



Supporting Young Children's Friendships

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INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the podcast "Supporting Young Children's Friendships: An Interview with Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky." The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss the benefits and challenges of peer relationships for children with and without disabilities.
- ◆ Understand that successful peer interactions integrate multiple skills. Recognize that many children need support using all of them at the same time.
- ◆ Consider families' unique perspectives and goals for their children's friendships.
- ◆ Plan to support children's development of peer interaction skills.

Activity

- ◆ Listen to the podcast or read the transcript.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on how you can support children's peer interaction skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed.

It's up to us, parents and teachers, to try to support children in those [peer] interactions so they can learn [friendship] skills.

Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the podcast? Why was that fact, idea, or example meaningful to you?



- ◆ Why are peer relationships important for both typically developing children and children with disabilities?
 - Why might children struggle to interact with peers and build these important relationships?



- ◆ Successful peer interactions require children to use social communication, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills at the same time. Children with disabilities may need extra support using these skills to connect with peers. Think about a child in your class who has a hard time engaging with peers.
 - Which peer interaction skill(s) is this child strong at?
 - Which skill does this child struggle with?
 - How can you build on this child's strengths and interests to develop those other skills during peer interactions?



- ◆ Families may want to help their children practice peer interaction skills at home or in community settings. How can you be a resource to families and share ways that support these skills while respecting their unique situations and values related to friendships?



- ◆ While some children may struggle to initiate play with peers, others may struggle to invite or accept others into their play. Plan to create a classroom environment to which all children feel they belong and where they seek to include others in their play and conversations. Choose a part of the day when children have the most opportunities to practice peer interaction skills (e.g., choice time, outdoor play, mealtimes).
 - How can you change the physical space or materials to encourage more peer interactions?
 - What specific skill(s) do children need more targeted support to initiate or sustain interactions in that setting?
 - From your prior observations, who would benefit from small group or individual coaching to use those skills during play?
 - How will you keep track of children's development of those skills?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children's peer interaction skills:

- ◆ **Source:** Teacher Time-Head Start Preschool
- ◆ **Episode:** "Can We Be Friends? Peer Interactions and Your Curriculum"
- ◆ **Link:** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/preschool-teacher-time-episode-4>
- ◆ **Description:** This hour-long episode is full of research and strategies teachers can use to support young children's peer relationships. For specific ways to support dual language learners, check out the interview with Dr. Linda Espinosa starting at the 17-minute mark.

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- ◆ **Source:** Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego
 - ◆ **Toolkit:** Pre-School Inclusion Programming for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.rchsd.org/documents/2017/04/alexas-playc-preschool-inclusion-toolkit.pdf/>
 - ◆ **Description:** Learn more about supporting peer-to-peer interactions and how to foster friendships for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Note: you can jump to the section on Peer Engagement using the bookmark found in table of contents.

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- ◆ **Source:** EmbraceRace
 - ◆ **Webinar:** "Why and How to Encourage Cross-Racial Friendships Among Children"
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.embracerace.org/resources/why-and-how-to-encourage-cross-racial-friendships-among-children>
 - ◆ **Description:** According to research, cross-racial friendships are rare, yet very beneficial for adults and children. Watch this webinar to learn strategies you can use and share to encourage more cross-race friendships among children.

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- ◆ **Source:** Colorado Department of Education
 - ◆ **Video:** "Friendship, Inclusion, and Learning"
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SITrYePC0w&feature=youtu.be>
 - ◆ **Description:** This video shares a story of a friendship between two girls in a preschool inclusion classroom. Watch as their teacher and families describe how their friendship supported both children's social-emotional and language development.