

Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

WHAT IS SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT?

Social engagement is the process of communicating and interacting with peers. This may entail engaging in direct social behavior, such as sharing toys, conversing, and other activities with a reciprocal turn-taking structure. It may also incorporate active involvement in structured play (tag, soccer, etc.) or unstructured game (fantasy, imaginative activity, etc.).

WHY IS SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Repeated exposure and successful social engagement between children over time may result in relationship and friendship development. This is critical for all children as the ability to successfully interact with others builds significant foundational skills: communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, prosocial skills, collaboration, empathy, self-esteem, and conflict resolution. Social engagement at an early age allows children to form healthy relationships with others throughout their lifespans.



IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Follow children's leads about what they want to play with (chalk, grass, playground structure, chess, etc.) as well as their strengths (building Legos, running, throwing a ball, etc.) and interests (Spongebob Squarepants, trains, subway maps, etc.).
- Plan materials to bring to the playground to support children's social engagement. These may include low-activity objects such as board games, cards, and books or high-activity objects including jump ropes, balls, hula hoops, etc.
- Facilitate developmentally and age-appropriate activities or games to scaffold children's social engagement with peers.
- Sustain children's engagement in the activity or game. Participate in the game to model appropriate behaviors for children. If children use a reinforcement system, they may earn tokens/reinforcers for "minutes engaged."
- Support children's social communicative behaviors including initiations and responses to peers and reciprocal conversations. Use props such as conversation starters and joke books to spur developmentally and age-appropriate conversation.
- Coach children through difficult situations with peers to practice conflict resolution and mediation skills. Validate how they are feeling and provide language and/or alternative choices to support children.

For additional resources and downloadable materials, please visit <http://www.remakingrecess.org>

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html>
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/winter2021/fostering-engagement>

CASE STUDY: KODIAK CUBS PRESCHOOL

Kodiak Cubs Preschool in the Cascade School District spends a lot of time in class teaching and modeling social engagement in multiple ways through embedded learning opportunities and play. Teachers follow the lead of the children in and out of the classroom. For instance, during walks outside the preschool and pre K students direct the group collaboratively and are given the opportunity to say right, left, straight, etc. The teachers follow the student's direction and help facilitate the conversation when there is no agreement.

Materials used in the classroom and playground have been chosen intentionally to engage the students and encourage social interactions. During table activities such as play dough each student is given their own dough to manipulate but the tools are in 1 bin and shared. There are not enough of one tool for each student so the children are encouraged to ask for a turn and socially engage with their peers. Teachers work with students modeling this and other types of social interaction such as providing comments on a student's work or identifying when a peer might want to comment. If a student is looking at a peer's work the teacher could say "I see that you are looking at your friend's dough, what do you think about it?" then encourage the peer to make this comment to their friend to start the conversation. The teacher will then continue to support as needed.

Cooperative game play is utilized in a meaningful way to support social engagement. The games provided focus on taking turns, along with sharing tools and equipment. Instead of having one winner, the object of these games is to complete a task together. The game featured in this photo is called Stack Up. In the classroom this game supports social engagement with the activity itself as well as with others playing. Kodiak Cubs Preschool not only encourages this learning in the classroom they also extend it to home. In a newsletter they suggest the following "At home, you can encourage cooperation by turning tasks into a game. Cleaning up, setting the table for a meal, or folding laundry can all become a game if using dice to take turns or introducing a timer."



The intentional materials and embedded learning opportunities are important to teaching social engagement and are facilitated through Social Emotional Learning and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or PBIS. These concepts are taught with super friends using a fun chant and gestures, social stories, and visual support. Once introduced the concepts are embedded in play and information is sent home to encourage families to use the same language. Even in the time of a pandemic, the Kodiak Cubs Preschool promotes and encourages social engagement with the use of intentional materials and activities as well as collaboration with families. Establishing relationships is essential work of the Kodiak Cubs preschool.