Supporting social development

Social development is about children and young people learning the values, knowledge and skills that enable them to relate to others.

How can educators support social development?

Some children and young people seem to get along with others easily – they bound in and out of groups effortlessly without a care in the world.

For some individuals, though, joining in or getting along with others doesn't seem to come so naturally. This may be because they've not yet learnt the social and emotional learning skills they need to get along with others.

Being sensitive to individual differences can help educators identify opportunities and skills appropriate to the social development of each child or young person, and put targeted support in place so they can enjoy the company of others.

Read more about what social development looks like in children and young people.

Set the tone for positive, supportive relationships

In order to encourage healthy social skills development, children and young people need to form social bonds with positive role models including family members and educators. For this reason, it's important that social relationships at home, at school and in the community reflect healthy values of respect and care. Educators can build a welcoming and warm learning community by demonstrating respect, listening skills and positive expectations about respectful and caring behaviour.

Use everyday interactions as learning opportunities

Social skills take many forms, including understanding and listening to others, respecting differences, communicating effectively and problem-solving. Educators can provide coaching and teaching to help children and young people to think about and solve day-to-day social difficulties they may encounter. Where possible, support problem-solving without taking over. Ask questions in a supportive way to help children and young people think through situations and encourage them to take others' feelings and perspectives into account.
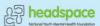
Promote deeper thinking

By discussing moral issues and listening to a range of views, children and young people can build awareness and understanding of diversity. Creating an environment where children and young people feel safe can assist them to state their opinions and reasons.

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Communicate effectively

Encourage children and young people to use effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills while interacting within the learning community. Demonstrate the use of appropriate body language and posture, eye contact and tone of voice. Provide children and young people with practice opportunities to try out these skills for themselves.

Appreciate social and cultural diversity

Education helps children and young people develop awareness of the diversity present in the world. Find out about the social and cultural backgrounds and values of children, young people and their families. Look for ways you may be able to accommodate their needs and perspectives. Be open to adjusting your style of teaching and communication, and ensure common classroom practices are clear and appropriate for everyone. Create opportunities to include different perspectives – encourage children and young people to explore and appreciate the differences.

Deal promptly with discrimination and harassment

Teach children and young people about stereotyping and discrimination. Make it clear that these are unacceptable behaviours. When discrimination, harassment or bullying occur, ensure you act based on your early learning service or school's policies.

Be You Professional Learning

Check out content on social and emotional learning (SEL) and teaching for resilience in the Learning Resilience domain.

References

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