

CORE SKILL: RELATE

Problem-Solving with Others



What You Need to Know

Most infants have a strong desire to engage with the people and objects around them. As the skills needed to interact positively with peers (e.g., perspective-taking and self-regulation) do not emerge until later in their development, infants rely on adults to help guide their social experiences. Infants need their caregivers to constantly observe and be ready to jump in to support infants' exploration of their environment in ways that promote rather than hinder social interactions. Adults, therefore, play a vital role in problem-solving for infants. While it may require a lot of effort from caregivers to actively observe and brainstorm how to purposefully structure the environment and interactions in ways that promote positive peer interactions, infants' exposure to and experience with positive peer interactions early on will play a critical role in their development of the skills needed to positively engage with those around them!

Things to Consider

- ◆ Pay attention to infants' signals and cues in order to best set them up for success with peers. Prevention in the form of careful monitoring, coupled with the knowledge of what triggers conflict can alleviate many potential problems. Being hungry, tired, angry, frustrated, or overstimulated, for example, can reduce infants' ability to navigate social interactions. If an infant is hungry, bring them a snack before they play with others. Or, if they are overstimulated, reduce the noise or number of peers around them. Through these simple actions, you can foster a positive social experience for infants.
- ◆ While in toddlerhood, an emphasis is placed on helping children learn from and navigate challenges with peers; this is not the focus during infancy. Rather, infants are just learning how to engage with others, and we cannot expect them to manage their social environment independently. The focus is instead on simply providing opportunities for infants to engage with others.

Development of Emotional Connections with Peers

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Sometimes try more than one approach to solving a problem or engaging someone in interaction.	Show the ability to shift focus in order to attend to something else, participate in a new activity, or try a new solution to a problem.
Modify expressions, actions, or behaviors based on responses of others.	Look to or seek help from familiar adults.
Respond positively to familiar adults' efforts to help with stressful moments.	

Setting the Stage

Activities, materials, or routines that encourage peer problem-solving skills:

- ◆ Position infants in close proximity to one another while playing. This will naturally provide the opportunity to practice how to effectively explore and achieve goals while in the presence of their peers.
- ◆ Carefully observe infants' interactions and cues and, when possible, be proactive in intervening to prevent a social problem (e.g., provide another toy, or re-direct an infants' crawling).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Problem-Solving with Others

Monday OBSERVE	OBSERVE When you observe challenges occurring between infants, think about what is else is happening – the context of the situation. Are there particular activities/materials or times during the day where infants may especially benefit from more proactive problem-solving (e.g., are there more issues before snack or right after nap)? Is there something in the environment that is making problems more likely to happen? In addition, observe your own behaviors and expectations. Keep in mind that infants have not yet developed the ability to consider the needs of others – if they grab a toy from a peer, this is simply because they want that toy, not to be “mean” or to hurt the other’s feelings.
Tuesday FOCUS	Narrate Problems and Solutions Draw attention to problems and solutions. Remember, we do not expect infants to be able to identify and suggest solutions on their own, but narrating and modeling how to resolve issues both alleviates the situation and exposes them to problem-solving strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Uh-oh. You both want to build in the same place,” while pointing where they are playing. “How about (Child 1) moves over here (<i>move blocks toward one side</i>) and (Child 2) moves over here (<i>move blocks toward other side</i>) ... Now you can both play here!”◆ When an infant accidentally bumps into another or their toys. “Oops, you accidentally bumped into (Child)’s tower. Sorry, (Child)! Let’s help them pick up the pieces,” while scaffolding the infant to help their peer.◆ An infant tries to give a teddy bear to another child. “I think you want to play with (Child), but they are turning away. I think they are saying, ‘no thank you.’ Let’s see what they want to play with instead. Maybe we can join them in a different game.”
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	Help Children See You as A Resource Help infants see you as a resource in their peer interactions by modeling prosocial strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ When noticing that an infant is frustrated that another infant is playing too close in proximity. “Here (Child), let’s move your toys over here... Would you like my help?” while pointing at/picking up toys.◆ While two infants are pushing a ball back-and-forth, “Oh no, the ball rolled away! Here, I’ll get it for you,” while getting the ball, smiling, and encouraging continued play.
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 build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.