

# Meaningful Interactions with Peers

## What are meaningful interactions with peers?

Meaningful interactions are planned or unplanned opportunities for learning friendship skills such as joining in play, sharing, helping, collaborating, comforting, making suggestions in play, giving compliments, understanding how and when to give an apology, and problem solving.



## Why are meaningful interactions with peers important?

Peer interactions are important because they support healthy social and emotional development in children. Children who can meaningfully interact with their peers are able to make and maintain friendships and are included more often in activities.

Meaningful peer interactions are supported by high quality inclusive environments whose core belief is that all children, regardless of diversity, are welcomed, actively engaged, and have a sense of belonging.

## Educators can support meaningful interactions by:

- Modelling positive interactions (i.e., being attentive, nurturing, warm, responsive, and respectful in all interactions with children and adults).
- Getting to know each child's unique interests, needs, and cultural background so that you can better scaffold and support children's interactions with peers.
- Share and create joy by being at the child's level (i.e., face to face, providing eye contact, being positive, responding warmly, etc.)
- Providing co-regulation strategies (i.e., comforting presence, deep breathing, etc.) to support a child to be calm and ready to learn.
- Modelling how you identify, label, express, and soothe emotions.
- Teaching social interaction skills:
  - getting a peer or adult's attention,
  - sharing an object (taking turns),
  - asking a peer to share,
  - providing a play idea to a peer,
  - saying something kind to a peer or adult.
- Providing materials and opportunities for play throughout the day so that children can engage in friendship skills (i.e., taking turns, sharing, problem solving, etc.)
- Modelling through role play, positive interactions with co-workers, and reading books that demonstrate friendship skills.

# Meaningful Interactions with Peers

Positive words and concepts to introduce could include:

- **Infants:** problem, help, calm, sad, smile
  - **Toddlers:** gentle, kind, share, take turns, wait, upset, hug, take a break, play together
  - **Preschoolers:** patience, problem, solution, strategy, agree, apologize, respect, think, reflect, fair, unfair, plan, collaborate
- Building collaborative relationships with families by welcoming and valuing their experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and ideas. For example:
    - Educators work with children and families to develop appropriate expectations on how you treat each other with respect and caring in your space
    - Provide opportunities for families to share their beliefs around friendship, how their child engages with other children, how they initiate play, what they do when a conflict arises in peer interactions, etc.

- Providing opportunities for families to spend time with each other and engage in meaningful interactions (i.e., family barbeques, craft night, learning activity, etc.)
- Sharing strategies and information with families about what is working in your program and learning from them what works for their child at home and in the community.

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## References

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## Helpful Resources for Educators

### BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Gossie and Gertie**  
[ Olivier Dunrea ]
- **Grumpy Bird**  
[ Jeremy Tankard ]
- **What Should Danny Do**  
[ Ganit & Adair Levy ]
- **The Very Cranky Bear**  
[ Nick Bland ]
- **Tucker the Turtle** (Puppet and Social Story)

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning** Practical Strategies for Educators: scripted stories on friendship, tools for working on relationship building, book suggestions, and teaching social emotional skills <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#scriptedstories/> [https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice\\_Guideline\\_Supporting\\_Positive\\_Interactions\\_with\\_Children.pdf](https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice_Guideline_Supporting_Positive_Interactions_with_Children.pdf)
- **Circle Time Magazine:** Teaching Problem Solving and Friendship Skills Edition 4 Positive Behaviour Supports [Circle Time Magazine Edition 4: Teaching Problem Solving and Friendship Skills](https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice_Guideline_Supporting_Positive_Interactions_with_Children.pdf)