

Peer Social Interactions

Peer interactions are important for children’s learning and development. Children learn new skills by observing and interacting with other children during everyday classroom activities and routines. By paying close attention and responding to what children are doing while playing and interacting with others, adults can support and enhance their social play and interactions.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Supporting Peer Interactions

- Provide frequent opportunities for children to interact with one another. Children’s interactions can happen during everyday classroom activities and routines such as mealtime or circle time, or during block play or sandbox play.
- Provide toys and other play materials that encourage children to take turns, pretend, engage in physical play, or use materials together. Making these kinds of materials available increases the likelihood that children will have opportunities to interact with one another.
- Provide children opportunities to be engaged in things they like and enjoy doing in the classroom. Children will have the most chances to interact with one another when they are involved in an activity that matches their shared interests.
- Observe how each child tries to initiate interactions with other children, get another child’s attention, or sustain interactions. Notice how each child communicates both nonverbally (e.g., nodding, waving, signaling, showing something to another child) and verbally (e.g., saying another child’s name, asking a question, talking about what another child is doing).
- When you notice a child interacting with another child, respond promptly and positively to sustain their interactions. You might comment on or describe what the child is doing, join in the interactions with the children, praise the child for initiating the interactions, or provide them the toys or materials they need for the interactions.
- Encourage children to interact with one another in new and different ways. You might show a child how to do something different with another child, expand on what a child has said, suggest other things a child could do or say, or provide toys or materials that encourage the children to do something different.



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A Quick Peek

Knowing that the children in her classroom enjoy music, Marta invited her uncle, Rafael, to play his guitar for the group. She watched the children swaying, moving, and jumping as Rafael played. When she noticed Kylie approaching Jodi and touching her hand, Marta said, “Kylie, do you want to ask Jodi to dance with you?” Kylie said, “Dance, Jodi!” The two girls held hands and laughed as they wiggled to the music. Marta told the group, “Kylie and Jodi are dancing!” Marta clapped the beat to the music to encourage the two girls to continue “dancing.” She moved her arms back and forth to show them how they could sway their arms together. As the girls continued to dance, other children soon began to take a partner to dance to Uncle Rafael’s tunes.

You’ll know the practice is working if...

- Children initiate interactions with one another more often
- Children interact with one another in a variety of ways in different classroom activities and routines
- Children use more complex behaviors during interactions with other children

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Interaction 1, 2, 3, 4
 The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sp.ed.gov/recommendedpractices>

Access this practice guide and other products at <http://ectacenter.org/decrp>
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