

# Supporting children's friendship skills

## Suggestions for teaching staff

### Having friends at school provides critical support for children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Children who have friends show more cooperative behaviour and feel more connected at school. Conversely, children who lack friends are more likely to be bullied and to show behavioural and mental health problems. Teaching staff can play a key role in teaching and promoting positive friendship skills.

### How teachers can help:

- **Be a role model**

Lead by example. Be sure to have a caring, empathic and respectful attitude to all students. Connecting with students in a personal way provides an important model for friendly behaviour. On the other hand, singling students out for criticism in front of others can indicate that it is okay for them to do likewise.

- **Create learning opportunities**

Introduce classroom routines to teach friendly behaviour. For example, you might model giving compliments and then set up situations where students can practise giving and receiving them.

- **Integrate friendship skills across all key learning areas**

Provide children with varied opportunities to practise what they are learning and reinforce core social skills. Literacy, drama and social studies lessons all lend themselves well to this. For example, you can select story books and writing topics that endorse key social messages (e.g. what makes a good friend etc.). You can also teach social skills through role play or dramatic rehearsal. Dramatic play is enjoyable for most children and gives them practice in using skills in real social situations.

- **Use small group work**

Small group work is an effective way of providing children with opportunities to practise the skills of cooperation, including giving and receiving help, sharing ideas, and listening to one another's point of view. For small group work to be successful children need to first be taught the relevant social and emotional

skills, such as listening and sharing. Group tasks should be well structured and monitored to ensure that children continue to develop skills for cooperative learning.

- **Take advantage of 'real life' situations to teach social skills**

For example:

- Help children express their feelings during emotionally charged social situations (e.g., "I guess you might feel pretty angry that Sean spilled your drink.").
- Teach empathy and encourage children to be more understanding of the feelings of others (e.g., ask the child to tell you about how Sean is feeling in the situation.).
- Promote problem solving. Use questions and strategies to guide and encourage children to find mutually satisfying solutions (e.g., understanding the other's position, saying sorry, looking for solutions that meet each child's needs.).

- **Reinforce skills outside of the classroom**

The playground often puts more demands on children's social skills as there is less structure than inside the classroom. A whole school approach is needed to establish clear behaviour guidelines for the playground. Classroom teachers may also need to plan ways to support particular children with strategies to manage friendship issues outside the classroom.

- **Involve parents and carers**

Communicate with families about your strategies for supporting children's developing social skills. Sharing information and ideas is important in every area of the child's learning and encourages parents and carers to continue to teach and reinforce skills at home.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing

