

Friendship skills: Suggestions for school 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. School staff can play a key role in teaching and promoting positive friendship skills.

How school staff 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 (eg what makes a good friend).

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.

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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 (eg "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 (eg 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 (eg understanding the other's position, saying sorry, looking for solutions that meet each child's needs).



School staff may also need to plan ways to support particular children with strategies to manage friendship conflicts outside the classroom.

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 will work best to establish clear behaviour guidelines for the playground. School staff may also need to plan ways to support particular children with strategies to manage friendship conflicts 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 a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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