

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE
INFORMATION FOR EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

Developing Friendships in the Early Years

The Importance of Early Friendships

Evidence shows that children's social and emotional development impact their overall academic achievement.

Friendships in the early years tend to be play based and create opportunities for children to learn important social, cognitive, language, and emotional skills.

Friendships are more likely to form between children when they share similar characteristics (age, gender, attitudes, beliefs, and play styles).

Supporting Play in The Learning Setting

Structure the environment

Include areas for large and small group gatherings.

Be mindful that the areas are large enough to foster collaboration and not create competition for space and materials.

Create social stories together as a whole class or in groups that consider how to solve class and group problems.

Scheduling the day

Have small and large group times structured into the day to support those children who often play alone or in a limited environment to play safely alongside their peers.

Allow children some time to play alone.

Speak to parents and encourage "play dates" and opportunities for the children to socialise in informal environments.

Feelings of belonging

Create a classroom display which shows the children working / playing collaboratively.

Create opportunities for group problem solving.

Comment on the strengths that children bring to the group so that children recognise what it is important to one another.

Supporting Specific Skills

Exploring play

Encourage parallel play between peers, and between children and adults to explore new activities and ways of playing.

Encourage children to sit opposite each other when they play so they can develop awareness of each other.

Social and emotional awareness

Play with children and model interpreting emotional and social cues.

Label emotions of the children and yourself when playing with a child.

Narrate children's attempts to socialise explicitly by commenting when children are helping one another or playing together.

In order to give positive feedback on play skills, acknowledge and comment the positive feelings they show during play.

Social Language

Model and comment on how you are using your own language when playing with children (e.g. I'm going to ask Brian if I can have the car before I take it).

Some children need explicit teaching of language for play, they may need visual reminders and help to use this language.