



WHAT IS IT?

Supporting Friendship Skills is a set of strategies to foster social skills that children need to make and maintain friendships. It involves explicitly teaching social skills through the use of books, puppets, and other materials.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

During Morning Meeting, the teacher reads a book that illustrates what successfully sharing looks like in the classroom. The teacher provides each child with a laminated picture of an item shared in the book, labeled in two languages (English and Spanish), which represent the children's home languages. When their corresponding page is read, children role-play sharing the items with a peer (i.e., hand picture to a peer).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Children learn social skills through repeated practice and observation of their peers. Intentionally teaching social skills helps children understand how to interact positively with their peers, while providing a safe place for them to practice these new skills.

Among many others, some important social skills for preschoolers include sharing, turn-taking, initiating conversation, perspective-taking, respecting and valuing differences, showing patience, being flexible, and listening to others.

Using Peer Pairing in the Classroom

Peer Pairing is a strategy that involves intentionally pairing children to work or play together during a specific activity or time of day. One of the best ways for children to learn friendship skills is by practicing with other children. The typical preschool day is full of moments where children need to figure out how to share toys, take turns, and play alongside or cooperatively with each other. You can structure opportunities for children to practice positive social skills, so they are ready to navigate these daily challenges/interactions.

How to use peer pairing:

Plan an opportunity for children to work or play in pairs.

This can be chosen based on the skill you are trying to develop. It could be a specific activity, like building with blocks, reading together, pretend play, or an art project. You could also choose a time of day to make pairs, like during Choice Time or Transitions.

Make pairs intentionally based on children's unique interests, strengths, and areas of growth.

The pairs could also be chosen randomly. It is best **not** to allow children to pick their partners, as they tend to play with the same children repeatedly.

Introduce the pairs and explain the activity.

Be creative in making the pairing exciting for the children! Ideas include giving them matching stickers or use buddy bracelets.

Provide support to pairs during play.

Some pairs may need more or less support than others. Try to scaffold the pair and provide just enough support. If conflict arises, encourage problem-solving.

Acknowledge the use of friendship skills after play.

Use positive descriptive feedback to tell the children what you liked. Encourage the children to think about how the play went too (e.g., "You both worked together to build a tower! What was your favorite part of playing with your friend?").



TIPS FOR SUPPORTING FRIENDSHIP SKILLS

1. Use materials that support using friendship skills.

- Use books, social stories, puppets, or videos to show different scenarios.
- Ask open-ended questions about the characters (e.g., “How do you think this character feels?” or “What would you do if that happened to your friend?”).
- Point out social skills being used (e.g., “Wow, this character helped their friend who was crying. That is a nice thing for a friend to do!”).
- Make sure materials include characters from different cultural backgrounds and characters with differing abilities.

2. Prime children to think about friendship skills before activities begin.

- Before play time, ask children questions about friends (e.g., “Who are you going to play with? What materials will you share?”).
- Help children plan for challenges (e.g., “What will you do if you both want to play with the same toy? Let’s think about our solutions!”).

3. Suggest play ideas.

- Offer new ways to use materials.
- Encourage children to expand their activities to include others (e.g., “You both are playing with blocks. Maybe you could build something together!”).
- Offer children choices to join in play or ask others to play.

4. Encourage friendship skills during play.

- Directly model desired play partner behaviors, such as joining in or asking a friend to play.
- If conflict arises, model using problem-solving to come up with a fair solution.

5. Provide explicit instruction for children who need extra support using friendship skills.

- Provide opportunities for children to practice friendship skills.
- Offer specific suggestions for what to say (e.g., “If you want to join in, you could ask ‘Can I play with you?’”).

6. Use positive reinforcement.

- Provide specific, labeled praise shortly after play has ended (e.g., “You two shared your toys so nicely!”).
- Make sure not to interrupt play to provide reinforcement, as this may disrupt play interactions.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT FRIENDSHIP SKILLS

Supporting Peer Relationships

[ECE Resource Hub](#)

CASTL ©

I Can Be a Super Friend

[Available as PDF](#)

NCPMI©

Super Friend Activity

[Available as PDF](#)

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