

# CORE SKILL: RELATE

## Peer Relationships



### What You Need to Know

Most infants love to connect with others. At first, their priority is to establish a strong relationship with the adults who care for them. But as they develop, they begin to express interest in engaging with their peers. Supporting peer relationships during infancy means helping babies begin to recognize, acknowledge, and enjoy their interactions with one another. These “interactions” often take the form of simple behaviors, such as smiling at another infant, pointing at or reaching for another infant, crawling toward another infant, or simply looking up when another infant enters their space. As they continue to develop into toddlerhood, children will begin to both socialize more purposefully and more frequently. In the meantime, pay attention to these “interactions” by acknowledging and reinforcing them as they occur. Though seemingly small, these skills are critical building blocks to eventual friendship formation!

### Things to Consider

Be intentional about which infants you place near one another. For an infant whose temperament is one of high energy, for example, it may make sense to pair them with another infant who shares a similar energy level during play. Or, for an infant who you know enjoys playing with blocks, place them near another infant who also enjoys playing with blocks. Similarly, if an infant does not initiate interactions frequently, you may try pairing an infant who is very social as a means of modeling. By doing this, you can intentionally stage interactions to both diminish the likelihood of issues and promote positive experiences.

### Development of Emotional Connections with Peers

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Show recognition of familiar children through actions or behaviors (e.g., smiling, reaching, or making sounds).	Participate in simple back-and-forth interactions with another child.
Look attentively, touch, or explore another child’s face.	Interact with a few children on a regular basis and know some of their names and likes/dislikes.
Respond to another child’s actions or sounds during play by watching attentively, touching, or reaching.	Participate in simple imitation games, such as making similar sounds or running after another child.
	Play next to other children with similar toys or materials.

### Setting the Stage

Activities, materials, or routines that support the development of peer relationships:

- ◆ Shared experiences (e.g., playing with similar toys).
- ◆ Shared tasks – engaging in similar activities next to or near peers (e.g., dance to music or sing a song altogether).
- ◆ Peer introductions – greeting and saying the name of each child as a morning group routine.



## Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Peer Relationships

Monday OBSERVE	<b>OBSERVE</b>  Carefully observe if and how infants respond to the presence of their peers. Do they notice when a new peer enters the play space? Do they glance at or pay attention to what their peers are doing? Do they make attempts to engage with peers? If so, what types of gestures or efforts do they display?
Tuesday FOCUS	<b>Acknowledge Positive Peer Interactions</b>  Focus on pointing out the <b>presence</b> of peers as often as possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Acknowledge when other infants enter into shared or nearby space. For example, point and say, “Someone is at the door. I wonder who it could be? ...Look, it’s our friend, (Child)!”</li></ul> Promote and draw attention to <b>shared experiences</b> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Place infants in close proximity to one another to allow opportunity for interaction.</li><li>◆ “Oh look, (Child 1)! (Child 2) is playing with the trains, too!”</li></ul>
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	<b>Join in the Play</b>  <b>Model and Narrate prosocial skills.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ While sitting in the block area, place blocks in between two infants and then prompt or model how to share. As they begin to play without trying to take the other’s blocks, smile, make eye contact, and say in an excited tone, “Wow, you two are sharing so nicely!”</li><li>◆ When you see an infant looking at another and their toys, point and say, “Look, I think (Child) wants to play, too. (Child), come over here and play with us!” while gesturing for the child to join in play.</li></ul>
Thursday & Friday KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing infants on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffold. Find ways to intentionally incorporate strategies to continue building upon infants’ peer relationships.