

A Checklist of Everyday Strategies to Promote Prosocial Development

Adults are the most important features of young children's environments (see Pianta 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). In various ways, adults may encourage or discourage children's development of prosocial behavior. Across the early grades, classroom observations reveal how seldom children behave in prosocial ways and how seldom teachers explicitly encourage, reinforce, or discuss expectations for prosocial behavior (Spinrad & Eisenberg 2009). Friendship skills don't just happen on their own. Examine daily routines and embed friendship and social interaction instruction and practice opportunities throughout the day.

1. Is each child - especially any child who may be struggling with behavioral challenges - involved in frequent, friendly, individual interactions with teachers? (Even a few minutes a day help build a secure relationship, the foundation for prosocial competence.)
2. Are classroom jobs used to build prosocial skills and a sense of community (Design daily jobs so that children have to partner and negotiate in order to achieve them. Invite a few children to pitch in and help open boxes that have been delivered, or ask a child for help in rearranging the books so that others can find them more easily).
3. Does the physical environment promote cooperation and community participation? (Set up interest areas and materials to invite small groups to work together, share supplies, and interact).
4. Do adults model prosocial behavior showing empathy and kindness to co-workers by using respectful language and engaging in positive interactions?
5. Do you intentionally embed instruction around friendship development into almost any part of the daily schedule as well as plan explicit time to teach friendships skills just as you would literacy, math or any other skill?
6. Do you comment positively and descriptively on children who are working together, helping each other or engaging in other friendship behaviors? ("I see that the two of you have started cleaning up the art area together. That's real cooperation.")
7. Do you explain the reasons behind rules and help children understand the effects of their behavior on others? This kind of inductive discipline seems to encourage children to be kind and helpful.
8. Do classroom rules include positive, prosocial expectations ("We treat our friends and classmates kindly").
9. Do you scaffold children's efforts to be helpful and kind by providing them with examples of things they might say, when they see they are struggling? "Instead of saying-give me that-you could try saying-when you are finished could I please have a turn."
10. Do you explicitly teach or prompt children how to **initiate and respond** to their peers?

The goal is to develop pro-social children. Regularly assess your children for these skills, and refine your classroom or individual curriculum and interactions to augment any needed areas.

- Children express positive feelings about themselves and confidence in what they can do.
- Children form relationships and interact positively with other children.

- Children demonstrate the social and behavioral skills needed to successfully participate in groups.
- Children recognize and respond to the needs and feelings of others.
- Children demonstrate the ability to think about their own thinking: reasoning, taking perspectives, and making decisions.