

Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors through Promoting Positive Interactions Between Children

What are positive interactions between children?

Positive interactions are communications/exchanges that take place between the children in your classroom and are successful for the children involved. Child-to-child (or peer) interactions serve many important purposes for young children. As they watch, imitate, model and interact with each other, the children in your class are learning to share, solve problems and work together. These are all important skills for kindergarten and later life. Although there are many opportunities each day for children to interact and play together, not all of those interactions are pleasant or positive. Most teachers have seen children grab toys from others, push or hit to get what they want or ignore a friend who is trying to talk to them. One role of all teachers is to help children learn the skills necessary to have positive experiences with other children. These skills don't all come naturally, however, and some children must be taught the skills necessary to work and play well with other children.

Why are positive interactions between children important?

Interactions in the early years create the foundation for a child's future style of interacting...both negative and positive. Teachers have an opportunity in the preschool years to help children learn the social and emotional skills that will positively affect their ability to create healthy relationships throughout life. Every classroom provides many 'teachable moments' each day that can be used to encourage these skills. Teachers should try to view children's inappropriate interactions with classmates as teaching opportunities and support them as they learn new skills.

What can you do in your classroom?

Set aside time during circle time to teach and practice social skills. You can use circle time to help your children learn skills, such as getting a friend's attention, sharing toys and materials, making suggestions for play, helping each other, saying nice things to one another and entering a play situation. If you follow these steps to teach social skills the children will have better success:

1. Explain the skill you want to help them learn
2. Demonstrate the skill
3. Demonstrate an incorrect way and allow children to problem solve
4. Let children practice the skill with an adult or with another child
5. Provide positive feedback and attention as they use the skills

Look for opportunities for children to practice during activities and transitions. Make sure you have cooperative use toys (e.g., puppets, telephones, rocking boats) in your classroom to promote social interactions during play. You can plan social interactions throughout the classroom day (e.g., passing out names for jobs at circle, passing out napkins at snack) to provide more opportunities for learning these positive social behaviors. With your guidance and patience, the children in your class can even 'un-learn' inappropriate ways to deal with other children, such as grabbing toys or hitting to get what they want.

Research on this topic:

Research suggests that the use of positive social skills with other children can lead to the development of positive relationships, acceptance and friendships. Preschool children's success at making friends also predicts many positive later-life outcomes. By actively teaching children appropriate social skills and by creating opportunities for children to practice these skills, you can improve children's social behaviors, potentially for a lifetime!

Food for thought:

Think about how you feel when a co-worker or supervisor notices and comments about what you are doing 'right.' Children need those reinforcing moments, as well, so don't forget to catch them being good and comment on their emerging skills. You can extend the positive feedback by sending home a HappyGram or SuperFriend Award to parents to share the good news. Positive interactions between children can help create a happier classroom!

Adapted by *Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors* from CSEFEL *What Works Brief #22* www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/