



Strategies for Developing Classroom Friendships

Children spend a significant amount of time in the classroom which is a wonderful environment to build lasting friendships. This article includes strategies for helping children develop friendships with classmates.

1. Activities – Create situations where children collaborate and work together. Look at their interests and abilities and use paired or group activities to encourage interaction. Physical activities like team sports or throwing a ball and counting the number of times it remains in the air before being dropped are fun and require teamwork. Small group projects like creating a collage where children have assigned roles such as writer, picture locator, and materials cutter, help children focus on a task and interact to complete it. Depending on a child's age and ability, give them more or less structured directions. For older children, let them select different roles and problem solve how to complete the project as a way to learn collaboration and compromise.



From *Working Together*

2. Direct Instruction – Sometimes it is necessary to discuss and outline social skills clearly for children to understand them. Role plays and group discussions about meeting someone new, having a conversation, sharing, helping, and being a good sport can illustrate aspects of the skills children may overlook. Rehearse new scenarios, frequent interactions, or a past event to practice real-world situations. Start by clearly explaining the specific actions in the skill. For example, when practicing having a conversation discuss and practice greetings, responding to questions, asking questions, attending to the person, and saying good-bye. Have children role play a scene with the skill. Discuss possible things to say and do when having a conversation and how choices during a conversation affect the outcome of the interaction.

3. Bridge Home and School – Parents and teachers can work together to promote an interest in school friendships. Have children write a story about their classroom friends then ask parents to read and discuss the story at home. For younger children, include information about friends in notes home. Mention things like, "Alex played cars with Sarah in the sandbox." Encourage parents to ask about who the child played with or worked with at school.

4. Activities Outside the Classroom - Children often see classmates at community activities. Joining a new activity with a classmate is a way to encourage friendships outside of school and have the support of an existing friend at a new event. Whether playing on a baseball team or attending story time, participating with someone the child knows is a way for them to have additional common interests.

5. Don't Pressure Children – Teaching children the basics of being good to peers is important. Sometimes children develop close friendships this way, other times they will remain classmates. Do not force a friendship, but encourage children to share, say kind things, and be good to their classmates. Use children's interests to involve them in activities such as sports, clubs, or neighborhood get-togethers they enjoy, so they continue to participate and find friends with similar hobbies.

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