

Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Social and Emotional Learning** Series

DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

What do
we mean by
developing
positive
relationships

Knowing how to make and keep positive relationships allows children to form strong bonds with others. For younger children, this starts with caregivers and trusted adults and, as children get older, their relationships expand to other family members and friends. As they grow, children learn how to approach people, communicate with them kindly and make new friends.

Why is it
important

Building positive relationships is at the heart of early childhood education. Developing positive relationships with others helps children to discover who they are, to understand others and to enjoy new experiences.

Developing friendships

Children of all ages, in particular those around preschool age, build skills that help them to develop friendships. These skills can include learning to share, taking turns, and understanding things from another person's point of view. Through practicing these skills and having discussions about friendships, children develop an understanding of how they can be a good friend and the steps they might need to take to make new friends.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and use puppets to reflect on what makes a good friend
- Use visual tools like stickers and posters to support children to practice making and keeping friends

Inspiring Ideas

- When reading or telling a story, ask: *"Who are [character]'s friends? Who are your friends? Why are they such good friends? How can you be a good friend? That's so important!"*
- When you notice children helping, sharing or playing together well say: *"You are such good friends! It's lovely to have friends! Why don't we see if anybody else would like to be good friends today?"*
- Freeze! In pairs, children balance an object on their head (for instance a soft toy, tissue or leaf, perhaps). When it falls off, they are magically frozen! They can only unfreeze when a friend heroically comes to the rescue!

Giving compliments and using kind words

Having the ability to give compliments and say something kind about another person is an important social skill. Children benefit from seeing others giving and receiving compliments and having discussions with their friends about how and when they might give compliments. Providing opportunities to practice using kind words is important.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Demonstrate and discuss how children can praise others
- Use visual tools, such as posters, to help children practice using kind words

Inspiring Ideas

- Support children to decide which words are compliments, and which are not, by asking, for example: *“Which is a compliment: ‘that’s a picture’ or ‘that’s a WONDERFUL picture?’”*
- Give compliments freely to children and other adults during the day. When you receive a compliment, point it out to children. *“What a lovely compliment. Those kind words have made me feel really happy!”* Children can then practise giving compliments using dolls, puppets and small world resources. *“Oh pirate! You are excellent at finding treasure.” “Thank you, elephant, I know I am!”*
- When a child produces artwork, writes or builds something, prompt other children to compliment their work. *“What a fantastic castle! You’ve worked so hard on that! What’s everyone’s favourite part?”*
- In a circle, children spin an arrow or roll a ball and give a compliment to whoever it lands on! Help children to focus on other children’s best qualities by giving examples. *“I like the way you play with me/help me/share with me.”*

Tip

Focus compliments on why someone is nice and friendly, rather than on their appearance and belongings. This keeps everyone feeling included and valued, which supports positive relationships.

Valuing similarities and differences

Being able to recognise similarities and differences between people helps children value diversity and inclusion. Children can celebrate their unique qualities by exploring each other's likes and dislikes, and learn to understand that families all over the world are both similar and different.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Introduce and discuss how we are all both similar and different
- Use photos of different cultures, books and songs to help children explore and appreciate similarities and differences

Inspiring Ideas

- Let's Talk! To celebrate each family member's unique qualities, ask: *"Who smiles the most in your family? Who is the funniest? Who is the sleepest? Who helps the most?"*
- At snack time have children make a fruit kebab. Point out everyone's unique and tasty patterns! Be excited about what children eat with their families and discuss how different families eat different delicious snacks.
- When reading or telling a story, discuss the similarities and differences between the characters and children. *"Do you have brothers and sisters like this character? Do you have a pink sofa? Would you like ice cream for dinner too?"*
- With arts and craft materials sorted into groups, encourage children to make their own piece of art. Talk to children about how each piece of art is wonderfully different, even though they are all made from the same materials!

DEVELOPING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Being kind and caring

The ability to act kindly and compassionately is an important part of developing positive relationships. Children benefit from having discussions with their friends about what 'being kind' means to them and opportunities to practice acts of kindness towards others.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- When you read a story, ask children how the characters are kind to each other
- Using visual tools such as posters or picture cards, discuss with children the different ways they can be kind to others and show that they care about their friends

Inspiring Ideas

- During the day, encourage children to be kind when other children are shy, upset, hurt or need help. *"Can you see that the baby is crying? What can we do to look after the baby? That's so kind!" "I think your friend is feeling a bit shy today, how can we be caring and help?"*
- Let's Talk! *"What kind thing can you do today to make someone feel happy? How do you feel when you are being kind?"*
- Caring Cards! Have children make cards for someone's birthday, or someone who is ill or might have been upset. *"I bet seeing this card will make them feel happy! You are so kind!"*