



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Teach Children the Skills Needed to Make Friends

Have you ever wondered why some children make friends easily, and why it's harder for others? It turns out that there are several key skills we all need in order to make friends, and those who have these skills find it easier to make and keep friends.

Moreover, research has shown that children who gain these skills are not just successful in making friends, but they are also successful in school and in life. A child's ability to develop good relationships with peers lays the groundwork for her adult relationships, mental and physical health, her self-esteem, and overall well-being and happiness. Some researchers have called these skills one of the most important set of skills a child can learn.

The good news is that children can start to learn these key skills beginning at a young age – through their interactions with the important people in their life. One way for children to learn these skills is through playing social games. Whether it's an interactive game like “peek-a-boo” or a board game like “Candyland”, when children play games with others, they gain foundational skills such as:

- ♥ Listening (learning about and following rules)
- ♥ Taking turns & waiting (part of learning to share)
- ♥ Cooperating (working together)
- ♥ Negotiating (compromise)
- ♥ Problem Solving & Conflict Resolution
- ♥ Reading social and emotional cues (interpreting intentions of others) and responding appropriately (e.g., showing empathy)

In this newsletter, we will introduce some games



to play with young children. We will also discuss how friendships develop at each age level – infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and present ideas that you can do to help your child learn the skills necessary to make and maintain friends.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

When a parent or other caregiver interacts warmly with an infant by smiling, making eye contact, talking to her, or singing, a bond is built between that adult and child. Through these warm interactions, infants learn that people are social beings who communicate with one another, and who trust and rely on one another. They notice and learn to interpret their caregiver's facial expressions and gestures. They also learn that interactions are enjoyable and rewarding. This lays the foundation for the child's ability to form relationships with others.

Here are other ideas for helping your infant learn foundational skills for making friends:

- ♥ **Respond to cues.** An infant who wants to play might demonstrate cues such as making eye contact with you, smiling, or reaching her hands toward you. Talk to your infant about her cues. You can say, "I love your smile! Do you want to play?"
- ♥ **Copy-cat games.** Get close to your infant and try imitating her facial expressions and gestures. Next, make faces for her to copy –



try a smile, a big open mouth, a small "oooh" shaped-mouth, raised eyebrows or a stuck-out tongue. You'll soon see your baby will start imitating you!

- ♥ **Words for waiting.** Infants cry to communicate their needs and it is important to respond right away. But there are times when a caregiver is unable to respond immediately because she is tied up doing something. In this instance, let your infant know that you hear her and that help is on the way. For example, "I hear you little one. I'll be with you in one minute, honey." Your infant is learning that while she may sometimes need to wait a bit, her needs are important and will be met.

Activity for Infants: *Singing and Movement*

Adapted from Little Angel Nursery Rhymes

What You Need:

None

What to Do:

1. Sing to or play simple games such as "peek-a-boo" or "pat-a-cake" with your baby.
2. Sing rhymes and gently move her hands to the words in the rhyme.
3. Use words and songs from your child's cultural heritage. Here is a movement game that Japanese families play with their babies.

Chochi chochi (gently clap your baby's hands together)

Awawa (gently tap your baby's mouth with her fingers)

Kaikuri kaikuri (gently roll your baby's hands around each other)

Atama ten ten (gently tap your baby's head with her hands)

Ba! (cover your baby's eyes with her hands and open them when you say "Ba.")



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Toddlers show more interest in other children and they make deliberate attempts to gain peers' attention to get them to respond. A younger toddler may engage with another child by sitting next to her and exchanging toys every so often, perhaps even reaching for a toy and saying "mine!" However, older toddlers will engage more with peers and their play may involve doing things together, and engaging in pretend play.

At this age, toddlers are working on lots of things, in particular how to get along with others, problem solving skills, and understanding feelings in themselves and others. When your child is with you or others, you can help her practice these skills by:

- ♥ **Labeling strong feelings/learning to read cues.** When you see that your child is experiencing strong emotions (e.g., yelling or crying), give her words to describe the feeling and help her read emotional cues. For example, you can say "You look angry." Or, "When you took his toy, he was sad and started to cry."
- ♥ **Cooperating.** Present suggestions that involve children playing together. For example, a



"toddler band" in which each child has an instrument or scarf to shake along to the music. Or a "mural painting" in which each child has paint and a brush to use on a large cardboard box so everyone has a place to paint.

- ♥ **Modeling words and turn-taking.** Model words to use when interacting with others, including "Hi! I'm Logan," "Can I play?," "My turn?," and "Thank you." Toddlers will need to hear these words many, many times before they learn to use them.

Activity for Toddlers: *My Turn, Your Turn*

What You Need:

A ball or toy car (Something to roll back and forth)

What to Do:

1. Sit on the floor facing your child with your legs out in front of you.
2. Place the ball or car on the floor and roll it to her and say "Your turn."
3. Encourage her to roll it back to you and say "My turn."
4. Repeat, saying the "Your turn, my turn." as the ball is rolled back and forth.
5. If your child is talking, encourage her to say "My turn" when the ball gets to her.



*If other children are participating, sit in circle and encourage them to roll the ball to each other saying the child's name for example "Sam's turn."

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

As your child engages in more peer interactions, either with family or friends' children— to more formalized settings such as a family child interaction learning program, you may see that she engages in more complex social pretend play and more cooperative joint activities. For example, you might hear her say, “You be the mommy and I be the teacher” or you may see children using blocks to build a castle together. Through these experiences, your child is learning how to share toys, take turns, communicate clearly, and cooperate with other children, and she'll probably need some help from you.

Here are ideas for how you can support your preschooler in making friends and playing with others:

♥ **Social and emotional cues.** Help your child learn to read and respond to cues by talking about it. For example, “Your cousin looked frustrated after you tripped over her block building and knocked it over. What can we do to help her?” You can also show her how to comfort someone in distress with a gentle touch or a little hug. Teach her comfort words,



such as, “Are you okay?” By doing this she will learn important empathy skills.

♥ **Playing games together.** Try the following games as you model turn taking, listening, cooperating, negotiating, and conflict resolution.

- *Tic Tac Toe*- use a stick to draw a grid of 9 boxes in the dirt or sand. Take turns with your child, drawing an X or O to connect 3 in a row.
- *Memory* - From a deck of cards, select 10 pairs. Shuffle and lay them face down. Take turns flipping over two cards at a time. If they match, keep them and go again. If they are different, flip them back over and it is the next player's turn.

Activity for Preschoolers: *Cereal Box Board Game*

What You Need:

Recycled cereal box	Die, or deck of cards
Markers	Game pieces (e.g., bottle caps, small figurines, erasers, etc.)
Scissors	

What to Do:

1. Cut the cereal box open to create a flat game board.
2. On the blank side, draw a starting box with a curvy path to a finish line.
3. Segment the pathway by drawing boxes and numbering them.
4. Have your child come up with a theme (e.g., candy land or volcano land) and help decorate the board with obstacles (*Volcano! Go back 3 spaces*) or scenery.
5. Select your game pieces and place them at the start, then take turns rolling the die or pulling a card.
6. Have your child count the number of spaces and place her piece where she lands.
7. Use phrases such as, “Oh no! You lost a turn. That's okay, you can go again after me.”

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through her senses (seeing, hearing, and touching)
- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles and small muscles

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Learn to interact with others

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills and her attention span
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language



Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Develop early math skills like quantifying, comparing, sorting, grouping and ordering.

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Friendship Saimin

*Try this recipe after reading *Plenty Saimin* by Feng Feng Hutchins

Ingredients for Broth:

- 1 packet Dashi (Hon Dashi bonito soup stock)
- 2 quarts Chicken broth
- Shoyu to taste

Saimin Ingredients:

- Saimin noodles (fresh or frozen)
- *Kamaboko, Eggs, Cabbage, Green Onions, Char Sui, Spam (*optional items)



Directions:

1. Bring chicken broth to a boil, then add the dashi and shoyu.
2. Cover and simmer on low until the noodles are ready.
3. Prepare the saimin noodles according to the package instructions.
4. Have your child add the ingredients of her choice into the saimin.
5. Serve and read *Plenty Saimin* as your child enjoys her meal.

Resources

From Feelings to Friendships: Nurturing Healthy Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/30-from-feelings-to-friendships-nurturing-healthy-social-emotional-development-in-the-early-years>

This resource from Zero to Three provides a short video and downloadable tip sheet with information on how to support your child's relationship-building skills.

Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/building-social-emotional-skills-at-home>

This article provides suggestions on helping your child develop social and emotional skills at home.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Who Says I Love You by Highlights for Children Inc.

Infants and toddlers will love hearing and making the sounds of the animals pictured in this book. This book has repetitive text with the words I love you and a bonus mirror in the back.

I Can Share by Karen Katz

This book features simple, repetitive text and adorable illustrations of toddlers. This playful little book is the perfect way to introduce the magic of sharing.

Preschoolers

Plenty Saimin by Feng Feng Hutchins

It is Ah Kee's birthday! On his way to the market with Ma he invites friend after friend to join him for noodles. Will Ma have enough to feed everyone he's invited? As the noodles are being prepared one by one each friend brings an ingredient to add to the pot.

My Friend Bear by Jez Alborough

Eddie is lonely—that is, until he meets an oversized bear who is lonely, too. Children will love this heartwarming tale about the beginning of a special friendship.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowthawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowthawaii