

Families want their children to be socially competent.



Children with disabilities and learning difficulties have trouble

interacting with peers.

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

During the first three years of life, a child develops his/her own “theory” of peer relationships and uses this going forward. (Wittmer, 2012)

It takes complex skills for two toddlers to interact.
(Goldman & Buysse, 2008)

Teach children to:

- Give/Pass objects to another child
- Put out their open hand to receive things from peers
- Use the names of peers in photos and greetings
- Talk about one another during routines
- “Try again”
- Play turn-taking games
- “Show your friend”
(+ “Watch your friend”)

Set up and fade back



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Positive peer relationships support the mental health of young children.
(Guralnick, 2006)



A focus on peer interaction is a **preventative** approach.

Teach socially competent peers to be **peer mentors**:

- “Stay with your friend”
- “Play with your friend”
- “Talk with your friend”

(CSEFEL; Goldstein, English, Shafer, & Kaczmarek, 1997)

Use peers to teach

- greetings
- turn-taking
- routines
- transitions



Foster Peer Interaction

It can take several months to develop connections with peers. Children engage most readily with their most familiar peers. Support friendships through continuity of caregivers and enrollment practices that keep kids with familiar peers.

- Children notice physical differences and adapt their play to meet the needs of their peers
- Children connect best in small groups facilitated by one adult
- Best practice places two socially skilled peers with a less competent peer who can learn from watching them interact
- Young children often prefer peers of the same gender

Consider **outcomes or strategies** that includes peers.

Practitioners have in-depth knowledge of children's capabilities, and so **supporting peer interaction** needs to be put into practice

(Davis & Degotardi, 2015)



Create a caring community.

Inclusion means interaction.



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While we often say
“Eyes on Me”,
“Hands to Yourself”, or
“Feet on the Floor”,

Young children connect
when we say

Show Your Friend!



Fostering peer interaction
in very young children:
A guide for
**professionals working
with young children
with disabilities**

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