

## **Strategies for Creating Opportunities that Support Children's Interactions**

Although most children find it easy to talk, play and work with other children, some need a teacher's assistance. Through planned social situations children are able to make new friends, which gives them confidence to seek out other social interactions. Opportunities for embedding friendship activities occur naturally within the daily classroom routine. When you plan ways to encourage and support peer interaction in your classroom, think about how you might get children to actively play together. It might be as simple as setting up a Buddy Table during free choice play and requiring that children find a friend to play with there in order to gain access to the high preference toys at this center. Promote interactions during meals and snack by introducing topics to stimulate conversation between children sitting together at tables. You should also look for those frequently occurring tasks performed by the teacher that could easily be assigned to a child, then consider how those tasks can be structured to teach the social skills goals and expectations to your children. Give thought to how you provide the support children need to be successful in carrying out the task, such as verbal cues, gestures, visual cues, or physical prompts and assistance.

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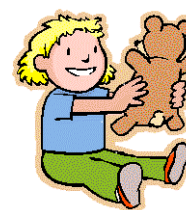
**Snack Picnic:** Take advantage of pretty weather and spend some extra time outdoors having a snack picnic. Help each child find a buddy (taking into account friendship preferences and /or children who might need extra peer support) and give each pair a snack-for-two in a paper bag. Make sure the snack is easy to share (i.e., 2 apples, 2 packs of crackers, 2 juice boxes) and send them to find a cozy picnic spot on the playground. Walk around and visit with each pair asking starter questions to prompt their conversations (i.e. Do the cicadas sounder louder to you today? Do you hear them at your house?) The novelty of being in charge of their own snack and selecting their own setting will keep them engaged in the interactions for longer than a typical snack time in the classroom.



**Story Time:** Choose books that actively teach friendship skills and look for ways to promote and extend those ideas through the rest of the day. Involve the children in a discussion or role play about how they could use that skill. Compliment children who display the desired behavior. Create a Super Friend icon such as a cape, crown, badge, or necklace and bestow one on every child who uses friendship skills during the day. *I Can Be a SUPER FRIEND!*, is available for free download at <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html> .

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**Circle of Compliments:** As the day winds down, pause for a closing circle time with the children. Use this time to talk about the highlights of the day with an emphasis on how the children worked and played well with each other. Model for the children how to give feedback or a compliment when they like what a friend has done (i.e., *I felt happy when you shared the blocks with me today*). You can extend this activity by writing the compliments on a chart or strips of paper to post. To make this more interactive, you could use a Teddy Bear as the Compliment Bear who is passed from child-to child during the Circle of Compliments.



**Free Play:** During free play children have the most time to develop friendship skills and teachers should provide multiple options for peer partnering during free play. Younger children will enjoy working together to play Ring Around the Rosie, create art murals, construct and destroy tall towers, or complete simple floor puzzles. Older preschoolers will enjoy practicing turn-taking and following rules through table games indoors or cooperative games outdoors such as Hide-And-Seek, Tag, The Farmer In the Dell, or Duck, Duck, Goose!

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