

Children with disabilities and learning difficulties have trouble interacting with peers.

Negative interactions are normal. As children are learning the skills to play with others, they use mechanical means like pushing or hitting. These are opportunities to guide all children to connect positively with one another.

When conflict happens, help both children to “Try again”.

Having a child with special needs can be isolating. Reach out to other families.



Positive peer relationships support the mental health

needs of young children.

(Guralnick, 2006)

Create a caring community
Inclusion means interaction

Ideas to foster peer interaction:



- On a play date, bring something to share like stickers, snacks, or drinks
- Put away small toys and use big toys such as a large box or a chair and blanket “fort”
- Meet at a neutral spot in the community- library, playground
- Give the kids buckets or baskets to empty and fill together outside. Kids love “loose” parts
(Nicholson, 2009)

Foster peer interaction from the very start!



Even babies seek one another.

Infants do best in pairs.

Toddlers like duos and trios.

It takes complex skills for two toddlers to interact.

(Goldman & Buysse, 2008)

Kids can learn to “Stay, play, and talk” with friends and to “Show your friend” (& “watch your friend”).

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A child needs at least one friend.



Children learn from siblings and cousins, but the most important factor for future success in academics and social skills comes through **PEER RELATIONSHIPS.**

If you participate in early intervention, consider an **IFSP outcome or strategy** that includes peers.

- Instill the joy of helping and sharing with others
- Respect that young children often prefer peers of the same gender
- Children connect best in small groups facilitated by one adult
- Invite two socially skilled children to join a less competent peer who can learn from them
- Children interact most with the children they see the most often



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We often say,
“You did it!” or
“Way to go!”

Young children connect when we say:

Show
Your
Friend!



Fostering peer interaction: A guide for **parents of very young children**

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