



NEWSLETTER

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Dear Caregivers,

Building the social and emotional skills for friendship is really the work of SYC. It is important that you know at SYC, kids are the boss of who they play with. We do not force children to play with each other, however teachers model and coach children in the foundations for healthy friendships- to understand their rights as a person, set limits and boundaries with their peers, effectively communicate their needs, wants, and desires, and problem solve as conflict arises. At SYC, we hold friendship very sacred, this is why we deliberately refer to the group of children as "kids" or "playmates" rather than "friends". Developing friendships takes higher play skills, a slightly more mature brain, and immense social and emotional risk. Whether or not someone is a friend is something you get to choose as something unique and special to you. During the preschool years, developmentally children do not make a lot of friends. By the end of SYC, children might have 1-2 solid friendships. This is so much different than what society assumes so no wonder it is so confusing to know what is actually expected. Below, I have broken it down by class to help give a better understanding of what is developmentally appropriate. As always, if you'd like to discuss it further, feel free to come to office hours or contact me via e-mail!

What friendship looks like in the 2s, 3s, & 4s

In the 2s-

- Impact of stage of play on social interaction:
 - Developmentally friendships form as kids move more into cooperative play. As kids become aware of other kids as playmates in parallel play, they might want to incorporate the other person in their play. It is typical for kids to still want to control every aspect of the play; the idea, what is happening, why it is happening and who is allowed to play.
 - Kids are more likely to play around kids that like the same type of play they do, the same play themes, and play that matches their energy level
 - Same type of play: Loud rowdy play, big gross motor ideas, art activities, sensory play, quiet low energy play, building, sand
 - Same themes: dinosaurs, art, trains, babies, kitchen, dress-up, TV shows, transportation, construction, tools, etc.
 - Friendships seem to form as children move into cooperative play closer to age 3. Friends might look for one another each day. Play is typically still based on similar interests, skill level, energy level, and type of play. Friends will not necessarily only play with each other. A child might have one child that functions as a true friend to them but they might have a lot of playmates.
- Impact of brain development:
 - Kids' immature brains often get in the way of them playing with others. Kids are still working on impulse control, emotional intelligence, communicating first instead of acting with a behavior, emotional regulation, communicating ideas clearly, listening to others, problem solving in a conflict, among many other skills. Interaction with peers may end poorly for a number of reasons, however kids are still very forgiving of others' behaviors. If two kids have conflict they may move through it quickly with coaching and continue to choose to play together.
 - Play with a peer is difficult to sustain and may end if the other person does not want to play precisely the way you wanted to play.
- Goals for friendship by the end of the 2s:
 - Be aware of others as playmates that they can parallel play with and not just play independently. Be able to name most of the kids in the class and recognize themselves as a member of the class community.

In the 3s-

- Impact of stage of play on social interaction:
 - Typically kids play is transitioning to cooperative play during the 3s. Play can incorporate more imagination and fantastical ideas and can be less concrete. Play is often more reciprocal and has elements of give and take. Actual friendships start to form based on shared interest.- what kids am I in proximity to based on my preferred play schemas?
 - Friendships ebb and flow and change based on ideas and interests. A child might start out with a friend and as the year progresses they might stop playing primarily with one kid and begin playing primarily with another kid and call them a friend. It is typical for a kid to identify 1-2 friends and still a lot of playmates. The goal by the end of the year is for a kid to have 1 connection with a kid that they've played with.
- Impact of brain development:
 - Kids have immature ideas of what a friend is and can become very protective of their friendships. Kids also begin to understand that friendships can yield power which leads to a lot of exclusionary behavior. It is very typical for kids to say "you're not my friend" "you're not playing with us" "She/he's my friend but you are not" "you're not coming to my birthday party."
 - As in the 2s, kids' immature brains often get in the way of them sustaining friendships and play. Kids work is still: communicating before getting into physical altercations during conflict, understanding their own feelings and emotions, and taking others perspectives, feelings and emotions into account.

- Kids still do not have Theory of Mind and are very egocentric beings so it is difficult for them to show empathy, understand others perspectives, and navigate social interactions. More information about Theory of Mind can be found [here](#).
- Social & Emotional Risk-Taking:
 - SYC defines Social & Emotional risk taking as: putting yourself in a situation in which you might make others or yourself uncomfortable; allowing yourself/others to be uncomfortable. Developing connections with others is full of risk-taking. Being vulnerable is risky and might make you or others feel uncomfortable, however great learning comes from these risks.
 - Children are working to understand the definition of a friend and need a lot of social coaching around friendship including: friends do not always have to play together, you can have more than one friend, you can play with someone that is not your friend, your friend can play with someone else and you can remain friends. This will only increase as the children move into the 4s, as the 4s is all about social interactions.
 - Kids remain forgiving of others lagging social skills and behaviors, however they may be more avoidant of certain kids if they feel unsafe around them or if they are unpredictable. Kids may begin to be aware of whether other kids like them or play with them.
- Goal for the end of the 3s:
 - For kids to have made one connection of someone they enjoy playing with where the relationship could exist outside of school.

In the 4s

- Impact of stage of play on social interaction:
 - Typically, most kids begin the 4s as cooperative players, ready to connect with other kids. Creating friendships and friendship groups is their main goal.
 - Friendships can still ebb and flow, however kids typically gravitate towards the same children and friendships are based on shared interests. If children stop playing together there is usually a specific reason and this can generate a lot of uncomfortable feelings.
- Impact of Brain development
 - Children continue to need A LOT of social coaching in order to learn "prosocial behaviors." Their brains remain egocentric and perspective taking is still a developing skill.
 - Brains have a greater capacity for impulse control, emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, problem solving, and frustration tolerance, however the ability to access these skills is based on feelings of safety, and brains are very sensitive to any stressors which make skills difficult to access when they are in their emotional brain.
 - For more information on this check out the "flipping the lid model" [here](#)
- Social & Emotional Risk-Taking:
 - Children are still learning the nuances of friendship and begin to use friendships to explore power dynamics. This may sound like: "I'll be really sad/angry/hurt if you don't play with me", "we're friends but you're not our friend", "You have to play with me because we're friends". "I don't want you to play with them", "To be my friend you have to do this"
 - It is important for adults to help children explore friendship and qualities that make a good friend. This social coaching might be expanding their definition of friendship, exploring what qualities they would like in a friend, asking them to reflect on how others made them feel and also what their words/actions made others feel, helping them to know their rights in a friendship and set appropriate limits and boundaries when someone violates those rights, and repairing with a friend when you've made a mistake or hurt their feelings, to name a few.
 - Power dynamics can affect children's confidence because of their fragile egos and insecurity and may cause them to think they need to change things about themselves to be liked by others. It is important to build children's confidence and sense of self into friendships.
 - By the time kids get to the 4s they are not as accommodating to others lagging social skills or aggressive behaviors. Kids who are unpredictable or make others feel unsafe might need additional support in order to develop social skills for friendships. Kids are more aware of where they are as compared to others, socially.
- Goal by the end of the 4s:
 - Children have friendship connections that carry outside of school with 1-2 kids. Kids feel confident in their ability to connect with other humans, be able to identify qualities of healthy relationships, and take risks even though situations may feel uncomfortable.

Collective Wisdom

- One thing that we see in the 4's is that as part of identifying those friendship connections, there is also an awareness of other kids- those not in their identified "friends" group. And, part of sorting that out looks like becoming "teams". This can feel tricky, but it is also very developmentally appropriate in how they are figuring out the larger group in a class of 21 kiddos. This being said, they are identifying who is part and not part of their play. We work as teachers to help them find ways to do this in a way that is more aligned with who they want to be with, and ask questions to see when and if they may be able to stretch that to allow others in. Such as, "if Josey is a kitty too, can she join?" or "Josey wants to bring the kitties some food...where should she put it?" Helping kids to find more strategies in addition to asking "can I play too?"
- Early friendships look like: We're doing the same thing, therefore we're friends. We both like Bluey, therefore we're friends. Later friendships look like: You don't want to play with me, you're not my friend!

- Don't expect that just because the grownups are friends, the kids will be too (although it's lovely when it happens!). Allow some space and time for kids to make friends with people they like, even if you and the other grownups don't quite click.
- It's okay (and even necessary) to say no to a friend sometimes. Learning how to say no "kindly" takes practice. At two and three, it looks like "I don't want to play with you" or "But *I* want to play *this* instead!" As kids get closer to six or seven (or older!), it might look more like, "I'm playing with her right now. We can play later," or "You want to do that. Maybe we could do this first?" The message and the ability to state your needs and desires must come first. Finessing the delivery comes much later.
- Kids really pay attention when adults talk about their adult friendships – managing more than one friend, wanting to do something with just one friend, having disagreements with friends, gossiping about friends – whether you know they're listening/paying attention or not. Consider what you're modeling for your kids about how to be a friend. Also, you can use this attention by talking openly with your kids about how you manage friendships, both as an adult and when you were a child.

What adults can do to foster healthy friendships

- Give kids space to use their developing skills and be uncomfortable, don't swoop in to fix things
- Model respectful interactions & conflict resolutions
- Be a good observer & get curious about what you see
- Model Healthy Boundaries in your relationships
- Actively listen & Hold space for your child to talk to you about their emotions & conflicts with peers

Have any questions, comments or topic suggestions? Let's chat! e-mail me at alicia@syccolumbus.org
Office hours: Tuesday 9:30-10:30 am, Wednesday 1-2pm or by appointment

6 Stages of Play

As a child grows they go through different stages of play development.

0-3 Months	Unoccupied Play	When baby is making movements with their arms, legs, hands, feet, etc. They are learning about and discovering how their body moves.	
0-2 Years	Solitary Play	When a child plays alone and are not interested in playing with others quite yet.	
2 Years	Spectator / Onlooker Behavior	When a child watches and observes other children playing but will not play with them.	
2+ Years	Parallel Play	When a child plays alongside or near to others but does not play with them.	
3-4 Years	Associate Play	When a child starts to interact with others during play, but there is not much cooperation required. <i>Ex: Kids playing on the playground, but doing different things.</i>	
4+ Years	Cooperative Play	When a child plays with others and has interest in both the activity and other children involved in playing.	

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