



## NATIONAL CENTER ON

## Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning



### Disabilities Services Newsletter

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### Supporting Peer Interactions

Children learn new skills by watching and interacting with other children during play and everyday activities. Peer interactions promote learning and development in language, literacy, and cognition. They also promote motor and social and emotional development. In this issue, learn ways to support and enhance child-to-child interactions at home and in the classroom.

#### Read About It



*Three-year-old Jake attends a Head Start program. His teachers notice that Jake rarely talks with other children, although he talks with his teachers daily, and his family has shared that he talks with them at home. Jake joins classroom activities, follows directions, and plays well with other children. However, when interacting with peers, he mostly uses gestures, smiles, and actions, such as handing a toy to another child, to communicate. Jake's teachers asked Mr. Dewey, the disabilities coordinator, for strategies they can use to increase Jake's expressive*

*language during peer interactions.*

#### Using the Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) to Inform Children's Relationships with Other Children

The Relationships with Other Children subdomain within the Social and Emotional Development domain provides guidance on desired outcomes related to children's relationships with other children. Learn about observable skills, behaviors, or concepts that children should be able to do or know related to interactions with peers at different developmental levels. This can help you think about individual supports for children who are struggling with their interactions with peers.

#### Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices: Interaction

The DEC Recommended Practices on interaction offer practices that education staff, home visitors, coordinators, and other caregivers can use to improve learning outcomes for children. These practices promote the development of young children, including those who have or are suspected of developmental delays or disabilities and those with chronic health impairments. They support children's interactions across environments, routines, and activities. Jake's teachers and Mr. Dewey can use these practices to help Jake improve his interactions with peers.

Examples of the interactional practices that Mr. Dewey and Jake's teachers can draw on are:

- Encourage children to start or sustain positive interactions with other children and adults during routines and activities by modeling how to enter and contribute to play with peers. Provide feedback to children in the moment. For example: "Jake, let's ask Sarah and Kyle if you can be a puppy too!"
- Observe a child's verbal or non-verbal communication. Respond by using language to label and expand on the child's requests, needs, preferences, or interests.
- Observe a child's exploration, play, and social activity. Respond intentionally by joining in and expanding on the child's focus, actions, and intent.

## Take a Look

### **Leah Asking a Friend to Play: Planning Session and In the Classroom**

Explore the planning and use of intentional peer interactions as a tool for individualized teaching. First, watch two video clips. One shows the planning and deliberate thought process that goes into the interaction. The other shows the actual interaction between peers and how the teacher supports it. While you watch the videos, think about how Jake's teachers could embed similar strategies to encourage his interactions with other children.

## Try It Out

### **Child-Child Interaction Checklist**

This checklist includes practices to encourage peer interactions. Use it to develop a plan to use the practices with a child in your classroom or to promote a parent's use of the practices at home. Adapt the checklist as a self-evaluation to track how often you used the practices. A disabilities coordinator like Mr. Dewey could share this checklist with Jake's teachers to help them plan and monitor the strategies they use to support Jake's interactions with his peers.

## Improve Your Practice

### **Peer Support**

This in-service suite offers strategies for using peer support to increase the participation of children who need more support. Examples illustrate what the strategies look like in the classroom. Materials include handouts, a presentation with presenter notes, and activities that can be used for professional development.

### **Using Classroom Activities & Routines as Opportunities to Support Peer Interaction**

Learn about the importance of supporting peer interactions. Find tips and strategies on how to incorporate these interactions in the classroom. Discover how this approach benefits children with and without disabilities. This brief is from the Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

## Families, Too!

### **Practice Guides for Families: Playing with Friends**

This practice guide gives family members ideas about how they can support their child's interactions with peers at home and in the community. You will find tips for implementing practices and an example of what the practice looks like. Explore how to know that the practice is working, and watch a video. The guides also include links to resources where families can learn more about peer interactions, so be sure to share the guides with the families in your program.

*Note: The resources provided here are only a sampling of the array of resources available on these practices.*

## Ongoing Features

### **Free Access to a Specially Selected Article from Young Exceptional Children (YEC)**

Read the YEC article, **Play and Social Interaction Strategies for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Inclusive Preschool Settings**. It is available through this newsletter until Jan. 30, 2018.

## Head Start Disability/Inclusion Network

Engage with Head Start disabilities/inclusion peers around the country in an online community hosted on the MyPeers platform. Our community now has more than 1,000 members who are sharing resources, engaging in conversations, and asking questions. **Register now** as a member of MyPeers. If you are already a member of MyPeers, find the Head Start Disability/Inclusion Network community under "All Communities" and select the blue "Join" button.

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## We Want to Hear from You

The Disabilities Services Newsletter is produced monthly by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. Submit questions or suggestions for newsletter topics to [ecdtl@ecetta.info](mailto:ecdtl@ecetta.info).

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