

FRIENDSHIP, CONFLICT & BUILDING RESILIENCE



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TONIGHT WE WILL EXPLORE:

CHILD DEVELOPMENT:

- What 'play' looks like for children - 6 Stages of Play
- The distinction between friendship, mean behaviour & bullying
- Special considerations: pandemic & new school building/outdoor space

PARENTING STRATEGIES & RESPONSES

- Yourself, first.
- Helping children understand their own feelings, increase their tolerance for discomfort, and build skills for navigating conflict with appropriate age-level skills
- How to effectively help your children deal with ongoing issues

YOUR QUESTIONS

My child comes home often at least once a week, telling me that he is being called names, getting pushed or hit, or being excluded from play by his peers. This has been happening since he started attending school.

- How do I teach him to deal with this conflict when it happens?
- How do I know what is normal age-appropriate playground behaviour and what isn't?
- What are the flags to look for that additional intervention/investigation is needed?
- How do I help my child learn that this is not acceptable behaviour and he shouldn't be doing it even if other people are doing it to him? Is he learning that this is normal playground behaviour if it's happening all the time?

If there is a repeated conflict with one other child, what is the best way to approach this with the other parent? Should you approach the other parent?

Some parents believe nothing that their children are telling them, others believe everything. Both aren't good - how can I figure out what to believe and what not?

My child has a close friend that they play with often... but they also want to play with other kids sometimes too. When this happens, the close friend complains that s/he is being excluded. What can my child do or say?

What do we need to understand about social skills during COVID?
What do we need to understand about the new school space (indoor and outdoor)?

How can I help a child that is being bullied?

How do you support a child who is having difficulty with interpersonal relationships with their peers? Where can you go for help?

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY FRIENDSHIP

- Shared interests/passions
- Boundaries established and honoured
- Trust
- Honesty
- Ability to compromise
- Good communication
- Emotional regulation
- Fighting fair and conflict resolution



Parten's Classic Study of Play

Unoccupied	Child not engaging in play as commonly understood; might stand in one spot
Solitary	Child plays alone, independently of others
Onlooker	Child watches other children play
Parallel	Child plays separately from others, but in manner that mimics their play
Associative	Play that involves social interaction with little or no organization
Cooperative	Play that involves social interaction in group with sense of organized activity

SKILLS REQUIRED FOR HEALTHY GROUP PLAY

Cooperative play involves children playing and working with others towards a **common** goal or purpose.

- Cooperation
- Communication
- Empathy
- Trust
- Conflict resolution

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pandemic Restrictions

- Extracurriculars & social events
- Unstructured play time
- Extra screen time

New School Building & Outdoor Space

- Added logistical stress for students and teachers
- Smaller spaces - growing kids

CONFLICT: A NECESSARY CONDITION OF CHILDHOOD

Conflict is defined as disagreement/disruption between two or more parties when ideas or needs/wants do not match.

It can be an uncomfortable process for young children, causing one, both, or all children involved to feel uneasy, sad, fearful, or a range of other strong emotions.



Conflict is a natural occurrence in families, classrooms, on the playground and in social situations and through conflict, children learn how to strengthen their own skills and self-awareness, and how to be in healthy relationships with each other.

UNHELPFUL STRATEGIES

For many years, social skills development has fallen massively short of actually providing kids with the tools they need to manage social interactions and conflict.

Examples:

- “Sharing is caring”
- Just be kind
- Walk away
- Ignore it
- “Is this a small problem or a big problem”
- Sort it out amongst yourselves
- “Oh, that’s just how _____ is, you just have to get used to it”
- “No one likes a tattle-tale”
- You always have to include everyone
- “Use your words”



"I'm *not* being a tattle-tale! —
I'm being a reliable source!"

ACCIDENTS & MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The majority of conflicts at school, whether on the playground or in the classroom, fall into this category.

As children are learning the skills required for cooperative play and building deeper relationships, they are also still learning how to:

- control their bodies
- regulate their physical speed and intensity
- process feelings of excitement and injustice
- Self-regulate their emotions and discern what is a current feeling and what is a 'leftover'
- Communicate with words effectively

and they are at varying levels of cognitive understanding of group rules.

Each child arrives at school with 'norms' that are modelled and taught at home.

"TYPICAL" EVENTS AT SCHOOL

- Games that involve running and 'tagging' or reaching an end point
 - Someone will tag more aggressively than others
 - Kids can run at different speeds and different sizes and are unaware of strength
 - Kids can think the wrong person is "it"
- Someone who is not particularly good at a game will try to disrupt it by ignoring rules
 - Usually the behaviour is because they are self-conscious and want the game to end (impulsive, not well-thought out)
- Some kids cannot deal with losing, or actually being 'tagged' or 'out'
 - Kids feel humiliated and ashamed and so they blame others, those others call 'cheat' and angry words (name-calling, accusations are exchanged)
- Lining up
 - Some want to be 'first', some want to stand with their friends, some don't like to be crowded, some can't manage to stand in a line yet. Someone budes in or accidentally steps on a toe or a taller kid elbows a shorter kid in the eye, which then causes eruption of frustration and anger, resulting in words or pushing
- The list is endless... and exhausting for parents, supervision aides, teachers...

MEAN BEHAVIOUR ...

- can be intended or accidental
- happens once or twice, is unplanned and spontaneous, usually resulting from some sort of disagreement or misunderstanding
- causes sadness, frustration or anger to the target
- is resolved quickly, ideally between those involved



The child who is using mean strategies, will likely feel badly about their behaviour and actions when the other child or an adult points it out, and is usually willing to make amends to repair the friendship.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

Relational aggression is referred to as emotional bullying and involves social manipulation such as:

- Excluding people from a group
- Spreading rumors
- Breaking confidences or sharing secrets
- Recruiting others to dislike a target

It is more typical to begin between grade 5 - 8, but this also happens between adults, colleagues, etc...

More often than not, **relational micro-aggressions start because there were already dynamics that existed that were not resolved.**

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR TYPICALLY INVOLVES...

- a power imbalance between children (ie. age, size, perceived social status, economic disparity)
- intention to cause harm or humiliation with the goal that the target feels “less than”
- repetition, and over time the behaviours often intensify as the bully enjoys the powerful feeling



DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS & CONFLICT

Additionally, while children may be the same age and/or in the same class, there are children who have developmental physical, cognitive, emotional and social delays for any number of reasons.

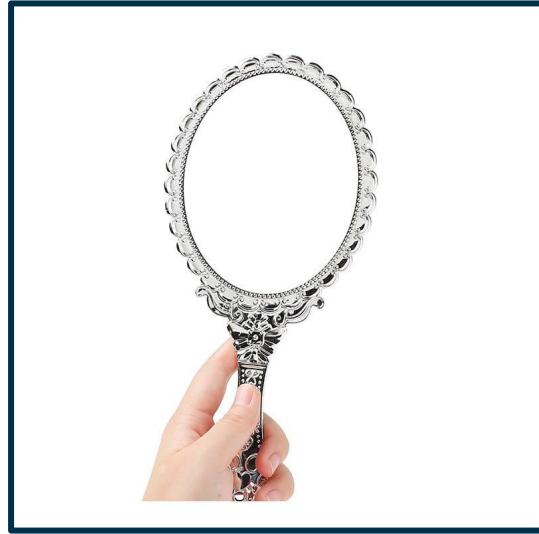
These situations require **supervision**, and those supervising **must** understand the limitations and extra support needed and tend to it with vigilance.

It is the **responsibility of the adults** to attend to this discrepancy in social skills, and ensure that all students receive what they need (physical and emotional safety).

Same-age/grade students who are delayed in skills need opportunities with others who are at their **ability** level so they can safely join games.

It is **not** the responsibility of the other children - they do not have the brain development or social skills to understand or adjust to others' special needs.

PAUSE... A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU!



WHAT DO WE (AS ADULTS) BRING TO THE TABLE?

- our own lens of experience
- our own fears and expectations
- distance from the lived experience of today
- memories and old feelings that have been constructed over time, and paired down or amped up, but in truth, partial and really, unrelated.

WHAT TRIGGERED ME

1. I felt excluded.
2. I felt powerless.
3. I felt unheard.
4. I felt scolded.
5. I felt judged.
6. I felt blamed.
7. I felt disrespected.
8. I felt a lack of affection.
9. I felt I couldn't speak up.
10. I felt lonely.
11. I felt ignored.
12. I felt I couldn't be honest.
13. I felt like the bad guy.
14. I felt forgotten.
15. I felt unsafe.
16. I felt unloved.
17. I felt like it was unfair.
18. I felt frustrated.
19. I felt disconnected.
20. I felt trapped.
21. I felt a lack of passion.
22. I felt uncared for.
23. I felt manipulated.
24. I felt controlled.

HELPING YOUR CHILD

1. What is happening for your child?
2. Check in with yourself
3. What can you do to help with the feeling?
4. Soothe the feeling, don't focus on fixing what you think is the 'issue'

Avoid...

1. Rushing to solve the problem
2. Creating a narrative that portrays others in a poor light
3. Hypervigilance
4. Being Inattentive

HELPFUL GUIDING QUESTIONS



1. Is my child sharing this information with me because they need to process their feelings and/or because they need help?
2. What am I feeling/thinking as I listen to my child and watch them deal with difficult feelings?
3. What kind of support does my child think they need?
4. What kind of support do I think they need?
5. Is the issue being talked about for the first time? Consistently over a short period of time? Cyclical? (ie. at the same time of year)
6. Who can I talk about this with that will help with the situation? Alternative perspectives.

When our kids are struggling or dealing with big feelings, it is natural to want to protect them and make things better. When we *pause* to reflect on what will actually make things better, we reduce the odds of over-reacting, making small things bigger, and creating stories about our own kids' strengths and others' weaknesses that are not accurate.

TALKING TO THE 'OTHER PARENT' ABOUT CONFLICT AT SCHOOL...

Don't do it. **Don't** do it. **Don't** do it.

Don't post on social media in order to gain support in school forums

This includes direct commentary and passive-aggressive news articles that support your view with the purpose of getting people “on side”

Don't talk about the 'other' parent or child to other parents at school

Resist 'demonizing' the other child(ren) or creating a narrative based on previous experience* or what you have heard from others.

**your previous experience is useful in creating a plan, but not in creating a negative story. These beliefs will make it harder to work on building relationships/skills, and resolving the conflict.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING AND CONFLICT RESOLVING STRATEGIES

Do communicate with your child's teacher about your concerns (sooner rather than later)

- Discuss situation - is more observation needed to understand the actual circumstances?
Do we understand what is actually happening and who is involved?
- Develop a plan of action to assist child(ren) involved in the situation
- Determine a way to measure success of the plan and a duration for implementation.
- Set a future meeting to review if plan is working
- If plan has not worked, develop new plan. You may need others involved.

Do seek support from your partner, or friends whose children do not attend the same school. Avoid those who become outraged or indignant - this does not help.

Do research, if necessary, to understand what your child's behaviour is communicating

Do reach out to a counsellor or child specialist for advice on how to assist

TEMPERAMENT

“the combination of mental, physical and emotional traits of a person, natural predisposition”

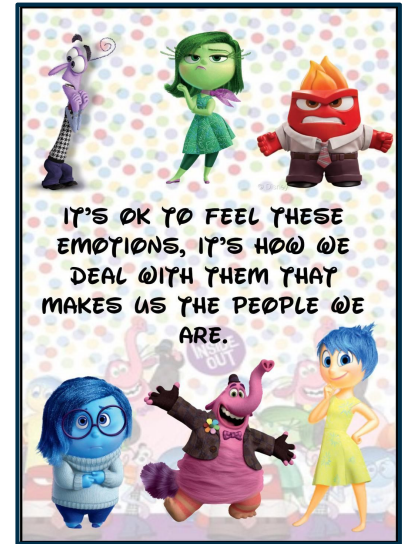
- Impacts the way we react and relate to others
- Observe your child - traits will emerge
- Become aware of your own temperament and share stories with your child(ren)
- Allow your child to develop the friendships that he or she needs, rather than who you would prefer



The more we understand what we do and why we do it, the more we can find ‘our place’, and where we want to belong.

DEVELOPING AND BUILDING CHILD RESILIENCE

- self-regulation and self-control
- empower child to find a suitable solution or offer various choices to choose from
- offer consistent and predictable practices to develop an understanding that actions produce consequences
- challenge negative thinking pattern with previous experience and evidence
- celebrate their successes



POSITIVE PLAY TIME

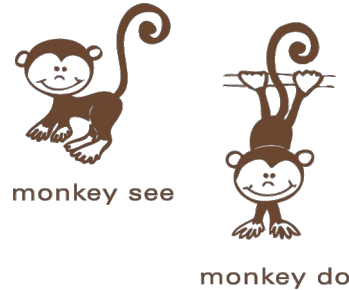
SOCIALIZING BEGINS AT HOME

- Individual readiness
- Child takes the lead (when and with whom)
- Invitations can be turned down
- Birthday parties
 - intentional activities building closeness
- Play dates
 - appropriate activities
 - appropriate supervision
 - connect with parents
- Sleepovers
 - age and activities - is there a purpose?
 - appropriate supervision
 - connect with parents



PARENTING SUPPORTS AND STRATEGIES

- Model ways of handling difficult situations
- Show empathy to your child's feelings
- Provide opportunities and experiences
- Front load information to your child
- Provide a secure bond with your child
- Share (age-appropriate) personal stories about times that social situations were tough



SHYNESS

- Avoid labeling your child
- Don't push them to be who they aren't
- Help your child build their confidence
- Talk with their teacher - what do they notice?
- Ask the teacher to give your child some responsibility in the classroom
- Celebrate them for who they are
- Don't interview your child for the negative (ie. did you sit alone at lunch again?)

Article: [Super Shy The Protective Power of Shyness](#) by Deborah MacNamara

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Different triggers including speaking in front of others, reading out loud, fear about being evaluated by others, fear of offending others, fear of embarrassment, and fear conversing with unfamiliar individuals.

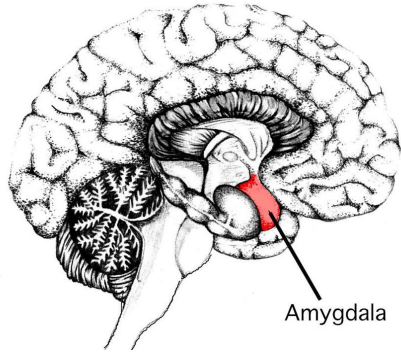
- Teach relaxation strategies
- Teach cognitive reframing (reframing thoughts)
- Teach problem-solving skills (practice, role-playing beforehand)
- Friendship Skills
 - Greetings
 - Sliding in and out of groups
 - Conversation starters
 - Listening and responding
 - Asking follow up questions/making follow up statements

AGGRESSION

Aggression is often a signal that your child's needs are not being met somewhere. This behaviour will impact social relationships. **It is very important to not ignore this.** It is unlikely “a phase” that they will grow out of.

- Conversational skills
- Empathy, perspective-taking, and empathic concern
- Emotional self-control
- A willingness to compromise and offer help
- A willingness to share, take turns, and follow rules

AVOID THE AMYGDALA HIJACK AND STAY PRESENT WITH YOUR CHILD



Survival Reactions

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze



Regulated Responses

- Logical and thoughtful
- Organized
- Informed

Reason:

- Avoid offering a solution
- Ask “what do YOU think might help this situation?”
- Ask “how can I best help you?”
- Explore many options
- Refrain from rushing into an action plan

Relate:

- Be together without distraction
- Listen with empathy
- Avoid too many questions, let the story unfold
- Validate emotions

Regulate:

- breathing
- safe space
- water, snack, rest
- hug



Questions

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