

# Visual Supports for Infants and Toddlers

## Friendship Behaviors



Visual supports, such as objects, photos, or drawings, add visual information to a learning environment to help children know what to do and how to interact during routines and activities. Visual supports have many different uses and can support children with a variety of learning characteristics.

This special collection of visual supports was designed with **young children between the ages of 16 to 36 months in mind**. The visuals are simple and concrete to match the developmental needs of young children who are just beginning to develop symbolic thought. Each visual support has a guide with information to help determine a child's need for support and what visual cues will be most useful.

Below, find the information needed to create and use **friendship behaviors** visuals to help infants and toddlers learn positive social skills they can use with other children.

### What?

The friendship behaviors visuals show examples of how a young child can interact positively with a peer. The visuals show different ways to initiate an interaction, play together, or communicate their needs. Use these visuals to help very young children learn how to safely play with their peers.

### Why?

The friendship behaviors visuals can help children learn positive and safe skills to use when interacting with other children. Proactively teaching safe social behaviors can help children learn to communicate, express themselves, and interact with peers.

You can use friendship behavior visuals in different ways:

- As a visual reminder of safe and positive behaviors for all children in a classroom or group socialization space.
- To help a child who needs extra support to learn and use safe and positive social skills and behaviors with other children.

## How?

1. **Make friendship behavior visuals.**
2. **Decide how and when you'd like to use the visuals.** Will you use the visuals with the entire group of children? Will you use the visuals for an individual child?
3. **Select which visuals you want to use for the group and/or for an individual child.** Which visuals represent the friendship behaviors you want children to use in your environment?

### Tips:

- Engage with families to learn about friendship expectations in their community. Make more visuals as needed.
  - Translate the rules into the languages spoken by the children in your learning environment or make separate visuals for each language.
4. **Select the format of the visual support you will use.** The format of these visual supports, which are drawings, will meet the needs of some toddlers. But to be most effective, visual supports should match the developmental needs of the children in your environment. Some toddlers may not yet understand the connection between the drawing and the behavior it represents. These children may benefit from a more concrete visual format, such as a photo.

**Tip:** Help children understand the expectations by giving a very specific example, such as photos of the children in your environment using the friendship behaviors themselves.

There are a range of visual support formats, ranging from most concrete to most abstract, including:

- Real object
- Miniature versions of object
- Photograph of real object
- Photograph of non-identical object
- Drawing
- Printed words

**Tip:** If a visual is too abstract and the child doesn't understand the relationship between the symbol and the item or activity, it won't be successful in supporting their participation, independence, or behavior.

5. **Print the visuals.**
  - Use them as a portable "key ring" visual support.
    - Cut out individual cards or photos and laminate them.
    - Punch a hole in the cards and put them on a ring so you can carry them easily with you to use as needed throughout the day.
  - Use them as a chart.
    - Print the entire visual support grid and laminate or place in a sheet protector.
    - Post the chart at children's eye level in different areas of the environment where children interact with one another. Make sure the chart is easy to see and access.

6. **Use friendship behavior visuals.** Introduce the visuals to children throughout the day to teach friendship behaviors. Describe the pictures — label friendship behaviors, model the behavior, and have children practice it.

**Tips:**

- Talk about friendship behaviors and practice the behaviors when children are feeling calm. It will be easier for them to engage and use the strategies. Don't wait until children are having a conflict to introduce the strategies and visuals.
  - Introduce each friendship behavior separately so children don't become overwhelmed with learning too many behaviors at once.
  - Ask children with language or communication delays to repeat the friendship behavior or point to the corresponding picture to ensure comprehension. Ask the child, "Which picture says, 'Give a turn'?"
    - During play, notice when there might be an opportunity for a child to use a behavior and show them the visual. Explain, "You can say 'Let's play,'" or "You can give a gentle hug."
  - Be ready to give more support as needed to an individual child. For example, show a child the friendship visual supports before times when they are likely to get dysregulated and use unsafe behaviors. Model the friendship behavior and help the child use it. Give intentional positive feedback when you notice a child using the positive friendship behaviors with other children.
7. **Use the visuals to redirect children who are using unsafe behaviors.** If you notice a child using an unsafe behavior, gently redirect them by showing them the visual of an appropriate behavior and explaining, "You can say, 'stop please,'" or "Ask for a turn." Support the child to use the positive behavior, then give them positive feedback.

**Tip:** For visual supports to be most useful to infants and toddlers, they should be used consistently each day.



National Center on  
Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

This resource was supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$10,200,000 with 100% funded by ACF. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

# Friendship Behaviors

Read Together



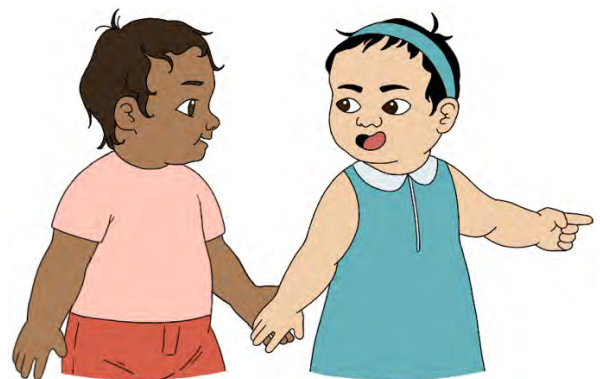
Say Hi



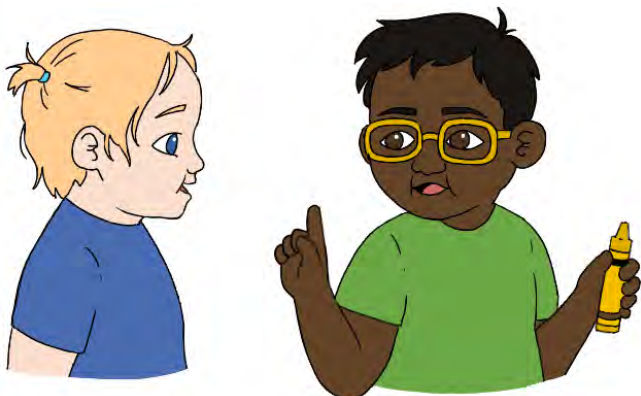
Ask a Grown-up



Let's Play



One More Minute



Stop Please

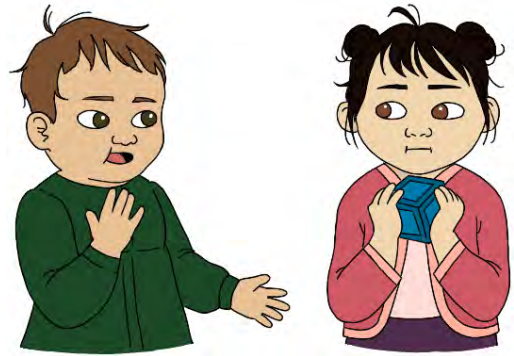


# Friendship Behaviors

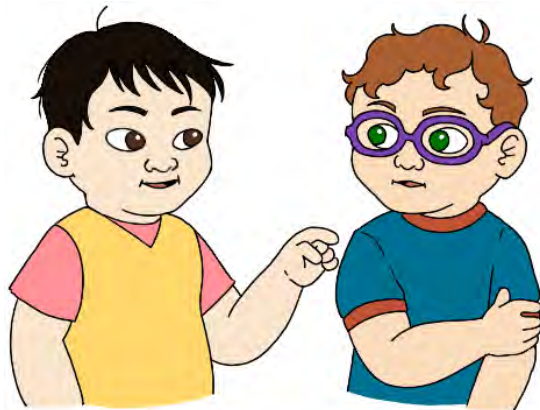
Give a Turn



Take Turns



Gentle Touch



Gentle Hug



Play Together

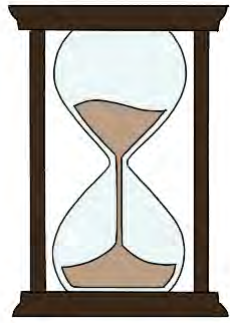


High Five



# Friendship Behaviors

Wait Please



Wait Please

