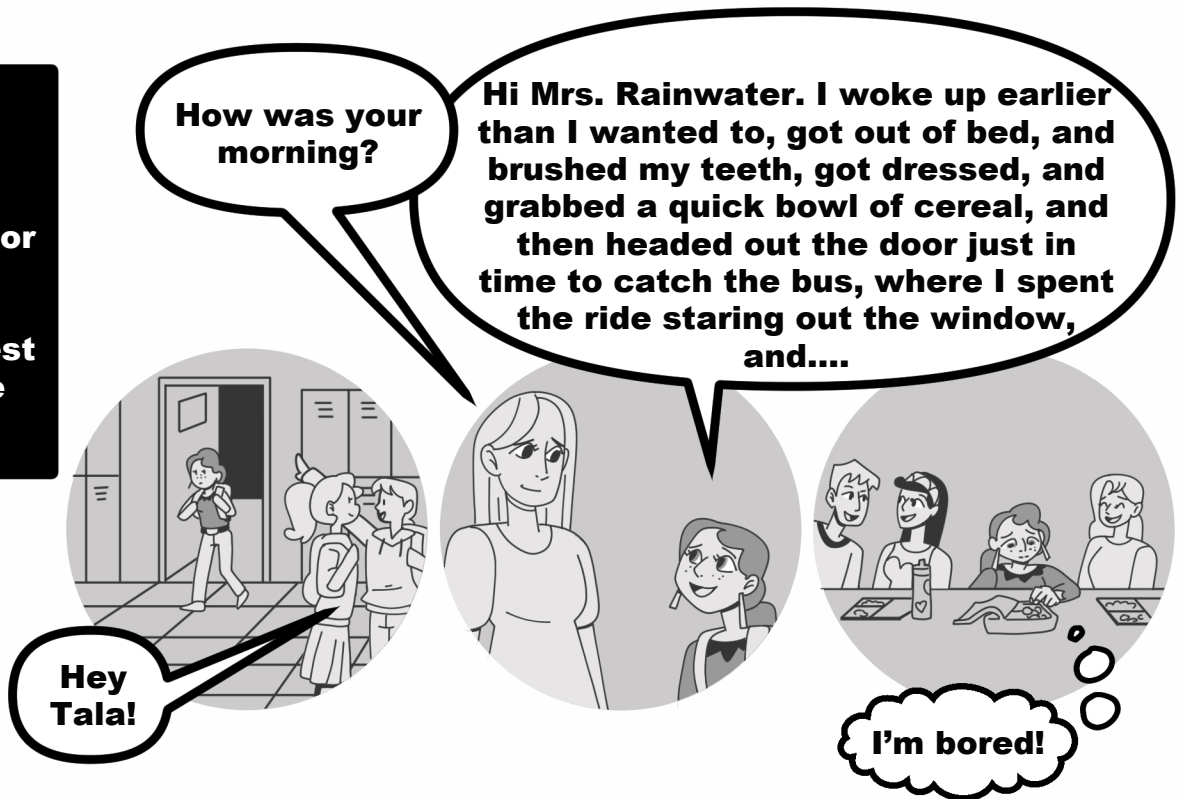


- Misreading the words, facial expressions, tone of voice, or actions of others.

- Feeling out of place and uncomfortable around other people.

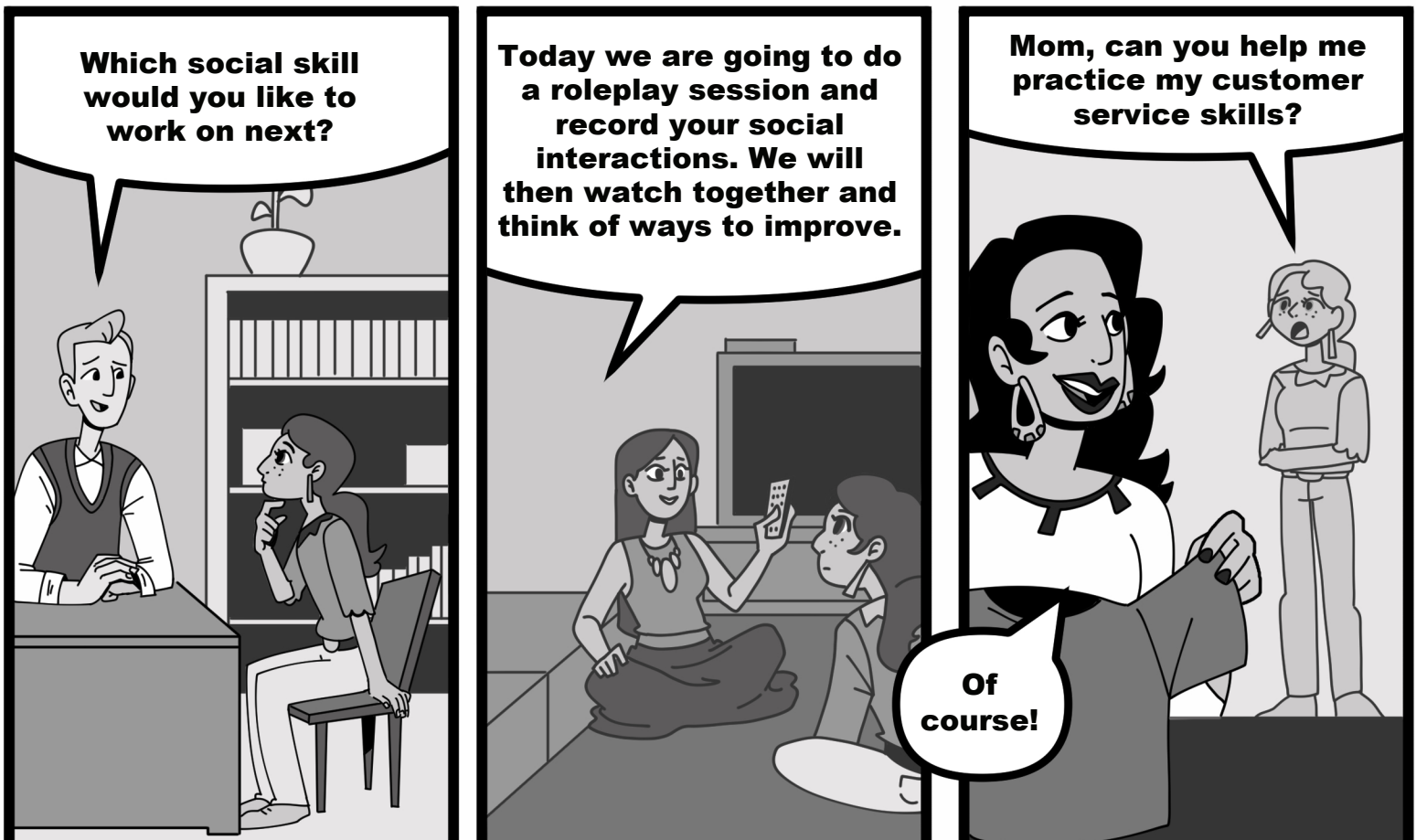
- Having a hard time getting along with others.

- Ignoring what someone has said.
- Talking too much or too little.
- Showing no interest in what others have to say.



How Social Skills Get Better After TBI

To improve her social skills, Tala worked with a counselor, a clinical social worker, and other health care providers. She practiced her social skills with family and friends.



The first step Tala took to improve her social skills was to evaluate where she was having difficulty. She asked people she trusted to give her feedback. She thought about what she does well and what she still struggles with. She also began watching others to see what makes them good communicators.

I like how Serena stays focused on the conversation and how she comes across as friendly and relaxed. I also like how she gets to the point.



Tala also set social skill goals for herself. She wrote down two areas she would like to improve and displayed them in her room to serve as a daily reminder.



How was your trip to the Grand Canyon?

Tala made sure to find time to practice her social skills with others, especially with family and friends.

Sounds like you had a great time!

I was amazed by how huge and colorful it was. We walked along the trails, took some pictures, and we even saw some eagles.

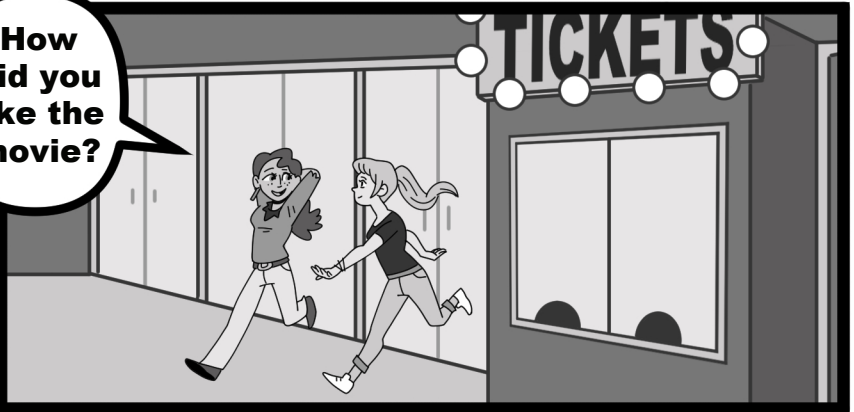


As Tala's social skills got better, she picked up a few tips along the way.

To start a conversation with someone new, try:

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Sticking with neutral topics. Avoid subjects like politics and religion.
- Talking about things that are around you like the weather.

How did you like the movie?



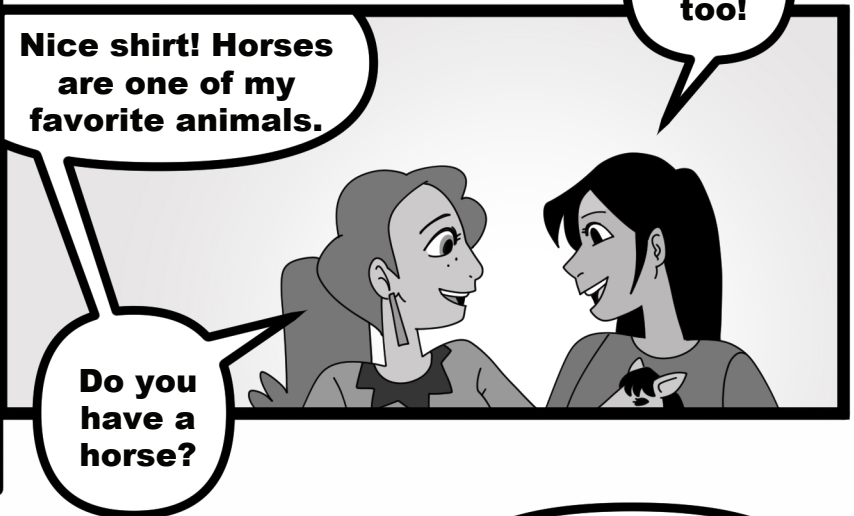
To keep a conversation going, try to:

- Focus on topics that may be interesting to the other person.
- Be aware of your body language and make eye contact without staring.
- Take turns listening.
- Watch for cues that the other person may want to end the conversation (i.e., looking at the clock, looking away).

Nice shirt! Horses are one of my favorite animals.

Mine too!

Do you have a horse?



When you feel like there may be conflict, try to:

- Use friendly body language and tone of voice. Don't yell, point fingers, or roll your eyes. Stay as calm and relaxed as possible.
- Let the person know how you are feeling in a polite way. If you are feeling upset, let the person know you need to take a break.
- Talk about how you are feeling without assuming how the other person feels.
- Show respect to the other person by talking to them the same way you would want them to talk to you.

I'm sorry, I went to bed early last night and forgot to reply. I'm not mad at you.

You didn't text me back last night. Are you mad at me?



By talking to health care providers, practicing with family and friends, and applying strategies, Tala has improved her social skills in all settings.



Source: The content of this infocomic was adapted from the factsheet entitled *Social Skills After Traumatic Brain Injury*, which was originally developed by Lenore A. Hawley, MSSW, LCSW; Jody K. Newman, MA, CCC-SLP; Dawn Neumann, Ph.D., Therese M. O'Neil-Pirozzi, ScD, CCC-SLP, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (<https://msktc.org>).

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. The contents of the infographic were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPKT0008). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this infographic do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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