Fostering Friendships to Support Social-Emotional Learning in Early Childhood Programs

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Overheard…

Participants will understand…

- **WHY** teaching friendship skills is important
- **WHAT** friendship skills to teach
- **HOW** to plan and teach friendship skills
- **WHEN** children are not friendly, how we can support them
- **WHERE** to start with supporting staff

Goal: Leave with 5 new ideas, resources, or activities to try
WHY is teaching friendship skills important?

- Belonging, security, safety, decreased stress
- Self-esteem & self-confidence
- Most other areas and contexts require these relationship skills:
  - Small group & team work
  - Sitting amongst peers at group time
  - Navigating outside play
  - Social problem solving
  - Empathy

WHY is teaching friendship skills important?

Without social skills (friendship skills, problem solving, emotions & self-regulation), children are more likely to:

- have “challenging behavior,”
- be rejected by their peers,
- do poorly in school,
- be held back in the early grades
- drop out of high school.
WHY is teaching friendship skills important?

- By teaching these skills to all children:
  - We create a common language.
  - We create a classroom culture of kindness.

WHAT skills should we teach?

Think about a child you work with who is a “good friend.”

What makes this person a good friend?

Jot down inner traits/characteristics on the inside of a “person.”

Jot down skills the friend exhibits on the outside.

Which part was easier to jot down? Why?

What are the skills we need to teach?

- 6 friendship skills
  - Give a toy
  - Give friendly touches
  - Ask to play
  - Help a friend
  - Give a compliment
  - Give a play idea

What do these things have in common?
How do we teach friendship skills?

- How do you remember what to buy at the grocery store?
- How do you know there’s a railroad crossing when you’re driving?
- How do you build your IKEA furniture?

How do we teach a child to recognize the first letter of their name?
HOW do we teach friendship skills?

Planning Method 1
Plan social-emotional lessons that specifically target friendship skills.

Examples:
• Reading Eric Carle’s *The Very Busy Spider* to illustrate giving a play idea
• Compliment cards

Planning Method 2
Embed social skill opportunities into your existing routines, activities, and lessons.

Examples:
• Partner patterns
• Marble box paintings
• Class jobs, such as giving each other child a napkin
• Tires or wagons on the playground

Group affection activities
• AKA affection training or group friendship activities
• Songs or games that are modified to include friendly touches

Staff development activity: Think of a song or game you currently use that doesn’t include a friendship component. Modify it to make it into a group affection activity.
**HOW do we teach friendship skills?**

**DAPPER**

- Demonstrate
- Add picture
- Practice
- Plan
- Extend
- Reinforce

**Give a Play Idea**

**Demonstrate:** "Teacher Theatre" with blocks; a teacher suggests that they build a zoo.

**Add picture:**

**Practice:** Children each give an idea for blocks with stem of "We could build a ....."

**Plan:** Small group; pairs using play dough and giving a play idea. Take turns so both partners give idea and try it.

**Extend:** Outside; challenge children to give play ideas for sandbox

**Reinforce:** Notice play ideas & show visual. Have children share at PM group.

**Have teachers bring a weekly lesson plan and have them:**

- Highlight activities where children work together in **blue** (opportunities for incidental teaching)
- Highlight activities where the social skill is explicitly taught in **pink** (intentional, explicit teaching where the objectives are teaching and reinforcing this skill)
- Review the activities highlighted in blue. If children could choose to play alone or work alone during these activities, highlight them again with **yellow** so they turn **green**.
HOW do we teach friendship skills?

Review the plans and consider:

- For green items (opportunities to play together or alone), how can I encourage children to play together? How can I increase engagement so children will choose to play together? How can I offer activities that require teamwork?

- For blue items (incidental teaching moments), how can I reinforce these skills? What am I going to purposefully notice and comment on? How can I encourage children to reflect?

- Do you have pink items? Review with DAPPER to determine next steps and ideas.

WHEN children are not friendly...

That's not nice.

Use your words.

I'm not your friend.

Be a good friend.

I can't be your friend; you're a boy.

You can't come to my birthday party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we say...</th>
<th>What we mean...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You can't come to my birthday party.&quot;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm not your friend.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Use your words.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We're all friends.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can't be your friend; you're X...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHEN children are not friendly...

Things to consider when responding to these moments:

I CARE

- I- intent (Analyze the intent)
- C- calm (How can you help the child regulate?)
- A- acknowledge (Acknowledge emotion, intent, desire)
- R- rewind (Re-try the situation using a friendship skill)
- E- echo (Echo back the situation, skill, and effects)

WHEN children are not friendly...

Common Child Beliefs about Friendship

- I can only have one friend- my BEST friend.
- My best friend cannot have other best friends.
- We have to do everything together to be friends.
- My friend likes everything that I like.
- A friend always says yes when I ask them to play.
- If a friend says no, they are no longer my friend.
- If my best friend is no longer my friend, I have no friends.

WHEN children are not friendly...

How can I help you feel better?

- Hug
- Handshake
- Fist Bump
- High 5
- Something Else
Reframing Activity

Have everyone bring a book or song that has moments that aren’t “friendly.” Work to reframe these stories, pairing them with a friendship skill. Brainstorm how you could use them to teach children. (E.g., Three Billy Goats Gruff, Little Bunny Foo Foo)

Positive, descriptive feedback + written documentation + sending it home

Friendship Skills
Voice Output

When I want to ask a friend to play, I can:

1. Stand close to them.
2. Say their name and ask, “Can I play with you?”
3. Wait for them to look at me and respond.
Lesson Idea: Read *Friends* by Mies van Hout. Each page has one illustration and one word. Ask if each picture is helpful or hurtful (e.g., bother, play, fight, laugh). Brainstorm what skills could be used in the situation or what else friends might do. Create chalk or oil pastel drawings of friendly ideas.

**WHEN** can I teach friendship skills?

- **Firefighter Cooperation Game**
  - Focus on “helping a friend”
  - Line up children, each with a bucket. Pour water into the first child’s bucket and have them pour and pass the water all the way to the last child in the line. Have the last child “put out the fire.”

- **Cooperation Station**
  - Focus on “give a play idea” and “help a friend”
  - Have a selection of materials (e.g., paper shapes or blocks) and have children give a play idea. Facilitate each child adding to the creation and identifying what they’ve added. Give each child a chance to give a play idea with other friends adding to it.
**Teacher and Family Resources:**

- CSEFEL site teacher resources: [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html)
- Head Start Center for Inclusion teacher tools: [http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools](http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools)
- ConnectABILITY.ca tools for kids: [http://connectability.ca/category/kids/articles-kids/](http://connectability.ca/category/kids/articles-kids/)
- Resources for families about teaching friendship skills:
  - [http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/communities/families.html](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/communities/families.html)
  - [http://www.naeyc.org/yc/backpack](http://www.naeyc.org/yc/backpack)

**Children’s Books:**

- The Very Busy Spider by Eric Carle (give a play idea)
- A Visitor for Bear by Bonny Becker (compliments; asking for space)
- One Lonely Seahorse by Saxton Freymann (ask to play, help a friend, give a compliment- a great friendship skills review book)
- Fox Makes Friends by Adam Rolf (help a friend, ask to play)
- A House for Hermit Crab by Eric Carle (help a friend, give a compliment)
- Many of the Elephant & Piggie books by Mo Willems

**Resources:**

- All Children Need Friends: [https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/Publications/All_Children_Need_Friends.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/Publications/All_Children_Need_Friends.pdf)