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Building Friendships in Preschool

BY SUE GAINSLY, HIGHSCOPE DEMONSTRATION PRESCHOOL DIRECTOR

This fall (2012), the HighScope Preschool Curriculum was identified as a model program by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in their 2013 Guide of Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs Preschool and Elementary School Edition.* CASEL selected programs that successfully promote students' self-control, relationship building, and problem solving, among other social and emotional skills. The relevancy of this to general school success cannot be overlooked. Research shows that children's social and emotional skills impact their overall academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

A great deal of "academic" learning takes place through social interactions, so being able to communicate easily and effectively with others is a primary channel for acquiring knowledge and skills. This not only applies to what children learn from adults, but

also what they learn from peers. Further, children who are confident about their interpersonal relationships also have the emotional security to take on the risks and challenges of learning other subject matter. Put another way, social success predisposes them to assum-



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*CASEL Summary http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/CASEL_Summary-9-20.pdf

ing they will experience academic success as well. And in its 2012 report, *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, the National Research Council connects social and emotional skills to a better educated and prepared workforce (National Research Council, 2012). Early childhood teachers recognize the tremendous opportunities for children’s social and emotional growth during the preschool years. In this article, we will explore one aspect of social and emotional learning (SEL) — the development of friendships among children and how to support these budding relationships in the preschool classroom.

The Development of Friendships

Friendships can help people feel secure, confident, and likeable. “Making friends” and “getting along with others” are goals most parents set for their children upon entering preschool. But the foundation for building friendships is laid well before preschool. Learning how to simply establish relationships with others is primary in social-emotional development. Learning how to build relationships begins early as infants establish bonds with their parents and primary caregivers.

Even before they can communicate verbally, infants establish connections with attentive adults by smiling, cooing, and crying. They notice and learn to interpret their caregiver’s facial expressions, gestures, and overtures. With secure attachments to primary caregivers, infants learn that people are social beings who communicate with one another, and who trust and rely on one another. Positive social interactions with parents and caregivers give children the expectation that social interactions are enjoyable and rewarding. As they move through infancy to toddlerhood, children broaden their interest to the actions and interactions of others in their environment.

Infants as young as two months old will turn toward other infants, and by six months they vocalize to get the attention of other children. By the age of nine months to twelve months, they begin to imitate their peers (Epstein, 2009). As their interest in others increases, toddlers approach and begin to play alongside their peers. For these young children, the potential for building friendships is somewhat dependent on where they are and who is close by. Again, adults must take the initiative to introduce children to these social opportunities. By the age of two years, toddlers begin to show preferences for specific playmates and may refer to one another as friends. At first these “friendships” begin and end within the context of specific incidents. These early interactions accumulate and are the building blocks for more permanent relationships. For example, the more children play together, the more compatible their play becomes. Toddlers will even adjust their style of play for different playmates. By preschool, children’s relationships with their peers become more reciprocal and voluntary as children become more skilled in social interactions and seek out playmates with whom they

PUBLISHER CREDITS

HighScope Extensions is a practical resource for early childhood teachers, trainers, administrators, and child care providers. It contains useful information on the HighScope Curriculum and on HighScope’s training network.

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Produced by HighScope Press, a division of HighScope Educational Research Foundation

ISSN 2155-3548

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The HighScope Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization founded by David Weikart in Ypsilanti, MI in 1970.

share interests. Older preschool children are able to identify and express the reasons for liking or disliking their peers. Preschoolers' relationships with peers also become more exclusive, and children often grapple with the idea of having more than one friend at a time.

By preschool, children have also gotten the message from adults, older siblings, and peers that being named as someone's friend is important. In fact, children also learn that friendship somehow increases one's status among other children. Thus, while friendships are developing, so is competition for friends, flirtation with including or excluding peers from play, and withholding friendship to gain even more status or control. This competition and exclusiveness can be upsetting to the adults who witness such behavior; parents and teachers want all children to get along. Yet, we should remember that "in" and "out" group tendencies are a normal part of development. Rather than being judgmental, we should realize that such behavior represents a higher level of cognitive and social awareness among children. We can take advantage of children's growing knowledge about the value of friendship to help them navigate this realm of social and emotional development more effectively, and in the long run, to develop more inclusive and meaningful relationships.

In the preschool years, children also begin to experiment with sex segregation among friendships. In preschool classrooms, children make comments such as "No girls allowed," or "Only boys can play here." According to researchers Mehta and Strough (2009), "sex segregation is a persistent feature of individuals' friendships

and normative developmental contexts" (p. 207). One theory about sex segregation in friendships suggests that, along with children's natural interest in self-identity, there is a tendency to want to affiliate with similar people. Studies have shown that even infants prefer to look at photos of same-sex infants.



By preschool, children's relationships with their peers become more reciprocal and voluntary as children become more skilled in social interactions and seek out playmates with whom they share interests.



Strategies for Structuring the Learning Environment

- Include areas for large-group gatherings as well as smaller nooks for more personal connections.
 - Place blankets over tables, large cardboard boxes and in corners; add pillows, and create cozy spaces for children.
 - Be mindful of the size of classroom areas (e.g., house area, toy area). When areas are too small, children are often crowded and limited in their choices. This sets up an environment of competition for space and materials rather than collaboration.
 - Move furniture to increase space in a popular classroom area, if not permanently, at least for work time.
- 

Children’s ideas about sex differences are later influenced by their experiences with media and messages from adults and peers about gender roles. This may contribute to “for me, not for me thinking” that influences children’s ideas about what to play and with whom to play (Zosuls, Lurye, & Ruble, as cited in Manaster & Jobe, 2012). Children’s communication and interaction styles, which have been shown to differ between boys and girls, may also influence friendships. Play and social interactions that are acceptable in one social group may not be effective in another. Again, while adults may look askance at sex-affiliated friendships and play themes, we should remember that such behavior is not only normal, but is the result of “positive” advances in children’s self-awareness and desire to embrace who they are. As parents and teachers, we can use this development as an opportunity to expand children’s self-identity and deepen the bases for their friendships.

Support Strategies

According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Childhood Care Research Network, higher quality child care is generally linked to a greater ability in children to develop more competent peer relationships (Belsky, 2002; NICHD, 2006). The adults in early childhood programs have the important role of structuring the learning environment and daily routine, and modeling interaction strategies that promote positive interactions among children.

Structuring the learning environment. Setting up the learning environment to support developing relationships is a concrete strategy that is relatively easy to implement. Room arrangement has an impact on the social opportunities for children. See the sidebar at left for some ways you can foster these opportunities.

Along with room arrangement, the type and number/amount of materials available to children also has an impact on social connections. Stock each toy bin on the shelf with enough materials for multiple users, and have multiple sets of individual toys (large wooden trucks, puzzles, computer keyboards). Research shows that children who have access to plentiful materials that they can find and put away themselves have more productive play and fewer social conflicts (Epstein, 2012). Include equipment and materials that lend themselves to collaboration, for example, heavy boards that require two or more children to carry, or large wheeled toys that invite children to play different roles such as driver and passenger(s).

In response to gender biases, evaluate your materials to make sure that they do not perpetuate social stereotypes. Media-influenced toys and materials are typically associated with stereotyped play and hinder opportunities for interactions and relationships between boys and girls. Choose books that depict men and women in nontraditional roles (e.g., a woman construction worker, a man doing housework), and encourage children to play in all areas of the classroom (e.g., boys in the house area, girls in the woodworking



A well-planned play space and an abundance of stimulating materials set the stage for children's collaborative play.

area). A well-planned play space and an abundance of stimulating materials set the stage for children's collaborative play.

Scheduling the daily routine. The program schedule can also help to facilitate interactions and friendships among children. Children often play together at work (free play/choice) time, but some children typically play alone. By including small- and large-group time every day, these children have the opportunity to safely play alongside or with their peers. Sitting side by side at small-group time, they may share materials or exchange ideas. At large-group time, they may have the pleasure of seeing others imitate their ideas, and this may embolden them to attempt sharing their ideas during self-initiated play times.

Also, look for emerging friendships, and support them by putting children who enjoy playing together in the same small group for planning and recall, and for snack or meals. Comment when children make plans to play together ("So, you and Rachel are going to collect all the big blocks and build a tower?") or when they describe (recall) what they did ("The three of you made a long track and raced your cars. Later, Jonah came over and raced his truck down the ramp").

Facilitating social and emotional awareness. Play is used by many animals as a way to learn and practice social interactions in a nonthreatening way. As they play, children, too, practice the social conventions necessary to communicate interest and approachability to others. During play, children practice communicating their needs and intentions (e.g., needing help, wanting to play) in appropriate ways as well as interpreting the social cues and intentions of others. Research suggests that children's ability to regulate their emotions and control aggressive behavior is linked to peer acceptance (Manz & McWayne, 2004). Adults play an important role in helping children obtain the social skills necessary for successful peer interactions. Adults become the initial interpreters of children's feelings and intentions during play, and as such must dedicate themselves to playing *with* children.

There are several strategies adults can use in *interpreting* emotional and social cues that will support the development of children's friendships. To help children develop emotional awareness, adults can label children's own emotions as well as the emotions of other children and adults. Along with identifying feelings, adults can also interpret social and emotional cues in both the individual child's and others' body language and facial expressions (e.g., looking down, pursing lips, moving over to make room at the table) and can focus on positive as well as negative emotions (e.g., saying "You're so excited that grandma is picking you up today!" or "You feel frustrated when you have trouble with the scissors"). Adults should be quite explicit as they interpret gestures for children. For example, to help a child recognize a friendly overture, describe exactly what you see

Adults play an active role in helping children learn social skills by facilitating interactions, modeling social language and actions, coaching children as they practice interactions, and supporting children's relationships.

(e.g., “When you sat down next to Toby, he pushed the cars toward you so you could get some too. He’s showing you he wants you to play too”). Adults can also help children acquire emotional knowledge as they read stories together. Look for opportunities to talk about the characters’ behaviors and possible emotions. Ask children what a character might be thinking, wanting, or feeling. Then ask children how they know.

Cooperative play skills (e.g., sharing, turn taking, collaborating in pretend play, and solving social conflicts), and language and communication skills (e.g., talking to peers, asking questions and responding to requests, and inviting others to play) have also been associated with peer acceptance (Manz & McWayne, 2004). Again, adults play an active role in helping children learn these skills by facilitating interactions, modeling social language and actions, coaching children as they practice the interactions themselves, and supporting the relationships children build with one another. Actively pointing out when children are playing together or helping one another also strengthens children’s awareness of their positive interactions with others (e.g., “You saw that George needed help carrying the milk, so you took one of the pitchers for him” and “You asked Marta for a turn, and she said she was almost finished. Now she knows you are waiting”). Be careful not to “praise” children for getting along, and don’t put the emphasis on *your* pleasure (“It makes me happy to see you playing together so nicely”). Rather, acknowledge the children’s social awareness and the satisfaction *they* receive from helping and collaborating with one another.



Adults can draw children’s attention to what other children are doing with materials, or play simultaneously with two children and slowly integrate the play into one scenario or collaboration.

Facilitating children’s interactions. Along with their role as interpreter, adults can also be facilitators of children’s interactions. For example, adults can draw children’s attention to what other children are doing with materials, or play simultaneously with two children and slowly integrate the play into one scenario or collaboration (e.g., an adult might encourage two children to join their train tracks to make a longer track, or the adult might encourage two children who are making food with play dough to try each other’s dish.

Modeling social language and action is another way adults can facilitate children’s social interactions. Adults can model prosocial behaviors by explicitly describing how

their own words and behavior exemplifies that skill. For example, an adult might comment, “It looks like you would like to play with the blocks. I will give you some of mine so we both can play” or “I’m going to ask Justin if he is finished with the red marker before I take it.”

Coaching children through social interactions is a strategy that adults can use when children need additional support and practice initiating social interactions with others.

When adults coach children, they

help children assess the social scene (e.g., Benji and Olivia are building with the big blocks), identify the need or goal (e.g., using the big blocks, playing trains with Olivia), and decide with the child how to approach the situation. For example, if the goal is to play trains with Olivia, the child might first have to decide how to get Olivia’s attention (e.g., tap Olivia, say her name), then figure out what to say to

Olivia (e.g., “I want to play trains with you” or “Do you want to play trains?”). Coaching children through social situations also includes helping them anticipate other children’s responses and decide follow-up actions based on those responses (e.g., what the child will do if Olivia says “no”).



The support adults provide helps children become more confident in their interactions with their peers.

• • •

Early childhood professionals recognize the tremendous growth in social and emotional development during the preschool years. The social skills children learn in childhood impact their future social and academic success. Knowing how young children develop relationships and friendships can inform adults about how to best support this social growth. Recognizing individual children’s emotional strengths and challenges helps adults choose interaction strategies that will best support each child.

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CLASSROOM HINTS

Building a Preschool Community

BY SUE GAINSLY

*Friends, friends,
One, two, three.
All my friends are here with me.*

This is a common song that teachers and children sing in the HighScope Demonstration Preschool at greeting time. As they sing the next phrases of the song, “You’re my friend,” children and teachers point to different children gathered on the rug, indicating that they are friends. As I started thinking about writing this article, this song popped into my head. I began wondering about what this song says to children about friendships. Upon entering school, if not before, children learn that having friends is valued by their parents and teachers. Some of the songs we sing with children reinforce this idea.

In some classrooms, teachers refer to children collectively as “friends” (e.g., saying things like “Friends, it’s time for small-group” or “Some of our friends built a spaceship today”) or refer to individual children as “friend” (e.g., saying “Do you see a friend with blue shoes?” or “Which friend is sick today?”) Do teachers really mean to imply that *all* children are or should be friends? If you ask a preschool child who his or her friends are, the list typically does not include everyone in the class. Friendship is a special status we confer on selected people with whom we feel an emotional connection. Children, like adults, do not identify all peers as friends. When we tell them everyone is a friend, we deny the validity of their feelings. Well-intentioned teachers who generalize the word “friend” may simply want a harmonious classroom where all children are welcome and respect the feelings and rights of others. What teachers are really striving for is a sense of community. In this article, we’ll explore how you can create this in your classroom.



A Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is central to children’s growth, both socially and cognitively. There is comfort in knowing social norms, the expectations of the classroom, and being able to relate to others in the community who share common experiences. Classrooms with a strong sense of community help children feel welcome, secure, and competent. And with security and the feeling of competence, children explore, take risks, form meaningful relationships, and learn.

In the HighScope Preschool Curriculum content, the description of KDI 11. Community states that *Children act as members of the classroom community by participating in routines, cooperating with social expectations, and sharing responsibility for maintaining the classroom.* The following are ways to develop a sense of community in the classroom by sharing time, space, attention, and ideas.

Referring to Children By Name

Referring to children by name tells children that you notice them as individuals and helps children learn the names of the other members of their classroom. Create a classroom photo album or post photos in different areas of the classroom that show classroom activities, field trips, and children working alongside one another and working collaboratively. Recall these past activities with children to build a collective memory that strengthens the feeling of belonging.

Establishing a Consistent Routine

Establish a routine that includes group activities and a greeting time. The very act of sharing the same daily schedule with a group of people creates a sense of community. Having a greeting time each day welcomes children into their classroom community. During greeting time, let children know which teachers or children are absent, to build children’s awareness of others. Share child-appropriate information about why someone is absent (e.g., “Martha won’t be teaching today because she is at a meeting” or “Marcus isn’t here. I remember that he said he was going to the dentist today.” Inform children about upcoming events, new materials, or visitors to the classroom. For example, when adding a new material to the classroom, ask which children have used the material before. Then say something like “You can talk to Kiefer if you want to know more about using this material” or “Molly’s small-group used these yesterday. Tell us how you played with them.” Children learn that they can be resources to others and that they can call upon others for help.

Large-Group Time

Large-group time is another part of the daily routine that helps develop a classroom community. Recognize that children participate in whole-group activities at different levels of involvement, from simply watching from the sidelines to fully engaging in activities. Keep in mind that even those children who are observers still experience the spirit of community.

Plan activities that give children opportunities to contribute ideas about how to move and what to sing. During large-group time, children practice being group leaders and being followers. During movement activities, copy children's movements and encourage others to do the same. Play cooperative games that require children to work together, such as shaking a large parachute or keeping balloons from touching the ground. Turn traditionally competitive games such as musical chairs into cooperative games. For example, during musical chairs, do not remove chairs, so everyone can continue to play; or, remove chairs and encourage children to share the remaining chairs (use carpet squares or Hula Hoops on the floor as an alternative to chairs). In another game, give children paper plates to balance on their heads. If a plate falls off a child's head, the child must freeze until another child picks up the plate and puts it back on the frozen child's head (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). Large-group-time activities such as these form a collection of common experiences that further ties the classroom community together.



Cleanup Time

Cleanup time (which follows work time in the HighScope preschool daily routine) offers another opportunity to build a sense of community as children and adults take collective responsibility

for maintaining the classroom. It helps make children aware that they share a common space for several hours each day. Home is where families gather as a community; school is where teachers and classmates create their community. Emphasize that one reason we take care of materials and put things back where they belong is so other people in the classroom community can find and use them too. Make comments acknowledging that, by working together, the class got everything put away and could move on to the next activity (recall time).



Group Problem Solving

Building a cooperative classroom community also involves *group problem solving*. Gather as a whole class to address classroom community concerns (e.g., what to do about name-calling) and decisions (e.g., where to put the large appliance box that was donated to the classroom). This can be done as part of greeting time or in impromptu meetings as situations arise. For example, if children are hiding at cleanup time, teachers might stop cleanup time and call children together to address how the behavior affects the classroom or its members. Use phrases such as “our classroom,” “all of us,” and “together” to help children recognize that they are part of the group. For example, say “We have a problem in our classroom. We have lots of toys still out. It’s time for recall, and we are not ready. What can we do so everyone is cleaning up?” Encourage children to generate solutions to classroom issues, and try out their ideas even if they seem unworkable. This process helps children share responsibility and become more invested in the outcome.

Describing Children's Actions

Teachers can also encourage responsibility and respect for the classroom and its members by *describing children's helpful actions and how those actions benefit the community* (e.g., make comments such as “You wiped up the water on the floor so others won't slip” or “You and Jessie picked up all the blocks — now the area is ready for large-group time.”) Children also enjoy having specific classroom jobs. When creating classroom jobs, make sure the jobs are helpful and meaningful, rather than being token jobs, so every child has a job every day. If a child does not have a job one day, however, he or she can learn to share responsibility with others.

Creating a Supportive Atmosphere

Finally, classroom communities thrive when all members understand the social expectations of the group. It is up to teachers to *create a classroom atmosphere of kindness and encouragement*. Teachers explain expectations (e.g., “At large group time we stay on the carpet. You can help us shake the parachute or sit and watch”; “We listen to other children's ideas when we solve problems”). Teachers model prosocial actions and language and coach children as they practice interacting with others. They recognize children's accomplishments and comment on their social successes.

Building relationships, making friends, navigating social situations, and participating as a member in the classroom community are huge undertakings for young children. Teachers who create learning environments that support and encourage children's social and emotional development set children up for future school success in all areas of development.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Friendship and Children With Special Needs

BY TERRI MITCHELL, EARLY CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATOR, CANYONS SCHOOL DISTRICT, SANDY, UTAH

Everyone needs friendships in order to feel a sense of belonging! This is no different for young children with special needs than it is for anyone else. Belonging in a classroom is more than just being part of the larger group — it means identifying with one, or more than one, peer with whom the child is socially competent. That is, it means being able to connect with another person through specifically acquired skills, including emotional regulation, communication, and understanding another's point of view. Frequently, however, the nature of a child's disability hinders his or her ability to identify with, interact with, or sustain reciprocal relationships with peers. Since an important goal for children is to have confidence in their ability to engage in social situations, adults can use intentional support strategies to encourage the development of friendships in early childhood classrooms and help them bloom. In this article, we will look at several such strategies that help all young children connect with their peers and are particularly effective for those with special needs.



Create an Atmosphere of Safety

Developing trust while taking risks is the beginning step to developing friendships. And feeling safe is a crucial component of taking risks. Children with special needs, who may have heard more warnings about safety or who in fact need to be more cautious in some situations, can feel more vulnerable than other children. When young children do not feel safe, they are frequently unwilling to take the necessary steps to engage with peers. In the development of social competency, children engage first with adults. Branching out to their peers takes practice and a feeling of safety, because children's peers are more unpredictable than are adults. That is, children cannot be sure that peers will respond positively to their social overtures.

Let's look at the example of Sadie and Majah, two children who enjoy playing in the house area. Majah likes to use kitchen tools to stir items in bowls. Sadie has shown interest in playing with Majah and has on occasion approached him to play with the same items, but Majah frequently responds with pushing or yelling. Majah does not yet recognize that Sadie's goal is to play with him, not to take items away from him. In this example, adults need to be close by to reassure both children that it is safe to be in the same area together. One way adults can do this is by simply explaining or interpreting children's behavior to one another. For example, after confirming with Sadie what her intent is, the adult might say, "Majah, Sadie is trying to let you know that she would like to play with you." Majah can choose whether or not he wants to play with her (the toys and how he plays with them are safely within his control); Sadie knows her social motivation is clear, and while Majah may not accept her overture, she will not be pushed or yelled at (she is safe from harm).

An adult can even facilitate some parallel play with similar materials in the house area until Majah and Sadie learn to trust each other. For example, Sadie might observe the teacher handling kitchen tools to Majah rather than touching those he is already playing with. Sadie can try this herself, having seen it work; Majah, having welcomed this overture from his teacher, might be more receptive to the same behavior from Sadie. This strategy thus allows children to practice playing alongside or with an adult before they attempt to do so with another child. In fact, one of the many reasons that HighScope urges adults to play with children as partners is to model effective strategies for social interaction.

Provide Support Through Labeling, Repeating, and Rephrasing

One of the key factors in friendship between young children is the ability to maintain higher levels of social interaction during play. This includes being able to adapt one's perspective to maintain conversational turn-taking in a particular play schema. This can be difficult for children who have special needs in the area of language development. But once children have trust with a peer, they will target social interactions with that peer. The challenge for a child with special needs is to maintain the reciprocal interactions necessary for play to be sustained. Sometimes an interaction may be initiated by one child; but if it is not sustained, the other child may lose interest or misunderstand the intentions. Using the adult-child interaction strategies of labeling, repeating, and rephrasing in the context of helping to sustain interaction can prove quite effective in helping children complete more playful exchanges.

Take the example of Tonia, Stacey, and Jamal, who all have planned together to work in the block area using the large Legos and the farm animals. Tonia and Jamal have a definite idea of how they might use the materials. Stacey struggles to contribute her ideas, due to her being at an earlier level of language development. Amanda, their teacher, takes time to be with the three children in the block area and to support their engagement with one another. Amanda labels Stacey's gestures, repeats her attempts to share ideas, and rephrases her attempts if not understood by Tonia and Jamal. For example, Stacey might inadvertently knock down the tower while attempting to add a block to the top. Tonia and Jamal get angry,

thinking Stacey meant to knock it over. Amanda can explain she was trying to make it taller and ask Tonia and Jamal if they can help Stacey carry out her real intent. At the same time, Amanda may rephrase and simplify the interaction Tonia and Jamal are having so Stacey can understand and respond. For example, Tonia and Jamal



may want to build out, not up. By stating this simply (e.g., pointing and saying "I think they want to build out this way"), Amanda gives Stacey the opportunity to add blocks on either end of the structure. This strategy requires understanding the intent of the child needing support and being conscientious not to change that intent. Therefore, adults should always confirm with children that they are correctly labeling, reframing, and/or interpreting their ideas.

Watch for Opportunities to Refer One Child to Another

Children with special needs sometimes need support in connecting with peers. When adults intentionally talk about the strengths of children and refer children to each other, adults help children learn to identify and connect with their peers. Let's look at the relationship between Jackson and Tyson. Both are children with significant special needs who have frequently sought each other out during work time or transitions. Both boys love to look at books, and they often like to look at the same book at the same time. Sometimes Tyson may wander the classroom, and an adult will refer Tyson to Jackson by telling him that Jackson is reading his (Tyson's) favorite book. Tyson then eagerly joins in looking at the book with Jackson. Over time these boys have become the best of friends. Tyson smiles and waves his arms when he sees Jackson. Jackson comes up and pats Tyson



on the head or back and says something to him. These children truly have an unconditional friendship.

Teachers' being intentional about commenting on the strengths and abilities of children with special needs also helps typically developing children to make connections with their nontypically developing peers. For example, a teacher might acknowledge that Michael, who is nonverbal, knows how to use the printer; that Sara, who walks with a walker, knows how to open up the watercolors; or that Lorie, who has Down syndrome, can show how to squeeze the play dough all the way out of the tube. Using such acknowledgements of children's abilities helps *all* children recognize that they can reach out and connect with peers about items and events that are important to them. Children also learn that adults are not the only people to turn to when they need help or are eager for new ideas. This realization further establishes friendships with peers as a fruitful avenue for accomplishing one's goals and having rewarding experiences.

Talk With Parents

Parents often know, before teachers do, who children talk about as their friends. Having conversations with parents can help adults in the classroom look for opportunities to support blossoming friendships. For example, Adam looked to adults to engage with during work time. His mother reported that he frequently talked about Sam and Jesse. Adam's mother thought he was interacting with Sam and Jesse based on how much he talked about them. With this new

information, adults in the classroom can observe how to support Adam and his "friendships" with Sam and Jesse. There may be opportunities that could naturally be built into the daily routine for Adam to interact, help, or even be next to Sam or Jesse. It could be that Sam may need help carrying the basket of milk cartons over to the snacktime area, and Adam could be prompted to help. Or there might be opportunities during work time for Adam to learn how to approach one of his peers that he talks so often about to his mother. For example, the teacher might join Sam and Jesse in play and ask them if it's okay for Adam to join them too. The teacher could suggest things for Adam to do in the context of the play ("It looks like you'll need some more tape. Maybe Adam can hold the tape while you cut it") until Adam is better able to integrate himself into the play scenario on his own.

Without the information from Adam's mother, these opportunities for the classroom teachers to provide support and for the children to do something new may have been missed.

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Encouraging the development of friendships in young children with special needs involves supporting and sustaining interactions among peers. Through careful child observation, information gathering, building on children's strengths, and adult-child interactions such as partnering, modeling, and interpreting, adults can facilitate the development of healthy friendships in the classroom and beyond.



Terri Mitchell is a HighScope field consultant and currently serves as the Early Childhood Administrator in Canyons School District in Sandy, Utah. Prior to joining Canyons, Terri was an educational specialist for the Utah Personnel Development Center, where she directed the training initiatives for early childhood special education classrooms across the state of Utah. Terri is a certified teacher in special education and early childhood special education. She has contributed her experience with instructional coaching, assessment, and systems change to the development of several high-quality early childhood programs. She co-authored the book *I Belong: Active Learning For Children With Special Needs* (HighScope Press).

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TRAINER-TO-TRAINER

Creating Social Stories to Address Classroom Situations

BY SUE GAINSLY

Social stories can be created as a whole class, in small groups, or with individual children as a strategy to start a conversation about social learning. Addressing common concerns or classroom goals with others helps children see themselves as members of a classroom community working for the good of the whole. In this 60-minute workshop, participants will discuss the mechanics of writing group stories, practice writing group stories, and generate the beginning of a group story to use with their own class.



A social story

What You'll Need: Ahead of time, fold three pieces of chart paper into a book. On the front write the title "The Cell Phone." Then do the following:

- On the first page of the book draw a simple picture to depict people at a workshop with one person talking on a cell phone.
- At the top of the second page draw a face with a caption bubble that says "I feel..."

- At the top of the third page write "The problem is..."
- At the top of the fourth page write "How can we solve this problem?"

You will also need chart paper, markers, and sheets of blank 8½ x 11 paper.

Opening Activity

(15 minutes)

1. Hold up the book *The Cell Phone*, then turn to the picture on the first page and begin the story. For example, you might say,

Once upon a time, there was a group of teachers participating in a workshop. Right in the middle of a discussion, a cell phone rang. The person who owned the cell phone picked up her phone and started talking very loudly to her friend.

Pause and acknowledge if this has ever happened to a member of the group. Then turn to page 2 and continue with the story:

This made the other people in the workshop feel... (pause so participants can respond). Write participants' answers on page 2.

Turn to page 3 and write down participants' ideas for identifying what the problem is. Then turn to page 4 and write down participants' ideas for solving the problem.

Central Ideas and Practice

(20 minutes)

2. Introduce the idea of writing social stories with children as a strategy for solving classroom problems (social conflicts or problems with materials) and setting classroom goals or expectations. Mention that talking about classroom conflicts when they are not happening can make it easier for children to think about solutions and generate ideas. Explain that incorporating children's ideas for solutions increases their motivation to follow through with appropriate expectations for classroom behavior. Greeting time is often a good time to create group stories.

3. In table groups, have participants talk about the features of a social story and ways to share it with children that make it an easily implemented strategy that is appealing to children.

Discuss ideas as a whole group. Mention the following strategies and ideas if they are not brought up in the group discussion: using simple drawings; illustrating basic emotions; preparing materials ahead of time; giving a basic introduction of the problem (but so the story and discussion aren't too lengthy); restating children's ideas in their own words; stating problem and solutions; referring to other, similar situations; and making social stories available in the classroom for children to refer back to.

4. As a whole group, generate a list of common classroom situations that could be addressed in a social story.

5. Ask each table group to choose a situation from the list and create a social story that addresses that situation.

6. Have groups share their stories with the whole group.

Application

(20 minutes)

7. Ask participants to individually think of a classroom situation that they would like to address with a social story. Have them fold 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of plain paper into a booklet and sketch out the beginning of a social story to address their classroom's situation. Remind participants that they are making a sample and that social stories used in the classroom should be large enough for a group of children to see.

8. Once participants have sketched out their stories, have them find a partner. Have partners take turns reading their story to each other. Have partners talk about how children might respond to each partner's story (e.g., what children might say and what ideas they might suggest).

Implementation Plan

(5 minutes)

9. Ask participants to answer the following questions:

- When will you introduce your social story to your class?
- What challenges might you encounter?
- How will you address those challenges?



Classroom problems or children's conflicts can be the basis for writing social stories.

NEWS BRIEFS

Save the Date for the 2013 HighScope International Conference

Learn about best practices, products, programs, and teamwork! HighScope's 2013 conference will be held May 8–10, 2013, with preconference workshops available on May 6–7.

Educators from all over the world attend this event, which attracts 500–600 people annually. We purposely have kept it this size because it allows us to offer you up to 95 different, high-quality sessions presented by HighScope Certified Trainers and others in the field that have a proven record of excellence. And we make sure there are many opportunities to network with people from around the world who are dedicated to helping the children in their communities learn, grow, and succeed.

This year's conference will include talks by two nationally known early childhood experts: Sue Bredekamp will deliver the opening address, entitled “Continuity and Change: HighScope's Legacy and Leadership Moving Forward,” and W. Steven Barnett will give the keynote address, entitled “How the HighScope Perry Preschool Study Continues to Inform Research and Evaluation.”

Register by March 29 to receive the Early Bird rate of \$375.

Check highscope.org over the coming months to learn more about registration, conference and preconference schedules, speakers, entertainment, HighScope Demonstration Preschool visits, and travel information, and to get a preview of sessions.

HighScope to Contribute to Excellerations™ Early Education Products

HighScope will be contributing to the Excellerations™ family of high-quality early education products through its partnership with Excelligence Corporation®, which does business under the name of Discount School Supply®. Excellerations™ is a new, proprietary brand developed by Discount School Supply in response to parents' and teachers' demand for high-quality early learning products.

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ASK US

BY SUE GAINSLY

I have a child in my classroom who I think of as “the hit and run bandit.” She grabs toys, knocks over children's blocks, and pushes and pulls children out of her way. It doesn't even appear that she is particularly interested in the toys that she takes from others. She seems to do it more for the reaction she gets from the other children. I have plenty of materials available for children to use; she simply wants whatever is in someone else's hands. Now it seems that any time she approaches other children they feel threatened, and they yell or lash out at her in a preemptive strike.

When these situations happen over and over again, it can be frustrating for everyone involved, and it can escalate into a tense environment. What can I do to defuse the situation?

— A Preschool Teacher

One of the primary roles of an early childhood teacher is as an interpreter of young children's actions and intentions for other children. In your case, you can help the “bandit” communicate her needs in a more socially acceptable way. You've said that it doesn't appear that the child is particularly interested in using the materials she has taken, so she may be taking toys as a way to initiate interactions with peers that also get an adult response. Put another way, this child may want to enter into other children's play but has not yet learned the social skills that let her do so successfully.

Typically, then, it will be the adult who helps the child enter play or obtain materials. Grabbing toys is this child's strategy, albeit negative, for entering play. Your goals in this situation are to assist the child in acquiring new strategies for entering play and to help the other children understand and problem-solve what is happening.

One strategy for accomplishing both goals is to try to partner with her and interpret her intentions to other children, acknowledging the child's desire to join the play activities of her peers.

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NEWS BRIEFS CONTINUED

The Excellerations™ brand of products spans many content categories, including math, science, language, social-emotional development, dramatic play, active play, and others, and was developed by Discount School Supply as a natural extension of its broad proprietary product offering. The Excellerations™ brand features brand new items, along with teachers' favorites, which have been selected and designed to withstand years of daily classroom use.

According to Cathy Adams, Senior Vice President of Merchandising and Product Development for Discount School Supply, Excellerations™ products are designed to work with children's natural desire to learn and explore. "Our goal is to make the Excellerations™ brand of products instantly recognizable as a family of products that exceeds a customer's expectations for quality, added value, educational appeal, and usability at home and in the classroom," she said. "We want the customer to know that every product carrying the Excellerations™ logo will carry these important features."

ASK US CONTINUED

This reframes and validates her feelings. Let other children know that this child is still learning how to tell others that she wants to play with them. Use work time as an opportunity to model prosocial behavior and communication.

First let the child practice interacting with you, playing side-by-side and then sharing materials or conversation. Because adult behavior is more predictable, children often find it easier to begin acquiring social skills in one-on-one interactions with a teacher than with peers. Then, let this child observe your strategies for initiating interactions with other children. Say what you're thinking out loud. For example, "I want to play with Allison, so I'm going to tap her on the shoulder and tell her." When you are involved in play, you can look for opportunities to facilitate interactions between the child and her peers, such as passing materials to one another (e.g., "It looks like Persia might need more blocks — will you please pass her these?"), and connecting children's ideas (e.g., Tommy's a dog, you are a cat, and I am a cat; we are all pretending to be animals").

With your encouragement, your "bandit" will learn more appropriate ways to initiate play and resort less to the grab-and-dart method. Other children, knowing her intent is to play with — rather than disrupt — them, may also begin to reach out to her.

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