



June 15, 2023

Supporting Preschoolers' Peer Relationships

Viewer's Guide

This viewer's guide gives you ideas for creating learning environments for all preschool-aged children. The reflection questions and activities will help you think about ways to support children's learning. Helpful resources can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

Reflection: The Importance of Peer Relationships

Why should we care about children's friendships? Write your answers in the space below.



National Center on
Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning



This training 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.

What About the ELOF?

Social and Emotional Development



important Social and Emotional sub-domain is a key way adults can support peer relationships within all Head Start program settings.

Peer relationships fit within the ELOF Social and Emotional Development Preschooler Domain

Especially within the Relationships with Other Children sub-domain:

- This includes indicators like child “develops friendships with one or two preferred other children” and child “uses basic strategies for dealing with common conflicts, such as sharing, taking turns, and compromising.”
- Note that supporting peer relationships touches on many other areas of the ELOF, especially the other Social and Emotional sub-domains.
- **Supporting a Sense of Identity and Belonging:** This

Supporting Peer Relationships

The Adults’ Role



Adults model how to process and recognize emotions, how to establish friendships, how to take turns, and to manage problems creatively and fairly.

Adults, including teaching staff and home visitors, play an important role in supporting children’s emerging friendships and relationships with peers.

- One of the most important things you can do is foster a sense of belonging for all children in a program.
- Adults set the stage for successful relationships and peer play through the emotional and physical environment of a program.
- Adults do this in part by serving as a safety net, helping to step in when needed to keep children safe—both physically and emotionally.
- **Adults also serve as an important model for children:**

Model and Talk About Emotions with Young Children

Recognizing and understanding emotions is a key part of peer relationships. However, researchers report that teaching staff, on average, actually spend very little time directly talking about emotions with children. This is an area we can grow in, for all program settings: home visitors and teaching staff can intentionally think about how and when to add in direct conversations with children around emotions, recognizing them, what they are feeling, and what that means.



What are some of your strategies for modeling and talking about emotions?

Your answers:

What you might change:

For home visitors, how do you support families in talking about emotions with their children?

Your answers:

What you might change:

When Should Adults Step in?

Children have wonderful peer interactions all on their own. Observing children helps us know when it is a good time to interrupt, encourage language use, extend thinking, keep everyone safe—and when we should let them be and see where their interaction might go. Reflect on what kinds of interactions you are comfortable seeing, and why. This is an excellent place for ongoing professional development for staff and for home visitors to work with families.



Small Changes – Big Impact

Supporting Children with Disabilities in Peer Play

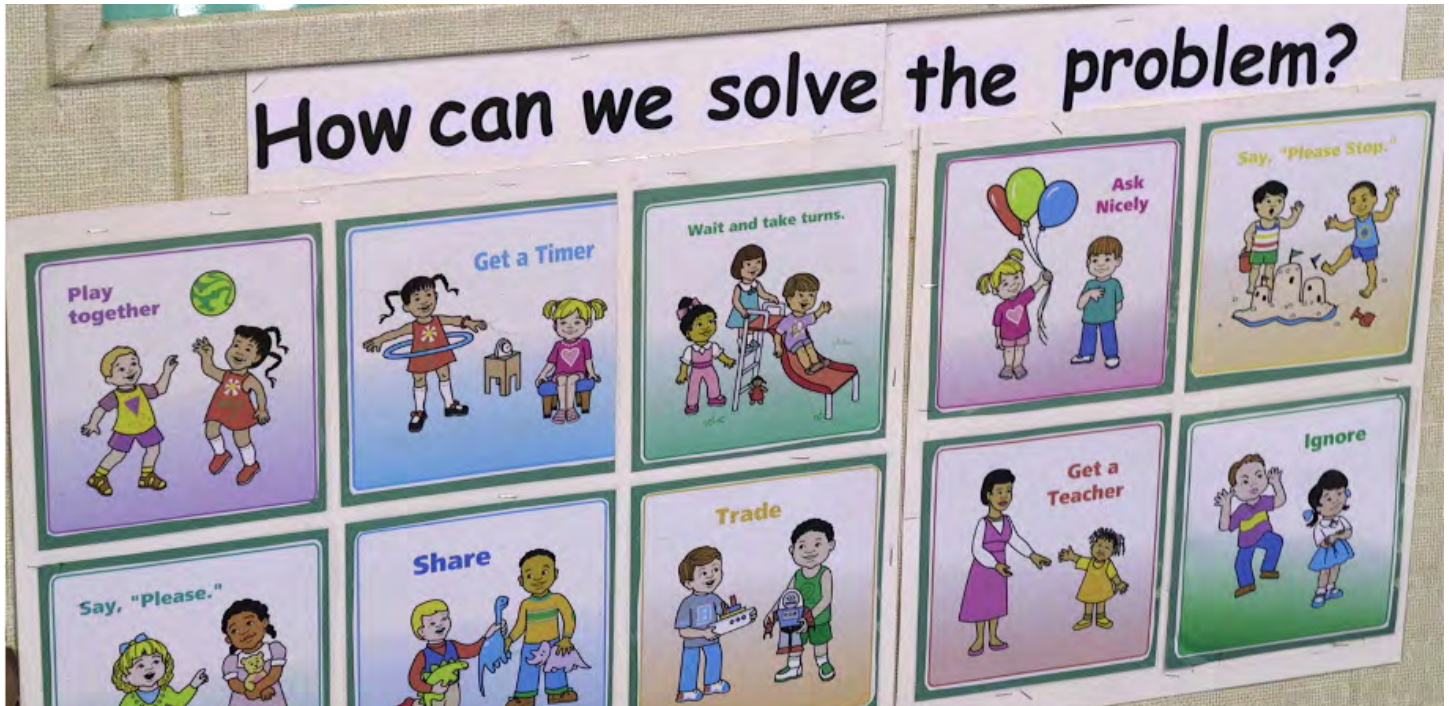


One example of when you may want to “step in” is in providing support for peer play for children with disabilities in building relationships with their peers.

- All children deserve and need opportunities to develop relationships with their peers, including children with disabilities.
- Adult intervention and providing direct support can really help support this during free play activities.
- This is about creating an environment that is accessible, allows families to be in the space, and allows children with disabilities to interact freely with their peers with specific adult support to play with peers.

Conflict Resolution and Problem Solving

Another role that adults take in supporting peer relationships is in conflict resolution, keeping children safe, and problem solving. Adults set the stage for successful and healthy conflict resolution between children. This means modeling strategies for solving problems, including materials (such as solution kits, below), behaviors (taking a deep breath to calm down, etc.) and language (modeling talking about feelings or how to respond).



Supporting Identity and Belonging for All Children

One of the most important aspects of the adults' role in supporting peer relationships is by supporting children's identity and belonging. This includes affirming all children's identities in and out of our programs and building a shared sense of belonging and identity within a program.

Affirming all
Children's Identities
in and out of
Program

Building a Shared
Sense of Belonging
and Identity Within
a Program

What are your ideas for supporting identity and belonging for all children in your program? What would you change about what your program is currently doing? What would you like to try? Write your ideas in the space below.

Supporting Diverse Peer Relationships

Encouraging Friendships with Children who Are Different From One Another



Having meaningful relationships with people who are different from ourselves is a key part of developing healthy peer relationships.

- Children naturally notice differences. This is healthy and normal. Adults can help children make meaning of the world around them as they do this. It is essential to address any stereotypes that come up directly.
- Talk about differences (including addressing any stereotypes) calmly and with curiosity, not shame.
- **Help children see others as individuals, not just a member of a group.** Practice perspective taking, and support lots of opportunities for engagement with people who are different, and celebrate our differences!
- **Build belonging in a program through shared experiences and movement, like dancing and singing together.** Research shows that moving together, especially in unison, helps people feel more alike and builds prosocial behaviors like cooperation and sharing.

Helpful Resources (*Resources Available in Spanish)

Online ECLKC Resources

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/preparacion-escolar/articulo/marco-de-head-start-sobre-los-resultados-del-aprendizaje-temprano-de-los-ninos>

Effective Practice Guides: Social and Emotional Development*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/environments-support-high-quality-inclusion>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/preparacion-escolar/effective-practice-guides/desarrollo-social-y-emocional>

Environments That Support High-Quality Inclusion

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/environments-support-high-quality-inclusion>

Problem Solving in the Moment

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/problem-solving-moment>

Creating a Caring Community

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/creating-caring-community>

Classroom Visuals and Support (especially Friendship Kit, Problem Solving Kit, and Emotions)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/children-disabilities/article/classroom-visuals-supports>

Strengthening Equitable Learning Spaces and Building Belonging iPD Courses

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio>

Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/multicultural-principles-early-childhood-leaders>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/cultura-e-idioma/articulo/principios-multiculturales-para-los-lideres>

Connecting Research to Practice Brief: Supporting Children with Disabilities or Suspected Delays*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/supporting-children-disabilities-or-suspected-delays>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/publicacion/apoyar-los-ninos-con-discapacidades-o-posibles-retrasos>

Connecting Research to Practice Brief: Talking to Children About Differences and Similarities*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/talking-children-about-differences-similarities>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/publicacion/hablar-con-los-ninos-acerca-de-las-diferencias-y-similitudes>

Healthy Gender Development and Young Children

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/healthy-gender-development-young-children>

Engaging with Families in Conversations About Sensitive Topics

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/engaging-families-conversations-about-sensitive-topics>

Head Start Heals Podcast: Talking to Children About Race (with Rosemarie Allen)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/podcast/talking-children-about-race>

Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/supporting-school-readiness-success-young-african-american-boys/strategies-culturally-responsive-strength-based-practices>

Preventing Bullying (Office of Head Start Blog)*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/blog/preventing-bullying>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/archive/blog/prevenir-el-acoso>

Webinars

Growing Physical Skills Through Outdoor Learning and Play (includes discussions with Jennifer Fung on inclusive play and Mike Brown on risky play)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/growing-physical-skills-through-outdoor-learning-play>

Social and Emotional Development in the Outdoors

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/building-social-emotional-development-outdoors>

Teacher Time Series: Preschool Positive Behavior Support

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/preschool-positive-behavior-support>

Teacher Time Series: Preschool Inclusion and Belonging

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/teacher-time-series/preschool-inclusion-belonging>

Anti-Bias Teaching and Learning Environments in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/anti-bias-teaching-learning-environments-head-start-early-head-start-programs>

Resource Collections

Equity landing page on ECLKC

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/browse/tag/equity>

Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness* (some key resources available in Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/equity-inclusiveness-cultural-linguistic-responsiveness>

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/preparacion-escolar/articulo/equidad-inclusion-y-receptividad-cultural-y-linguistica>

Other Online Resources

Social Skill Development of Young Children Amid the Pandemic (from ZERO TO THREE)

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/social-skill-development-of-young-children-amid-the-pandemic/>

Baby Talks: Parents Coronavirus Questions Answered (from ZERO TO THREE)

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/baby-talks-parent-coronavirus-questions-answered/>