

## **Strategies for Structuring the Environment to Promote Positive Social Interactions**

Planning and creating an environment that encourages positive social interactions in your classroom is one of the easiest ways to support the development of skills young children need to get along with others. All classrooms have materials that can be used to support social interactions and any material that can be used by more than one child at one time is a resource. Your role is to intentionally plan and structure how the materials will be used to increase the likelihood that positive interactions will take place. It's like planting seeds in a garden. The planning and organization takes time but, once they are put into place, you can watch positive social interactions flourish and grow.

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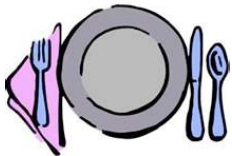
**The Play-Together Table:** You will need one small table, two chairs, an activity to work on together and a visual that indicates that the area is reserved for two children at a time (no more and no less). Introduce the table as a new learning area or center and explain to the children that they must find a friend to join them at the table to play. Materials can be a basket of manipulatives, a large puzzle, a doll house with props, a road map with vehicles, a puppet theatre, a magnifying glass with materials to study, a joint art project, etc. Your imagination is the limit! Remember to change the materials frequently to keep the children interested and wondering what is coming next to the play-together table.

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**Dramatic Play:** Dramatic play naturally fosters opportunities for children to play cooperatively together. You can facilitate this by joining children's play initially and helping them select roles that are part of a theme. For instance, you can turn your dramatic play area into a mechanic shop and children can be mechanics working together to fix a vehicle, the customers and/or the service manager. Change the themes in the dramatic play area frequently to facilitate continued positive interactions. You might consider props and materials that create a veterinarian's office, fire station, grocery store, doctor's office or airport. This strategy develops teamwork, problem-solving, planning, respect for other's ideas and peer relationships. These projects can take days or weeks as children come up with new ideas. Be ready to write down a list of materials as the children ask for them. Don't forget that this strategy can be implemented outdoors as well. For example, your sandbox can become a construction site, with hard hats, tools, and a wide variety of other construction materials.



### **Classroom Jobs:**



Review your helper chart and incorporate jobs that require more than one child to accomplish. Two children can set tables for meals working cooperatively on one table at a time or two children can be door holders. You can also incorporate jobs that require social interactions among children such as a classroom greeter who welcomes each child upon arrival; a child who asks each person, *'How are you feeling today?'* and indicates their answers on the Feeling Chart; children can help each other get their cots ready for nap or some children can rub backs for a while before they lay down.

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**Don't forget** to observe the children's interests and use them in your planning. Become a detective to identify places and ways you can enhance the classroom to promote these strategies. Look at all the children in your group and encourage children who have well-developed interpersonal skills to spend time with their peers who need some help. Try to envision your classroom as a growing garden, which with a little tending and time will bloom!

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