



## Promoting Positive Peer Interactions

Pyramid Resources for Infant-Toddler Social-Emotional Development  
University of Kansas

Adapted from:  
The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning  
Vanderbilt University

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1

## Learner Objectives

### Learn how to:

- **Facilitate positive peer interactions**
- **Support the development of social and friendship skills**

2

## Training Agenda

- **Setting the Stage**
- **Facilitate positive peer interactions**
- **Support the development of social and friendship skills**
- **Wrap-up, Reflection, and Action Planning**

3

## Our Learning Environment

**What can the trainer do to facilitate a safe learning environment?**

**How can other training participants help make the training environment conducive to your learning?**

**What are some agreements we can make?**

4

## Possible Shared Agreements

- **Confidentiality**
- **Take Care of Yourself and Others**
- **Demonstrate Respect**
- **Right to Pass and Take Risks**
- **Assume Positive Intent**
- **Recognize We Are All Learning**

5

## The Pyramid Model: Promoting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children



6

## CSEFEL Definition of Social-Emotional Development

**The developing capacity of the child from birth through five...**

- **to form close and secure relationships;**
  - **experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and**
  - **explore the environment and learn;**
- ...all in the context of family, community, and culture.**

Adapted from ZERO TO THREE, 2001

7

## Developing Social & Friendship Skills

**"The single best childhood predictor of adult social adaptation is not school grades or classroom behavior, but rather, how well a child gets along with other children."**  
- Hartup

8



9



10

Development of Social & Play Skills Handout 3	
Age	Play
Birth to 3 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responds to caregivers</li> <li>• Coos and smiles</li> <li>• Responds to familiar voices</li> <li>• Focuses on objects</li> </ul>
8 to 12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to imitate play actions or behavior of others, especially caregiver</li> <li>• Plays hiding games, songs &amp; rhymes with adult</li> <li>• Plays alone without caregiver for short periods</li> </ul>
25 to 36 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some cooperation and talking with other children</li> <li>• Some pretend play</li> <li>• Still plays alone frequently</li> <li>• Interactive level moving toward (cooperative play)</li> </ul>

11



12

## What are Friendship Skills?

- **Organizing Play**
- **Sharing**
- **Assisting Others**
- **Giving Compliments**
- **Reciprocal Interactions**
- **Responsive to the social bids of others**

13

13

## Why is Supporting Positive Peer Interactions Important?



14

Friendship Skills:  
Setting Up the  
Environment

**Space for social  
activities**

**Daily schedule**

**Materials & equipment**



15

## Friendship Skills: Promoting Development

**Encourage helping  
and togetherness**

**Model social  
behaviors**

**Provide positive verbal  
support for play  
between children**

**Read books about  
friends**

16

## Friendship Skills – Turn-taking and Sharing

### Gradual



### Learned



17

## Sharing: Cultural Considerations

### Independence

(Individualist Culture)

- Children encouraged to do things on their own
- Child must understand self as “possessor” before learning to share
- Encouraged to share

### Interdependence

(Collectivist Culture)

- Children encouraged to rely on others
- Sharing is stressed from birth; ownership is not emphasized
- Sharing is not a choice

Iruka, I. U., Curenton, S. M., Durden, T. R., & Escayg, K. (2020). *Don't look away: Embracing ANTI-BIAS classrooms*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

18



19



20



21

## Positive Peer Interactions: Play

### Infants

- Face peers toward each other during tummy-time
- Prompt and model gentle touches and greetings
- Point out peers' interests, actions, or feelings
- Use peers' names in play interactions

### Toddlers

- Plan cooperative activities



22

## Positive Peer Interactions: Meals & Snacks

### Infants

- Position facing one another
- Use children's names
- Encourage awareness of peers

### Toddlers

- Arrange seats in a circle or around a table
- Ask toddlers to help serve
- Model conversation
- Respond to children's initiations



23

## Positive Peer Interactions: Clean Up

### Infants

- Place bin where all children can help put toys away

- Model & prompt handing toys

### Toddlers

- Encourage children to help each other put toys away
- Provide multiples of cleaning supplies
- Assign roles or give choices



24

## Environment and Peer Interaction

### Group activity

#### Handout 5

**Classroom Environment & Peer Interaction**  
With your classroom team, find ways to use materials already in your classroom to encourage peer interaction.

<p><b>Mealtime</b></p> <p>How can we set up tables, chairs, or the meal to encourage interaction between children?</p> <p>What can we do before, during, and after meals to encourage peer interaction?</p>	<p><b>Play</b></p> <p>What toys can we use to encourage children to notice and engage with each other?</p> <p>How will we use these materials to encourage peer interaction?</p>
<p><b>Outdoors or Gym</b></p> <p>What materials or equipment are available that can encourage peer interaction?</p> <p>How will we set these materials up to encourage peer interaction?</p>	<p><b>Getting Ready</b></p> <p>Which types of self-care activities would be appropriate opportunities to encourage children to notice and/or engage with each other?</p> <p>How can we encourage interaction during these types of activities?</p>

25

## Positive Peer Interactions: Reflection

### Practice Implementation Checklist

#### Handout 6

**Practice Implementation Checklist: Peer Interactions**  
Place a star next to the items you feel are a strength for you. Then, check any of the boxes that apply.

Promoting positive peer interactions	I would like to...			
	Learn more about this	Do this more often	Do in other routines or differently	Do this in better ways
Encourage children to be aware of & care about their peers				
Encourage children to initiate or maintain interactions with their peers throughout the day				
Provide positive descriptive comments to children who are engaging in positive peer interactions				
Offer comfort when negative social interactions occur among children				
Model social skills for children such as sharing, gentle touching, requesting, or using words				
Help children understand their peers' intentions				
Use a variety of developmentally appropriate strategies, materials, and activities to encourage peer to peer interactions				

26

## Reflection

- What questions do you have about the material we discussed?
- What insights, if any, do you have about your own practices, the children, and/or their families?
- What strategies did you see or hear that might be useful in your role and work?

27

27

## Major Messages to Take Home

- Positive peer interactions are the foundation for the development of social and friendship skills.
- Teachers can support positive peer interactions by setting up the environment to promote interaction, and throughout the day, during routines such as play, meals and snacks, and clean-up time.

28

# Supporting Positive Peer Interaction Agenda

## Part 1

- Setting the Stage
- Support the Development of Social and Friendship Skills
- Facilitate Positive Peer Interactions
- Wrap-up & Reflection

### Other Information







## Development of Play Skills for Infants & Toddlers


Age	Play
Birth to 3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responds to caregivers</li><li>• Coos and smiles</li><li>• Responds to familiar voices</li><li>• Focuses on objects</li></ul>
4 to 7 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoys social games with caregiver</li><li>• Likes exploratory play supported by caregiver</li><li>• Plays some games with caregiver like peek-a-boo and patty cake</li></ul>
8 to 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Begins to imitate play actions or behavior of others, especially caregiver</li><li>• Plays hiding games, songs and rhymes with caregiver</li><li>• Plays alone without caregiver for short periods</li></ul>
13 to 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoys play with objects</li><li>• Increased interest in watching other children play (onlooker)</li><li>• Primarily plays alone (solitary)</li><li>• May offer toys to caregiver or other children</li><li>• May choose independent play close to other children (parallel) but not interact with them</li></ul>
25 to 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May play with other children but in an occasional or limited way (associative)</li><li>• Some cooperation and talking with other children</li><li>• May take leader/follower roles in play</li><li>• Some pretend play</li><li>• Still plays alone frequently</li><li>• Interactive level moving toward (cooperative play)</li></ul>



## Strategies for Supporting the Development of Friendship Skills

Examine the physical environment to ensure that there is enough space for infants, toddlers, and adults to engage in activities. Examples: comfy areas on the floor, rockers/gliders.
Evaluate the physical environment for spaces for two or more children to enjoy side-by-side activity and for adults to be seated close by for supervision. Examples: lofts, rocking boats, block areas, climbing boxes or play house.
Evaluate the daily schedule for multiple opportunities to develop play skills each day. Examples: indoor and outdoor play times.
Provide enough materials and equipment that allow and encourage two or more children to interact. Examples: large mirrors, stacking toys, cars, dolls, puzzles, or other manipulative materials.
Encourage toddlers to help each other and do routines together. Examples: handwashing, brushing teeth, cleaning up toys.
Provide positive guidance and verbal support for playing together and helping each other. Examples: "Maria and Tasha, you are doing such a good job rolling out the play dough together." "Tasha, please hand Maria her spoon." "Gabriel, will you take this book to Benji?"
Read books about friends, playing together, helping each other, etc.
Practice turn-taking and sharing. Play turn-taking games.
Imitate what a child is doing. For example, sit next to the child and stack blocks.
Describe one child's activity to another out loud, drawing the children to notice each other. For example, "Charles is lining the blocks up on the carpet. You are stacking the blocks up high."





## Classroom Environment & Peer Interaction

With your classroom team, find ways to use materials already in your classroom to encourage peer interaction.



### Mealtime

How can we set up tables, chairs, or the meal to encourage interaction between children?

What can we do before, during, and after meals to encourage peer interaction?



### Play

What toys can we use to encourage children to notice and engage with each other?

How will we use these materials to encourage peer interaction?



### Outdoors or Gym

What materials or equipment are available that can encourage peer interaction?

How will we set these materials up to encourage peer interaction?



### Getting Ready

Which types of self-care activities would be appropriate opportunities to encourage children to notice and/or engage with each other?

How can we encourage interaction during these types of activities?



## Practice Implementation Checklist: Peer Interaction

Place a star next to the items you feel are a strength for you.

Then, check any of the boxes that apply.

### I would like to...

Promoting positive peer interactions	Learn more about this	Do this more often	Do in other routines or differently	Do this in better ways
Encourage children to be aware of & care about their peers				
Encourage children to initiate or maintain interactions with their peers throughout the day				
Provide positive descriptive comments to children who are engaging in positive peer interactions				
Offer comfort when negative social interactions occur among children				
Model social skills for children such as sharing, gentle touching, requesting, or using words				
Help children understand their peers' intentions				
Use a variety of developmentally appropriate strategies, materials, and activities to encourage peer-to-peer interactions				

### My Notes:



# Peer Interaction Training Feedback Form

Directions: Please take a moment to provide feedback on the training you received. When the survey is complete, leave it with your trainer.

Training Location:

Training Date:     /     /

My Program or Center:

Position (Circle one):

Administrator

Education Coordinator

Disability Coordinator

Mental Health Consultant

Teacher

Teacher Assistant

Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_

Put an "X" in the box that best describes your opinion as a result of attending this training:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
I have a better understanding of why positive peer interactions are important in early childhood.					
I have a better understanding of how to facilitate and support positive peer interactions in my classroom.					
I have a better understanding of how social play and friendship skills develop.					
During the training, I thought of ways to incorporate what I was hearing into my daily classroom activities.					
The training included information that was new to me, or was presented in a manner that was different from other trainings.					
The presenter was well-organized and prepared for the presentation.					
The presenter was knowledgeable on training topics and able to address questions.					

Please respond to the following questions regarding this training:

The best features of this training were...

My suggestions for improvement are...

Other comments and reactions I wish to offer (please use the back of the form for extra space):

