



Developing Friendship Skills

A series of higher education activities based on the CSEFEL Preschool Modules. These activities are designed to be embedded in coursework and include ideas for in-class activities and assignments.

In-Class Video Activity

Rationale

When children are successful at making friends, they have opportunities to learn and practice many social skills such as cooperation, sharing, turn taking, problem solving, and conflict resolution. There are several discrete behaviors that young children engage in during play that seem to be directly related to having friends; children who exhibit these behaviors are more likely to have friends.

Objectives

1. Students will determine strategies to help children develop friendship skills.
2. Students will identify characteristics that help children successfully play with others.
3. Students will describe the behaviors that lead to friendship skills.

Type of Activity

Small group then large group discussion; make sure there is adequate space to work in small groups.

Time Allotment

Minimum of 40 minutes but more time may be needed to allow for sharing and discussion.

Materials Needed

1. Flip chart paper
2. Markers
3. CSEFEL Preschool Module Videos 2.1 – 2.5

Introduction to Topic and Transition to In-Class Activity

1. Explain to students that helping children develop friendship skills should be a part of the teaching that goes on in early childhood classrooms.
2. Explain that they will watch several video clips of children playing together, and then in small groups they will discuss the importance of teaching children friendship skills and discuss the behaviors that make children successful (and unsuccessful) play partners.

Sequence for In-Class Activity

1. In their small groups, have students list specific behaviors of children who are successful at making friends (Some responses may be: cooperating, sharing, turn taking, problem solving, and being able to solve conflicts). Have students share with the large group.
2. Have students watch CSEFEL video 2.1 of children playing (this video shows 3 children playing in the block area with one child trying unsuccessfully to gain entry into the ongoing play of the other 2 children).
3. In small groups, ask students to discuss what helped the children be successful or unsuccessful as they played together. Have groups share observations with the large group.
4. Explain to students that the next set of 4 short video clips (2.2 – 2.5) highlight specific skills (play organizing, sharing, being helpful/team players, taking turns, and giving compliments). When children have these “friendship skills,” it is easier for them to have positive play experiences. Assign one friendship skill to each small group (i.e., play organizer, sharing, etc.) and as they watch the video segments students will consider the rationale for teaching this skill, strategies for teaching the skill and how they might structure opportunities to practice the skill in their early childhood settings. Allow time for small groups to discuss their ideas after watching all 4 segments. As part of a large group discussion, have students share their observations and descriptions of how the skills can be supported in early childhood classrooms.

Closing

Make the point that when children have the skills to engage in positive interactions with peers, they are able to develop friendships. It is important to teach and provide opportunities for children to practice “friendship skills.” These skills make developing friendships easier for children as they engage in play and make new friends.

(continued)

Adaptations & Considerations

Potential issues and concerns for the instructor to consider

- Some students might state that children should not be forced to play with each other or that all children are not meant to be friends. The focus should be on developing a classroom community of acceptance and making sure that all children learn the friendship skills needed to develop close relationships with other children.

Adaptations

- Some students may not directly work with children but rather work with families or other professionals (e.g., administrators, social workers, technical assistance providers, etc.). In this situation, ask them to reflect on how they would support families in helping their children develop friendship skills at home (i.e., to use with siblings, cousins, etc.) and in community settings.
- You can also ask students who are administrators to make a plan for how they would use this activity with their staff and how they can support early childhood teachers in teaching friendship skills to young children.

Online Class Considerations

In a discussion forum:

- Ask students to view the CSEFEL video clips and post comments describing behaviors they observed as successful and/or unsuccessful friendship strategies and state why.
- Ask students to share their experiences and/or observations of friendship skills being taught to young children on a discussion board.
- Ask students to post suggestions on how they would go about teaching friendship skills.
- Require each student to respond to at least two postings from their classmates about their experiences and/or observations of friendship skills.

Practicum Seminar Considerations

- Ask students to reflect on how children are supported in making friends in their practicum sites. Encourage students to describe the specific strategies they have observed being used in their practicum settings to support the development of friendships.
- Have students share how they would teach friendship skills in their classrooms. What specific strategies will they use? How will they involve other classroom staff in supporting friendship skill development? How will they involve family members in supporting friendship skill development?

Resources and Readings

1. Joseph. G. E. & Strain, P. S. (2006). You've got to have friends. <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/handout3.pdf>
2. Embedding Friendship Opportunities into Daily Schedules <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/handout2.pdf>
3. What Works Brief #6: Using Environmental Strategies to Promote Positive Social Interactions by T. Bovey & P. Strain <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb6.pdf>
4. What Works Brief #8: Promoting Positive Peer Social Interactions by T. Bovey & P. Strain <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb8.pdf>
5. What Works Brief #17: Strategies for Increasing Peer Social Interactions: Prompting and Acknowledgment by T. Bovey & P. Strain <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb17.pdf>

