



Asking Friends to Play: Facilitator Guide

Group activities, large and small, offer great opportunities for introducing and teaching social skills in the Head Start classroom. Teaching all children in the group many ways to socially initiate with peers of differing abilities can increase the social opportunities for children with and without special needs.

Note: Video examples of an educator introducing the different ways a child can ask a friend to play are included in this in-service suite. The videos can be used by education staff for personal development, by learning leaders as a tool to engage education staff in reflection, or by the facilitator of this activity to show children what the activity and these inclusive friendship skills look like.

Materials

- Visual support cards from the **Asking Friends to Play Teaching Activity**
- Set of toys for peer demonstration (blocks, puzzles, etc.).

Setting it up

- Before the activity, gather the set of toys planned for the demonstration (e.g., 10 blocks) and place them near the educator.
- Place the visual support cards nearby.
- Plan ahead to include target children as part of the activity (consider a mix of children with and without disabilities acting as the initiators and the responders).
- Make notes on the back of each card to remind yourself of how you will individualize the activity (e.g., which child you will choose, materials you will use, etc.).

Opening the activity

- You can say: Today we are talking about asking friends to play. Do you know there are lots of different ways to ask a friend to play with you? Who has an idea of how we can ask a friend to play?
- Call on a few different kids to share their ideas. Validate comments and when possible, relate them to one of the visual support cards. Introduce a visual support as it naturally arises in conversation or hold one up and ask the children to guess how the child in the picture is asking his friend to play. Following the introduction of each visual, reference the back for more ideas.

Closing the activity

- After the demonstrations, help children generalize this idea by asking some questions: “Today we practiced asking friends to play with blocks. What are some other things you can ask a friend to play? What about when you’re outside?”
- Call on a few children to share their ideas, and supplement ideas as needed. Remind children that you and the rest of the educators will be watching throughout the day for kids asking friends to play by tapping a friend on the shoulder, gently taking a friend by the hand, or giving a toy to share and asking, “Do you want to play with me?”



Ideas for reinforcing the activity?

- Throughout the day, take opportunities to coach children through the strategies (e.g., “Josh, I see Ahmad is making a tower over there. If you worked together, I think you could build a huge building. Can you think of a way to ask him to play?”).
- Create and label a special buddy activity area or toy that children can only access when they bring a friend (e.g., game, teeter-totter, wind-up toy race, etc.).
- Use behavior-specific praise as you see children using the strategies (e.g., “You asked Julio to play by gently taking his hand! You are working together!”).
- Make an announcement when you notice a pair of children using one of the strategies (e.g., “Amara just asked Natalia to play in housekeeping by giving her a cup, and Natalia joined her!”).
- Periodically review this group activity throughout the year. Children will likely become more and more independent in their explanations and will also be able to share real-life examples.