



Fostering Friendships in the Cafeteria & During Recess
For Supervisors & Teachers

FOSTERING FRIENDSHIPS



*“Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Just walk beside me and be my friend.”*

Albert Camus

At times, some children/youth struggle to make and keep friends leading to loneliness and isolation. Such difficulties may be related to qualities associated with particular disabilities (e.g. autism), or may be because the child didn't learn friendship skills.

Occupational Therapists and other school personnel can play a key role in helping all children develop friendships, both in and out of school. Friendship skills can be taught either in a group or individual setting. The first step is to conduct an informal interview and an observation to determine interfering issues.

Refer to two of Attwood's observation checklists located on his website.
(www.tonyattwood.com.au) Also, read about '**Understanding and Teaching Friendship Skills**'

Friendship *Observation Schedule* at
<http://cdn.tonyattwood.com.au/images/stories/pdfs/obs.pdf>

Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule at
<http://cdn.tonyattwood.com.au/images/stories/pdfs/fos.pdf>

All school personnel, including cafeteria and recess supervisors, should tune-into children's friendships. Specifically:

- As you observe children in the cafeteria or other school environments, tune-into whether they have friends to talk and play with.
- Look out for the loners! Encourage other students to be kind to and include those who might be alone in mealtime conversations or recess activities.
- Praise students who include others.
- Encourage tolerance of differences. 'We are all unique.' Some children with disabilities engage in behaviors that might seem peculiar to others – e.g. hand flapping, rocking. Adults in the environment need to teach respect and tolerance – 'Sally does that with her hands when she's excited.'
- Children learn by examples. All adults need to demonstrate respect and tolerance of difference by ignoring self-stimulatory behaviors.
- Encourage all children to include everyone in play or mealtime conversations. Discourage click-ish behaviors.
- Promote 'put-ups' and discourage 'put-downs'. Encourage children to compliment each other. Discourage gossip.

The use of coaching strategies can assist a child who is reluctant or unskilled at entering a conversation, group or club. Friendships develop more easily if the child is motivated by a group's enjoyable activities, and interacting with children who have common interests. When positive interaction is observed, *praise* should be given to both the child and his or her peers. Adults can facilitate the continued progression of friendship in a natural and positive environment.

Refer to the handout on the next page for 'talking point' tips to use with children to teach friendship skills.

Developed by Louise Demirjian, MA, OTR/L, Fran Horvath, OTR/L, Lauren Baird, MOT, OTR/L, & Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L for *Every Moment Counts* (2014). Revised 2021. www.everymomentcounts.org

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“There is nothing better than a friend, unless it is a friend with chocolate.”

-Linda Grayson

Friends can be made anywhere! Recess and time in the cafeteria are perfect opportunities to foster friendship with the right approach. Here are some suggestions:

Review with children the way to make friends:

1. Smile
2. Say, “Hello”
3. Introduce yourself
4. Have a conversation

Share ideas for how to start a conversation:

1. Look the person you are talking to in the eyes,
2. Make sure you are at least in elbow’s length away from the person you are talking to so not to get ‘in their space’.
3. Talk about topics only once or twice.
4. Use good listening skills. If the other person changes the subject, let them.
5. Share some information about yourself. I wish we were having _____ for lunch....it’s my favorite. What are some of your favorite foods?
6. Show an interest in the other person – ask questions like: how are you? How many brothers and sisters do you have? Do you have any pets? What do you like to play during recess? Do you like to dance?
7. What is your favorite: TV show, Video game, Sport, Teacher, Colors, Ice cream flavor, type of music, etc.

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