


Peer Relationships



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2.0 Interactions with Peers	
At around 48 months of age	At around 60 months of age
2.1 Interact easily with peers in shared activities that occasionally become cooperative efforts.	2.1 More actively and intentionally cooperate with each other.
<i>Children interact comfortably with one or two playmates, although sociability is still basic. Children sometimes share materials and communicate together, occasionally working cooperatively on a mutual goal or project, especially with adult support.</i>	<i>Children initiate and participate in more complex, cooperative activity with peers. This may involve working together in groups to achieve a shared goal or communicating about how to share materials so all can use them.</i>

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2.0 Interactions with Peers (cont'd)	
At around 48 months of age	At around 60 months of age
2.2 Participate in simple sequences of pretend play.*	2.2 Create more complex sequences of pretend play that involve planning, coordination of roles, and cooperation.
<i>Children play imaginative, complementary roles (such as parent and child) in pretend play but without much planning or a well-developed story line.</i>	<i>Children develop longer, more complex pretend play narratives involving a shared script, coordination of child-selected roles, and mutual correction within those roles as they play.</i>

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2.0 Interactions with Peers (cont'd)	
At around 48 months of age	At around 60 months of age
<p>2.3 Seek assistance in resolving peer conflict, especially when disagreements have escalated into physical aggression.</p>	<p>2.3 Negotiate with each other, seeking adult assistance when needed, and increasingly use words to respond to conflict. Disagreements may be expressed with verbal taunting in addition to physical aggression.</p>
<p><i>Children seek adult help when experiencing conflict with another child. Peer disagreements (such as those regarding the sharing of toys) can escalate into physical aggression, although not as readily as happens with children of younger ages.</i></p>	<p><i>Children can suggest simple conflict resolution strategies as well as respond to adult suggestions for resolving peer disputes. Children may taunt or tease another child rather than hitting and may also retaliate when provoked.</i></p>

3.0 Friendships	
At around 48 months of age	At around 60 months of age
<p>3.1 Choose to play with one or two special peers whom they identify as friends.</p>	<p>3.1 Friendships are more reciprocal, exclusive, and enduring.</p>
<p><i>Children play with many peers but also seek the company of one or two specific children whom they identify as friends. Children are more cooperative and share more complex play with friends than with other children.</i></p>	<p><i>Children seek to share activities with special friends who, in return, seek their company. Friends act more positively toward each other but may also experience greater conflict. Children respond with enhanced efforts at conflict resolution.</i></p>

Even young children's peer relationships are surprisingly complex! . . .

- They require unique social and emotional skills
 - Initiation skills
 - Social maintenance skills
 - Managing conflict and aggression
 - Managing play - pretend and otherwise
 - Sharing, assertiveness, caring, status, cooperation
 - Social comparison
 - Emotion regulation skills
 - They require unique kinds of social understanding
 - Social problem-solving
 - Fairness and rights
 - Friendship and understanding friendship

What about problems in children's peer relationships?

Peer status categories:

- Popular (many positives; few negatives)
- Controversial (many positives; many negatives)
- Neglected (few positives; few negatives)
- Rejected-aggressive (few positives; many negatives; characterized by aggressive behavior)
- Rejected-withdrawn or submissive (few positives; many negatives; shy and hesitant)
- Average (everybody else)

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How do we help young children develop skills in peer relationships?

- Model cooperative, constructive social interaction skills and explain why you are acting this way
- Use your words to help children understand each other, especially when they are in conflict
- Work with children to use and practice conflict negotiation skills
- Praise models of cooperative conduct among children
- Introduce social complexity into children's pretend play stories
- Use books, puppet stories, and discussions to talk about peer interaction and getting along with others
- Coach social skills in children who have peer difficulties, and communicate with parents about these efforts

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Please talk to the people near you . . .

What are the implications of what we have learned for . . .

- teachers?
- children?
- parents?

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