

## TIPS TO SUPPORT PEER PLAY IN Early Childhood Settings

Around the age of three, an important change takes place in children's development: they begin to interact more with their peers in early childhood settings than they do with their educators. This shift is important because through peer play, children practice a wide variety of skills that prepare them for school success.

Here are some of the ways children benefit from peer interaction...

### Social Skills

Peer interaction builds children's social skills by giving them opportunities to:

- ★ Initiate play and respond to initiations
- ★ Wait, share and take turns
- ★ Resolve conflicts
- ★ Take others' perspectives

### Language Skills

Peer interaction builds children's language skills by giving them opportunities to:

- ★ Narrate the play
- ★ Negotiate, assign roles and explain
- ★ Hear and imitate the language models of peers

### School Readiness

Peer interaction is associated with measures of long-term school success, such as:

- ★ Increased social competence
- ★ Increased motivation for learning activities
- ★ Increased attention
- ★ Decreased disruptive behaviors

## What about children who have difficulty with peer play?

Children who are frequently left out of peer interactions miss out on important learning opportunities, as well as the chance to make friends, build confidence and have fun with peers. Flip the page for some practical tips to support peer interaction for all children in the classroom.



# Peer Play TIPS



## Tip 1

**Structure your classroom environment in a way that encourages opportunities for peer interaction.**

Create distinct play areas or “nooks” in your classroom using partitions or shelving. When you clearly define play areas (for example, the Dramatic Centre or Building Block area), you encourage small groups of children to come together and to stay together for longer.

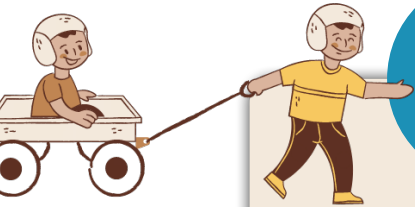
## Tip 2



**Provide children in the classroom with opportunities to collaborate.**

Assign tasks to children that require them to work together. For example, they might create a sign together using shared materials, lift a large item together, or take on pretend play roles that require them to interact, such as doctor and patient.

## Tip 3



**Give a child who spends minimal time with peers an important role.**

Raise the profile of isolated children in your classroom by giving them a special job. For example, let them drive the pretend bus or show the class a new toy. This helps the other children form a more positive impression of the child, making them more likely to include the child in peer play.

## Tip 4



**Become more intentional about the way you group children together.**

There are a variety of ways to group children together to support peer interaction. One idea is to pair a quiet child with a more sociable child who shares an interest with them. This works best if the children are around the same age and play in similar ways. For example, if they both like building, you can say, “the two of you can build something together with these blocks.”

The information in this handout is drawn from the Hanen e-Seminar, *Boosting Peer Play: How to Support Interactions in Early Childhood Settings*. Learn more at [hanen.org/BPP](https://www.hanen.org/BPP).

