

5-8 Peer relationships: developing positive interaction between children

Abilities to relate to other children do not develop unless they can learn to rely on others. In the kindergarten, children build a reliable relationship with friends by playing games and group play, by playing in the same sandbox, and by facing experiences in their play and in life in which they have to cooperate and discuss. Reliable relationships such as these will lead them to feel sympathy with friends and be considerate towards others, and thus to nurture abilities to relate to other children.

Games and group play

Games and group play are the activities through which children learn to relate to others and learn the rules to play. Experiences of playing with friends help children to understand the necessity of communication and the rules of play. According to what kind of play it is, the number of those playing might be from two to more than ten, but in order for children to play without teachers, members should not be too many. Play is sometimes guided by teachers and other adults, but often by other children of the same age or different ages. In some play children enjoy copying their partner's gestures, running away from their friends and chasing them, children learn how to relate to others through these physical experiences.

..... Educational goals

- **To find out that it is fun to mix with others, through sharing a place and rules with several children.**
- **To enjoy moving their bodies as hard as they can, for example by running away, chasing, changing their role, and competing with each other.**
- **To stimulate and develop their communication skills, through developing play with their peers.**
- **To learn to control their own feelings, by expressing their opinions and facing difficult or unexpected events.**
- **To feel satisfaction and fulfillment by doing their work together to create enjoyable play.**
- **To learn the meaning of words and how to use them while they exchanging necessary words for their play.**
- **To and deepen friendships and relationships, through personal interaction with teachers and others naturally through play.**
- **To understand that they cannot play the game unless they know and observe the rules.**

Games, Group Plays

"Janken play" is full of excitement and thrills. The choice of 'stone', 'scissors', or 'paper' decides who wins and who loses and you must know the rules. "Janken play" is appropriate for children aged four or more, because children of that age can understand the relationship between these three objects.

"Janken" can be played by two children, or by many.

(For the rules of "Janken", refer to p.185)

The "Donjan game" is a more complicate but exciting form of "Janken". First, two routes to a centre point are prepared, for example connected color hoops, or a spiral line on the ground. Two children start, one from the end of each route, at the same time. When they meet, they play "Janken". The child who wins goes forward, while the one who loses has to go back to the starting point and follows the route again. Children respond excitedly to a win or a loss at "Janken", and enjoy acting quickly.

They learn rules of "Janken" while they play it over and over.

Children enjoy a traditional type of play called "Hana ichi monme". The children are divided into two groups and they sing and choose one child from the other group. Two children picked from each group play Janken, and the one who loses is put into the other group, thus the group increases its members.

It is fun for children to join hands with others in the same group, and close-in on the other group or go backwards as they exchange rhythmic phrases in chorus.

It is thrill to be called on to play Janken, and winning or losing becomes an aspect of the play.

Singing "Kagome kagome....", children go around 'an ogre' joining hands with their friends. When they finish singing the last part of the song, "Who is behind you", they stop moving, and a child, who plays a part of ogre, guesses who it is. The child who guessed right becomes the ogre this time, and the game continues as before.

Children are playing, "London bridge is falling down" in the room on a rainy day.

Two children join their hands to make a 'bridge'. Other children go under the bridge, singing.

When they finish singing, the two make the bridge fall down, and catch some of the children under the bridge. The children caught by the bridge become another bridge, and so there are more and more bridges each time.

Keep in mind

- Take the children's age into consideration - it is better to let children start playing with simple rules. Games with lots of repeated songs and movements are best.
- It is better not to force children to follow the rules, but let them recognize the necessity of rules when they have a trouble with their games.
- It is important to make the rules more complicated little by little, and increase the members gradually to broaden the type of play.
- Have children experience through their relationships with their friends that their own selfishness or opinion is sometimes is not accepted.
- It is also important to offer a chance to children to decide the rules of a game. Play which is based on the children's own rules is attractive to children, and they are keen to enforce these rules.
- As for making the place for the group play, you should keep the surroundings in a good condition, so that it is not dangerous for children even when they are absorbed and excited.

Tips and suggestions

- When organizing play with a small or large number of children, the type of fun and the rules will change, even within the same play. So you should let children know this, and enjoy the play according to the circumstances.
- It is helpful to tell children that they can do things they have done before, even in different circumstances. .
- Children can change the existing game and make their own songs or a variation of a usual song.
- In group play and games, children can take risks and try out different decisions and strategies, so they can learn to make the best use of their opportunities in different circumstances.
- Teachers can check if children understand 'Jan-ken' by first playing 'Jan-ken' with each child, individually.

Play in the sandbox

Sand and soil are, for children, the natural things close to them. They can collect and use these resources as much as they like. And they can freely shape and reshape over and over again, if sand and soil are moist.

In the sand box, various scenes can be seen, such as one child with sand all over his body, one digs a tunnel in the mountain, another uses a piece of wood like a car and runs in the sand box, and another makes shiny mud dumplings while teaching his friend the knack of making them.

When they get to play with their peers in the sand box, they tell their ideas to each other to try to make a higher mountain or more attractive one. Sometimes they argue with each other, or someone's opinion is so strong that it causes dissatisfaction among their friends, and as a result, trouble starts. In such a case, the children sometimes try to adjust their opinions, with a teacher's help, but the main thing is to exchange their opinions with each other.

Also, through the experience of fun and a sense of achievement, they learn to play dynamically with their peers' cooperation.

..... Educational goals

- **Foster creativity through trial and error, by handling, sand and dirt which can be shaped freely, so children can easily create their images.**
- **Encourage scientific interest and questions from children, during their play in the sandbox through learning the nature of sand, dirt, and water.**
- **Develop ideas and concerns about quantity and quantity, through the number of their works and their shape.**
- **Experiencing a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, by making a mountain, a dam and mud dumplings enthusiastically and patiently.**
- **Share fun and pleasure with their friends, from the experience of deciding that each child has a role to dig a hole and make a mountain cooperatively.**
- **Develop cooperation and conflict resolution skills, through quarrels about a play spot or play tools, or about how to heap up sand, or how to irrigate the water.**
- **Develop mental stability, receptiveness and tolerance, through working silently, or move actively, according to the type of task.**

Play in the sandbox

When children put sand, dirt and water into a big container, playing with mud starts.

"Wow! It's so good!"

"It's like chocolate"

"I've got a good idea! I'm going to be a dumpling shop"

From a playing with mud to dumpling making, then running a shop, children develop their play.

Children collect sand and make a mountain. When they make a big mountain, they use a shovel to carry a lot of sand. Children must make their mountain hard, or when they dig a tunnel it will collapse.

After they make a mountain, they dig a tunnel.

In order for the mountain not to collapse, carefully they keep on digging with their bare hands.

When the tunnel is linked, they can shake hands in the mountain.

Children made a river with a shovel to make more water flow. Someone takes off his shoes and goes into the river, feeling the water flowing around his feet. Another one tries to stop the flowing water.

"First the mud mountain, then sprinkle dirt around it, and finally white sand"

Like this, children know which dirt or sand is food to make a dumpling.

A girl repeatedly sprinkles the dirt and makes it round patiently.

Some are making dumplings and show them to each other, while the other makes one silently by herself. Finally, hard and smooth mud dumplings are made. These are important treasures for them.

Children are constructing the sandbox with a shovel all together.

They dig a hole, collect the dug sand and make a mountain using their whole body.

"I am a shovel car!" says a boy, entering the sandbox with his tricycle to participate in the construction.

Children are playing with all their might, getting mud all over their bodies.

One boy put sand on his chest, and then his friends put more sand on his stomach.

One girl buries her foot in the sand along with her friend, and she is so excited, saying, "Oh my feet are gone!"

Once buried in the sand the feet can hardly move, nor can they be pulled out of the sand easily.

Keep in mind

- Dig the sand several times in advance so that children can use the sand easily. If the amount of the sand is not enough, add more.
- In preparation, check if there is anything dangerous, such as sharp pebbles, broken pieces of glass, or animal's excretion in the sandbox. While children are playing, it is necessary to keep paying attention to these hazards.
- Have children wear casual clothes which can become dirty, and have them turn up their sleeves and the bottom of their pants. Tell them to take off their shoes and become barefooted. In addition, it is better to prepare spare clothes just in case their clothes get very wet or become dirty.
- If children say that they do not like getting their hands and feet dirty, tell them that they do not have to worry because later they can wash the dirt away completely. Until they get used to the sand, do not force them to play with it. Tell them something which arouses their interest in sand play. Or to begin with, have them touch the sand with their hands, and work with them so that they can learn to enjoy the touch of the sand and mud.
- To keep a good sanitary condition in the sandbox, make sure that cats and dogs not to enter it, and cover the sandbox with a vinyl sheet or a net when it is not used.
- Set up a sandbox near the water supply. Topping up the water becomes easier, and it is convenient for the children to wash their hands and feet, body, and clothes after playing in the sandbox. Also, cut the children's nails neatly, before they play.
- Put play tools such as a scoop, a bucket, a cup and a sieve on the shelf near the sandbox, or put them on a movable basket. Choose the place to put them so that the children can use them easily.

Tips and suggestions

- In preparation, not only keep a normal flat sandbox, but sometimes make a high and big mountain in the sandbox bigger than the children could make alone. Then children's activities can be different from before.
- By using a piece of pipe or a tube, play such as making a mountain or a dam, or a waterway can develop dynamically. Furthermore, a piece of wood, a brick and a pebble can be used creatively as an imaginary car or a table, or for the partition of a dam and reinforcement.
- Flowers and leaves of plants, nuts and twigs can be used as a decoration for a sand cake or a pizza, and a plate. So it is advisable to collect those not only from the nursery garden, but also from outside.
- Any empty containers can be used in the sandbox. So make use of things near yourself.
- A piece of bamboo can be used as a shovel, a plate or a cup, if it is cut suitably. But take care that the children do not get injured by the cut surface.

Cooperate and discuss while playing

In children's group life, there are many cases when they cooperate together and lead their play. In such a case, children discuss many things. When they decide to play a playing house, for example, they discuss who plays the part of 'a mother', and 'a baby'. Or when they decide to make a building, they discuss where they are going to make an entrance and windows. In the process of their talking, children recognize that there are a lot of different opinions from theirs.

Also when they find different opinions, they need to adjust their opinions in order to continue their play. Sometimes it is difficult to reconcile their difference of opinions, and they end up quarreling. Other times, they ask their teacher for help. The teacher's help provides a model for the children to work and play together better.

By talking with their friends and cooperating together to continue playing, more dynamic and exciting play will be developed. From their experience of having enjoyed playing, children will learn that expressing their opinion, and listening to others' opinions, is very important in order to play together. The result of such activities will increase children's ability to get involved with others.

Educational goals

- **For children to recognize the difference between their friends' opinions and their own, through the process of expressing their opinions clearly, so that they can keep playing.**
- **Cultivating the children's communicative ability, through the process of thinking how they can get their friends to understand what they want to do and what they think.**
- **Raising the children's ability to change their way of thinking and to accept other's opinions, through the process of overcoming their troubles and conflicts with others.**
- **Learning that they can play more dynamically and have more fun, if they cooperate to play together.**
- **Getting deeply involved with their friends and creating a sense of camaraderie, through the process of developing their play by discussing and cooperating with their friends.**

Cooperating and discussing during play

Since it was a beautiful day, a boy thought of spreading a mat in the playground.

He asked his friends to help him borrow many mats from their teacher. The teacher supported them by asking, "What's going on?" and "It's going to be fun, isn't it?" She supports the children's play.

A boy tries to spread a mat with his friends, but it is too big for them to do by themselves. With a teacher's help, they could make it, finally.

However, it seems that the place where they spread the mat was a little different from their original idea. So the boy explains this to his friends and teachers, and he asks them to move the mat to a different place, and decides where to move it with his friends.

Many other children get together and start playing happily.

Children gather around blocks, and start asking one another, "What kind of house are we going to build?"

One of the children, who was running up and down the mountain while playing tag, crossed the bridge and ran away. Since running on the bridge is dangerous, by the bridge, they started talking about what they should do to avoid a danger. This picture shows the children who try to solve their problems by themselves, through talking and discussing.

After eating lunch, the children decided to play altogether.

They decided what kind of play tools they needed, and went to their teacher to get them.

As they all talked at the same time, the teacher could not understand what they needed.

The teacher advised them that when they have decided what they want, it is better to choose one person to ask the teacher.

Keep in mind

- When many children play together, special considerations about safety are needed. When they might run into each other vigorously, check if something dangerous is around them, or see if something might fall on their heads. If they play in a very small place, a teacher should suggest how to make a bigger space.
- Some children are not good at expressing what they think. When trying to cooperate and discuss, such children's opinions tend to be neglected, so teachers should pay special attention to them.
- Cooperation and discussion are introduced within early childhood care and education, gradually according to the children's development. Start with discussion and cooperation among two or three children, and add more children little by little.
- Even though it might seem that all children are discussing something, one influential child's opinion sometimes leads the discussion. So check exactly what is happening with cooperation and discussion.
- When starting an activity with discussion and cooperation, in a group or in pairs, take children's character into consideration when you create the groups.

Tips and suggestions

- Giving children opportunities to listen to others and express their opinions during their early childhood care and education helps children to cooperate and discuss with each other.
- When children succeed in cooperating to do an activity, teachers should explain to the other children how they succeeded in their activity. Other children can then apply this method next time.
- By spreading the children's cooperative activities throughout the classroom or the kindergarten, whole class activities, such as athletic festivals and children's concerts, can be developed appropriately and effectively. Thus, events have continuity with daily children's play, and children are not forced to, but are willingly and spontaneously involved in the events.