



feelings and helping them comfort one another (Giménez-Dasí, Fernández-Sánchez, & Quintanilla, 2015). For instance, “Claudia is crying and is feeling frustrated because she dropped her binky. Let’s help her.” Finally, teachers can engage in conversations with infants and toddlers that focus on discussions of their peers. They can point out to Felix that Anna chose the same color for her painting, and that Amir is waiting for them to finish painting for his turn. To Amir, the teacher can say, “Look, Felix and Anna are painting with green; I wonder what color you will choose when it is your turn.”

Preschoolers and School-Age Children During the preschool years, attachment behavior seems to shift from the need for continual guidance and security towards instrumental support (Sroufe. 2005). Specifically, the role of preschool teachers changes gradually towards instructional support, guidance and limit setting, encouragement of deeper thinking, and support in interactions with other children, such as problem solving. Nonetheless, close relationships with preschool teachers continue to play an important role for development and learning, which can be best characterized by a sense of warmth, responsive support, and trust, all of which promote self-regulation, independence and secure exploration in older children.

As children get older, their understanding of relationships and need of friendship increases. Teachers set the tone for a harmonious classroom by organizing cooperative learning experiences so that children can play and work together on projects or in small groups. In preschool and even more so in the primary grades, achieving a harmonious classroom involves the entire group working together (Durlak et al., 2011). To foster such harmony, encouraging children to talk about potential or actual social problems, offer solutions, and reflect on the outcomes during class meetings can be effective (Vance, 2013). In the *Promoting Play: A Member of the Class* feature, learn how Tasha creates a context for children to build a strong community.

Beyond focusing on children’s social “skills,” teachers need to promote positive interactions among children and be attentive to supporting children’s close, reciprocal friendships (Gallagher, 2013). Teachers can identify potential friends for children and arrange for them to work together on a project or be placed at the same table. Teachers can make cooperative games part of their learning centers and assign classroom duties to pairs of children. They can include families in their planning and suggest play dates or shared activities after school. Teachers can make a point of communicating with parents about relationships among children as they emerge, and share photos or stories of children sharing each other’s company.

Emerging research also suggests that teaching young children about the characteristics of good friends can influence their efforts at making and sustaining positive relationships with peers. In a study of third-graders, researchers found that children who had higher “friendship expectations” exerted more friendship efforts, which resulted in having more friends and feeling less lonely (MacEvoy, Papadakis, Fedigan, & Ash, 2016). Characteristics of good friends include sharing and taking turns, helping, listening, keeping promises, demonstrating care, being nice and respectful, spending time, having fun, and apologizing when necessary. Although this research was conducted with children in middle childhood, children had formed “friendship expectations” by third grade, implying that early childhood teachers can play a role in teaching children friendship expectations. For example, preschool teachers could role-play different scenarios with puppets that illustrated good and poor friendship skills, and ask the children to give a thumbs-up if they thought the puppet was acting like a good friend or a thumbs-down if not.

Children need to share space and activities with all the children in their group; however, only a few of the children may actually be chosen as friends. Friends are a type of relationship that is special and intimate—and chosen by the child. There is a current trend in early childhood to refer to all children in a group as “friends” and to call and refer to children as “friends” (as when a teacher says, “Your friend is waiting for her turn.”). However, teachers should be mindful of the use of the word “friend.” While all children can play, only children can choose with whom to be friends. Labeling all children in a classroom as “friends” could also serve to diminish the understanding of the characteristics of good friends.

