
Supporting Young Children's Friendships

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the podcast "Supporting Young Children's Friendships: An Interview with Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky." The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss the benefits and challenges of peer relationships for young children with and without disabilities.
- ◆ Understand that successful peer interactions integrate multiple skills. Recognize that many children need support using all of them at the same time.
- ◆ Consider families' unique perspectives and goals for their child's friendships.
- ◆ Plan to support children's development of peer interaction skills.

Activity

- ◆ Listen to the podcast or read the transcript.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on how you can support young children's peer interaction skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed.

It's up to us, parents and teachers, to try to support children in those [peer] interactions so they can learn [friendship] skills.

Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the podcast? Why was that fact, idea, or example meaningful to you?

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- ◆ Why are peer relationships important for both typically developing children and children with disabilities?

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- ◆ Successful peer interactions require children to use social communication, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills at the same time. Infants and toddlers are just beginning to develop these skills and children with disabilities may need extra support to learn to use these skills. Think about a child in your class who is just beginning to engage with peers or an older child who has a hard time engaging with peers.
 - Which peer interaction skill(s) is this child strongest with?
 - Which skill(s) does this child struggle with?
 - How can you build on this child's strengths and interests to develop those other skills during peer interactions?

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- ◆ Families may want to help their children practice peer interaction skills at home or in community settings. How can you be a resource to families and share ways that support these skills while respecting their unique situations and values related to friendships?

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- ◆ Some young children may show interest in and a desire to play interactively with other children, while some may feel comfortable playing near, but not with others. And some children may still prefer playing on their own. Plan to create a classroom environment to which all children feel they belong and where they have opportunities to interact with others in their play but can also choose to play beside peers. Choose a part of the day when children have the most opportunities to practice peer interaction skills (e.g., choice time, outdoor play, mealtimes).
 - How can you change the physical space or materials to encourage more peer interactions?
 - What specific skill(s) do children need more targeted support to initiate or sustain interactions in that setting?
 - From your prior observations, who would benefit from small group or individual coaching to use those skills during play?
 - How will you keep track of children's development of those skills?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting young children’s peer interaction skills:

- ◆ **Source:** Read Brightly
- ◆ **Article:** “Books About Friendship for Babies and Toddlers”
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.readbrightly.com/books-on-friendship-babies-toddlers/>
- ◆ **Description:** Sharing books about friendship is an effective way to introduce social skills to very young children. While reading with children, you can draw attention to the positive ways the characters interact with each other.

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- ◆ **Source:** Head Start Center for Inclusion
 - ◆ **Website:** Classroom Visuals and Supports
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://headstartinclusion.org/tools-and-supports/classroom-visuals-and-supports/>
 - ◆ **Description:** Young children are just developing the skills they need to communicate with others. Introducing visuals for words like “more” and “stop” or “please” can be helpful when supporting children’s communication attempts with their peers.