



I COMFORT

I THANK

I LISTEN

I AM A FRIEND

I ASK FOR HELP

I APOLOGISE

I ENCOURAGE

I FORGIVE

I TAKE OTHERS INTO ACCOUNT

# 5 JOY OF BEING TOGETHER

Many social skills are learnt by observing and mimicking people's actions and practising them with others. Children need a plenty of playful and positive interaction and authoritative feedback to learn skills such as joining in a game, comforting a friend, spurring on and apologising.

How could you ensure that every child finds friends at day care? How could even a shy child be helped to join in? How could you support friendships and finding friends in a day care group?

## Teaching kindness

Children develop through interaction with other people. It is important for children to interact with adults. In social interaction, expressions, gestures, senses, emotions, the nervous system and even muscles and the whole being are active. Adults' gestures, nods, smiles, speech and presence create security and are essential for children's positive development and learning.

Relationships with other children are important from a young age. However, making friends is not always as easy for children as us adults often assume, and they should not be left alone to cope in new social situations. Thus, adults should have the sensitivity and capability to notice the situations in which children need support, for example, when they form new friendships. Children's mutual affection increases, when they are given opportunities and occasions to spend time together.

It is important that children are shown how to act with kindness. They can be given concrete examples of how to comfort a friend, be fair and help others: "Mary, come with me to cuddle John, so he would feel better." Friendships between children depend on what else is going on around them in the group and the community. According to research, the level of endorphins in the brain goes up for the person doing a good deed and the person at the receiving end of it, as well as, for the person who witnesses it. Children need opportunities to practise being helpful and kind.

Being part of a group improves children's self-esteem and creates a feeling of safety. In a group, children see themselves in relation to their peers and learn to recognise their strengths and stumbling blocks. All children should experience successes when playing with other children and feel that they are

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT ADULTS IN PROVIDING CHILD-ORIENTED PARENTING?

HOW DO YOU DISCUSS CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SKILLS WITH THEIR FAMILIES?

WHAT KINDS OF SOCIAL SKILLS NEED TO BE REINFORCED IN YOUR GROUP OF CHILDREN?

*"Even three-month-old babies show approval when a puppet helps another one to reach their target, and disapproval when a puppet hinders another puppet's activities. (Hamlin & Wynn 2011.)"*

*"A one-year-old feels pleasure when food is shared equally and is disturbed if someone gets no food at all. The unhappiness of others makes babies feel miserable, but when they witness someone being comforted, they seem to calm down and relax." (Sajaniemi & Mäkelä 2014)*

an important part of a group. Adults must ensure that no child is left outside a group. Repeated experiences of being left out affect mental health and weaken children's quality of life.

**Loneliness experienced by pre-school aged children is connected to low self-esteem, fears and anxiousness, bullying and being bullied as well as becoming rejected and withdrawn. (Junttila 2002)**

**WHAT KINDS OF PRACTICES HAVE YOU IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR ECEC GROUP TO ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT ALONE?**

**HOW DO YOU HELP CHILDREN JOIN IN AND BECOME PART OF GAMES?**

**An interaction-based, authoritative style of raising children, which includes discussions, cuddling, apologising and attending to a game that is not working, reduced bullying in pre-primary groups. There was more bullying in those groups in which time out or isolation from others were used for disciplining. (Repo 2013)**

## Adults support and guide

The interest in being sociable and the desire to connect with others are at the heart of humanity. Some children are naturally more interested in other children. They receive a lot of practice with social relations, because they seek to be at the centre of activity and events. Those children may need adult support and guidance to learn to avoid constant conflicts and clashes. Children who like being on their own, on the other hand, need adult help to learn social skills and receive positive experiences of playing with others. A shy child might want to join in but lacks the necessary courage to do so. An adult can help children by supporting them in new situations and encouraging them to join in.

## Adults as role models

With their friends, children practice being more flexible and learn to negotiate and reconsider their views. Relationships with other children offer opportunities for growth and development. Children are often good at solving conflicts between themselves, because their aim is to continue their game as smoothly as possible. However, at the end of the day, it is the adults who define what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Adults' attitudes and actions are pivotal, for example, in cases of bullying.

We can prevent bullying by promoting social skills - by teaching manners and morals, practising social skills, taking others into account and strengthening friendship skills. Education and teaching should have a key role in strengthening social cohesion and grouping, even among small children. This is the responsibility of adults, and it is what children deep down also desire. Social skills enable us to form a connection with fellow human beings, share emotions and be seen and heard. Positive experiences of being part of a group, friendships and teaching social skills in early childhood education strengthen factors that protect children's mental health and support the wellbeing of the mind.

## Strengthening friendship skills in day care

- The operating culture of a day care group and the mutual interaction between the adults are key to the development of children's peer relationships.
- Through their actions and mutual interaction, adults demonstrate how the group treats other people and different ways of participating in group activities.
- Strengthening friendship skills through games and discussions can become a shared goal for the group.
- Positive feedback creates an approving atmosphere respectful of others.

(Viitala 2014)

## Supporting social skills

- Be a mindfully present, safe adult.
- Ensure that the group feels safe.
- Organise more games that strengthen the group's sense of community.
- Teach clear rules of what is right and wrong.
- Make sure that everyone joins in.
- Actively promote friendships.
- Intervene with bullying straight away.

## Social skills supporting children's mental health

Teach and help children to

- join in
- consider others in games
- spur others on
- ask for help
- listen
- comfort
- thank
- play together
- apologise and forgive
- solve conflicts
- be assertive.

These skills are learnt and practised throughout life.

## Children's challenging behaviour

- Teach children social skills.
- Ensure that children have been taught social skills before you expect them to have them.
- Be observant, reward and notice even the smallest sign of positive behaviour, and make sure that the reward for that is bigger than the immediate reward of aggressive behaviour.

WHAT KINDS OF  
SOCIAL SKILLS  
SHOULD CHILDREN  
LEARN IN PRE-  
SCHOOL?

## Cooperation with parents

Utilise the Being Together poster and the tool and exercises connected to it. At the child health clinics, you can discuss with the parents the benefits of authoritative and interaction-based parenting style.

# JOLLY GROUP

Tuuli Paasolainen

D A7 D D A7 D

1. We have a group as jol-ly as can be! We have a group as jol-ly as can be! When

6 Em A7 D D A7 D

the game's be-en shown, \_\_\_ no one's left a-lone. \_\_\_ We have a group as jol-ly as can be.

1. We have a group as jolly as can be! (moving towards the centre of a circle)  
We have a group as jolly as can be! (moving towards the centre of a circle)  
When the game's been shown, no one's left alone. (clapping your knees)  
We have a group as jolly as can be. (clapping your knees)

2. When we all play together in a crowd. (walking clockwise in a circle)  
It doesn't matter if we're upside down! (Stop and hang heads down)  
Together we're strong, singing our song. (clapping)  
When we all play together in a crowd. (clapping)

3. Sometimes a row may ruin a game we're playing, (thumping feet)  
and that may make you feel like crying. (thumping and thumbs down)  
An adult lends a hand and soon we feel grand (clapping)  
And we're all feeling safe in our games (clapping)

Tuuli Paasolainen  
Translation: Aino Kattelus

Singing songs that positively enforce the important things in life will gradually start affecting the way you do things. Music works on an emotional level, and this is why it can have such a positive impact on how things develop. Singing together strengthens interaction and the sense of community – it promotes a happy mood! It is as if a song or a rhyme threw magic dust over the group. Shared feelings create positive energy.

(Paasolainen, T. Musiikki-iloa kymmenen kiloa. 2015. Laula lelut laatikkoon. 2016)



## Cloth game

This is a game about cooperation skills. The children are divided into small groups, and each group gets a small cloth, which is placed on the floor. An adult gives the children instructions and asks them to work in cooperation. The children are supposed to touch the cloth with different body parts. The instructions can go as follows: place fifteen fingers, or two knees, eight heels, four elbows or twenty toes on the cloth. During the exercise, adults help the children with counting etc. The aim of the game is to develop cooperation skills.



## Shapes

This exercise works best with 4-6 children at a time. The children stand in a line, and the adult shows the last child in the line a picture, which the child draws on the back of the child in front of him/her (the shape can be a heart, square, triangle, circle, star etc.). That child then draws the same shape on the back of the next child, and this is then repeated until the first in the line draws the shape s/he has felt on his/her back on a piece of paper. Then the group checks, if the shape stayed the same.



## Circulating happiness game

Children sit in a circle on the floor. The instructor starts the game by pointing at one child in a group and smiles. It is almost as if the instructor infected the child with a smile. The child then infects the next person with a smile by pointing at another child, and in the end, everyone in the circle is smiling.



## What makes a good friend?

Everyone is sitting in a circle. Music is playing, and a ball circulates from person to person. When the music stops, the person with the ball gets to tell one characteristic of a good friend (doesn't lie, doesn't bully, is kind, is a good listener and so forth). After circle time, the children get to print their hand on a large card using finger paints. The adult writes on the card the characteristics of a good friend the children have mentioned.



## Let's look at art: Siblings Ilma and Nelma

This artwork is by artist Eero Järnefelt. The name of the artwork is Siblings *Ilma and Nelma*. The artwork was painted in 1890 with oil paints on canvas. The size of the painting is 24 x 33 cm.

Eero painted several artworks depicting family life and family members. Eero's relatives, girls Ilma and Nelma, often posed for Eero, and Eero liked painting them.

In this picture, sisters Ilma and Nelma sit doing their homework. The older one of the sisters, Ilma, looks focused, even serious. What kind of schoolwork could she be doing with such concentration? Her little sister, Nelma, sitting next to her, is making faces and amusing her. What do you think that girl is thinking about? Do you think she might have tricks on her mind? How do you think it feels for Ilma that her little sister is staring at her when she is trying to focus on schoolwork?

The girls are siblings. What does it mean when someone is your sister or brother? And what does it mean that some people are siblings? Ilma and Nelma are from the same family, but do you think they have similar personalities? Do your siblings or family members all have similar personalities?

The painting conveys a cheerful mood. When you look at the painting, you almost feel like you were in the same room with them. Would you like to sit around the same table with the girls? What do you think would happen if you joined them?

- What does close friendship feel like?
- How do you know that someone is really important to you?
- Do you think the girls in the picture have a close relationship, and do they play together a lot? What makes you think that?
- What does it mean when someone is your sister or brother? Do you have siblings?
- How does it feel when a friend or someone important to you lives far away?
- How do you ask a friend to play with you?
- What could you do if the other person does not want to play the same game as you?
- Do you ever quarrel or have disagreements with your friends or siblings? What causes the arguments? How can you settle an argument and stop quarrelling?



## Let's make video art!

Discuss as a group what friendships feel like and how you can keep in touch with people important to you. Come up with ideas together, and with, for example, a mobile phone, video short clips presenting life in your day care centre from both adult and child perspectives on how you can show others that you like them and that they are important to you. The video recording can be cut and edited, but a video shot as one continuous recording is also impressive. The group watches the video together with staff and parents.



