

Promoting Friendship Skills

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

IV. Supporting Children's Development

C. The provider actively promotes social skills and positive relationships among children.

2. The provider helps each child find positive ways to interact with others and supports children in developing friendships.



Happy Hearts Childcare



HoneyPie Nature Playschool



Hundred Acre Play Care

The Basics

Friendship (or reciprocal, intimate, voluntary bonds between people) provides children with emotional security, cognitive support, and sense of belonging (Rubin et al., 2008). Friendship development begins in infancy through relationships with caring, attentive adults offering a model for future social connections. Young children become increasingly aware of others and begin attempting to connect through verbalization, gestures, and imitation. Early childhood friendships emerge and solidify through play where children connect with others with similar interests and play approaches (Mehta & Strough, 2009).

Why promote friendship skills? Friendship promotes social and cognitive development whereas its absence contributes to loneliness, poor self-esteem, and anxiety throughout childhood (Rubin et al., 2008). Children's **play behavior** impacts friendship development and peer acceptance. Children who display positive play interactions like helping others, sharing, and encouraging others to join are more likely to establish friendships than children who display disruptive or disconnected play behaviors (Coelho et al., 2017).

How can I support friendship development? Educators play a critical role in supporting children's social and emotional competency by modeling, coaching, and establishing the social environment (Correia et al., 2026). Below are ideas for promoting friendships among children in mixed-age settings.

→ **Model.** Show children helping, comforting, including, and sharing with others through your actions.

"Would you like help rebuilding your tower?"

- **Acknowledge.** Recognize prosocial behavior between children like turn taking, helping, and cooperating. *"You both are working together to finish the puzzle!"*
- **Narrate.** Help children with limited language skills communicate with others through narration. *"It looks like Isaiah wants to play with you! He is dancing to the music you're making with the maracas."*
- **Encourage.** Incorporate materials and activities and plan your physical space to promote cooperation among children. *"I see you both found a spot in the cozy corner. What will you do together?"*
- **Discuss.** Read books and have conversations with children about friendship, including friendship-supporting behavior and its emotional impact. *"How do you know these two children are friends?"*
- **Support.** Help children work through conflict and communicate their needs to others. *"You are upset because Amelia is too close to you. Tell her, 'I need some space,' so she knows what you need."*

I want to learn more!

- [Building Friendships in Preschool \(Article\)](#)
- [Helping Children Learn and Play Together \(Article\)](#)
- [Two's Company, Three's a Crowd: Peer Interactions in a Preschool Social Triangle \(Article\)](#)
- [Future Directions in...Friendship in Childhood and Early Adolescence \(Research article\)](#)
- [Promoting Friendship Skills Across the Day \(Resource\)](#)
- [Helping Young Children Make Friends: Tips to Help Kids Build Relationships \(Article\)](#)