

Teacher Time
Episode 4: Can We Be Friends? Peer Interactions and Your Curriculum

Emily Adams: Hi Everyone. I'm Emily Adams

Carol Bellamy: And I'm Carol Bellamy.

Emily: And we want to welcome you to another edition of Teacher Time for Infant and Toddler Teachers. Today we are going to be talking about one of my favorite topics: the relationships between children. But first, we have just a little business. First of all, we want to remind you that this is one of eight episodes this season. Each episode will have a follow-up Coffee Break where we answer the questions you send in during today's show. We'll remind you throughout the show to send in questions, but you can send them in at any time.

Carol: That's right. And remember, when we use the term teacher, we're really referring to everyone who works with infants, toddlers, and their families in an educational environment. So, we are including family child care providers, people who provide child care in centers who may not see themselves as Teachers, but you are.

Emily: And for everyone watching, we invite you to join us on MyPeers where we are creating a community for Teachers to talk to each other and share their stories, successes, and questions. Make sure you check it out. So Carol, for the last three episodes we've talked about responsive curriculum, responsive environments and the critical importance of responsive interactions. But if you work with very young children, you probably already know that they begin to develop relationships with each other that are very important as well. Today we get to talk about the early relationships that children form with each other and how important they can be. Let's take a minute to hear from our listeners. You should have a poll on your screen right now. Can you tell us what is the earliest you have seen infant/toddler friendships?

Carol: Absolutely, Emily. We'll give you a few minutes to answer that. And to kick us off this afternoon, we have a really sweet video that will make you smile. The little boy is just over two and the little girl is a bit older. They share a wonderful friendship. Let's take a look.

Teacher: What do you want to do? Hmm?

Student:Danna.

Teacher: Danna. Yes, that's your friend. Danna. Oh, I like the way Axel gave Danna a gentle touch. Nice friends. Oh, that is awesome. Okay.

Emily: I love those two. They're just so sweet to each other, aren't they?

Carol: That was adorable. Yes.

Emily: I love them. We'll come back to these friends.

Carol: Yes. I really can't help but to smile looking at that video.

Emily: I know. They're so sweet. And they're hugging each other gently, and they're sharing an activity. They're really having a friendship.

Carol: A wonderful friendship.

Emily: Yeah.

Carol: Yes.

Emily: So, our poll results. Okay. So, about 30 percent of people thought zero to six months. Another 30 percent thought relationships start around six to twelve months. And then another 20 percent twelve to eighteen. And then the rest after eighteen months. So, that's really a spread all the way across the board. So, we're going to find out more about when early peer relationships begin in a little bit. But first, I had a chance to visit Carrie Germeroth in Denver last week, and together we talked about using books to promote friendships in early learning environments. Let's watch.

Emily: We're here again with Carrie Germeroth in her Denver office. Thanks for having me here to talk with you. And today we're really focusing on language and literacy and how we can use that as a way to support peer relationships with very young children- with infants and toddlers. So, Carrie, I know we've talked a lot before about using books with young children, but this is really a place where we can use books with infants and toddlers to talk a lot about friendship.

Carrie Germeroth: Yes. So, books provide great opportunities to build children's vocabularies and introduce them to new concepts and build their background knowledge. So, friendship is another good example of that. I have brought along a few books. There's a lot of them that are great for this topic, but we couldn't bring them all. So, Sharing Time is great for toddlers and lets you introduce some nice strategies and language that children can use when they're having some hard times sharing, which toddlers do.

Emily: That's not easy.

Carrie: No. It is not. So, it's a nice opportunity for you to talk about that with children. How Dinosaurs play with Their Friends. So, big dinosaurs have to figure out how does he play with his friends and share those toys, and how does he not take over the playground and give his friends turns on the tricycle or on the bike. So, it's another fun story.

Emily: I love that one, because it really does talk about taking turns, which can be a very successful strategy for toddlers more than sort of trying to make them share. They can take turns, and that goes pretty well usually.

Carrie: Yes. Gossie and Gertie are best friends, and they go everywhere together most of the time. Gossie tries to get Gertie to follow on a few of their adventures, but Gertie wants to do her own thing. And so Gossie at first is a little upset about this but it's a nice opportunity to talk about how best friends don't have to do everything together. And you can have different likes and dislikes, and that's okay. We can still be friends and not like all the same things and want to do everything together. And then Bear's New Friend is about Bear and his forest friends. There is a whole series of these books. They have lots of adventures. There are some times where Bear has a cold and his friends have to help him. It's very cute. And in this book, though, Bear is trying to figure out this noise he keeps hearing. He thinks it's a new friend. He can't figure it out, and so he enlists all of his other forest friends to help him. And so when reading this perhaps to an infant, and this is great for all ages really- there's lots of good friendship topics to explore in here, but you might just point out, as new characters get introduced, Bear, and then he's got a friend Mouse, and then eventually we are introduced to Bear's friend Hare. And so you might say, "Bear and Hare are friends. So, that means they like to play together and they enjoy doing things together and spending time together just like friends in our classroom like to do. So, Aaron and Elise, they're friends. They like to play together and they have fun together." You might also talk about how friends help each other out. So, Mouse is little, and his friend Bear is big. And Mouse needs help a lot to see things, right? So, he needs to see up into the trees investigating to see if the friend is up there- this noise that they're hearing. And so Bear lifts him up to help him see, or he catches a ride on Bear as they move through the forest trying to figure out what's making this noise. So, commercial books are great, but you can certainly make like a class book that would have pictures of every child in the classroom, and maybe ask families to contribute a family picture. And families can write down what the child's favorite color is or their favorite thing to play or favorite thing to eat. And then you can create your class book and send it home weekly with a different child and let them learn about their friends and talk about the friends that they have in their classroom with their parents. Often a child comes home and you ask who their friends are who they're playing with, and they don't remember. So, the class book becomes a great tool for having those home conversations as well around friendship.

Emily: That's so wonderful. I think those books tend to be really popular among the children in the classroom, because they can see themselves and they see their friends. They love it. Well, we want to know from you what's your favorite book to read with infants and toddlers about friends. And we will read your answer, so go ahead and fill them out in the Chat box, and we'll read them after this segment. So, now we have a video to watch of a teacher who is actually reading a book about friendship with young children. So, let's go ahead and watch that.

Teacher: Who is a friend and tries always to be kind. We think a better friend than that would be very hard to find.

Carrie: That teacher was talking about a friend who was a little bit scared to try something, and he was trying to ride a bike. And so his other friend was showing kindness. And so it was a great opportunity to talk about what it means to be kind and that friends are kind to one another. And then have a conversation with children about a time when they were scared to do something, and how someone, whether it was a friend or an adult, made them feel comfortable and showed them kindness when they were scared. And similarly in *Bear's New Friend*, they have a similar experience where we can talk about characteristics of friends. Remember, they're looking for a new friend, and they're trying to figure out who is making this noise. They identify that it's something in this hole here. And so Bear has eventually gathered all of his forest friends. He says, "I'm Bear. Howdy-ho. That's Mouse and that's Hare. And Gopher and Mole are standing right here. Next to those bushes sit Raven and Wren. Come swimming with us in a pool by the glen. Please do not hide. Come on outside. And then an owl says, "Who, who, who," and he pops out and he says, "Hello. I'm Owl, and I'm sorry I hid. I'm just a bit bashful, and that's why I did." And Bear says, "Hello, Friend." "Come on," cries Mole. And they all scamper off to the old watering hole. So, another opportunity to talk about what does it mean to be shy and bashful, and that sometimes when we meet new people that we hope to be our friend, we're just shy and we have a hard time talking to them. And posing the question to children about how did Bear and the friends make Owl feel more comfortable. And they may or may not come up with an answer, but, if they don't, you can always provide some clues or talk about, "Bear introduced himself and he introduced all of his friends as well. So, then Owl knew everyone's name, and then Owl was invited to come play with them. And Bear called Owl his friend. So, those are all things that we can do as friends as well in the classroom. When somebody new comes in, we can introduce ourselves. We can invite them to play and make them feel more comfortable and safe."

Emily: I love that book so much. I think asking these questions maybe the first couple of times you read the book, children won't have the answers, but probably by the tenth time you're reading the book together, because we know kids want to hear the same book lots of times, that the kids are going to be able to come up with their answers about how the group was really welcoming and made Owl feel comfortable. What a great book, especially when you have a new child coming into your group. So, we've talked a lot about books. And before we also talked about music and using music with really young children. Is that something that can also support young peer relationships?

Carrie: Yes. Music is a team activity. Whether it's toddlers who are able to hold an instrument or older infants who can each contribute to the music or the song, or whether it's their voice, their individual voices, contributing. They don't have to share these things. It's a nice cooperative activity that everyone can participate in. So, yes. Music is a great activity. It really provides some of those initial first opportunities for those kinds of foundational friendships that toddlers have at very young ages. We have another video of a teacher using music to support friendship, in particular singing songs that have children's names in them so that other children can learn the names of their friends and feel included and create a culture of friendship in the classroom. So, let's watch this video.

Teacher: Jaydian! Teachers: Jaydian came to school today. Doo-dah! Doo-dah! Jaydian came to school today. Doo-dah! Doo-dah! Day!

Teacher: You want us to stop Jorell? How about Jorell? Teachers: Jorell came to school today. Doo-dah! Doo-dah Jorell came to school today. Doo-dah! Doo-dah! Day!

Emily: That is such a sweet video. The kids are so engaged, and the Teachers are really energetic and excited. I like that they're really using the children's names, which is helpful to include all the children. And even the kids who are kind of not in the group, but walking around also can participate. Because I think it's really a lot to ask for toddlers to all sit still in a circle for a song for any amount of time. We know they may not all want to do the same thing at the same time. Wonderful. We've talked about books and we've talked about music. Can you share with us maybe just a few more strategies for supporting friendships with infants and toddlers?

Carrie: Yeah. So, naturally play is another great strategy, and one where language is certainly used.

So, creating spaces where children can play together, even if they're playing separately, but they're playing near each other parallel or alone. Those are still great spaces to support at least practicing these foundational friendship skills. Within those spaces, having cooperative play materials, like balls. It's much more fun to play with a ball if you have someone to play with, so to roll it back and forth. It's much more fun to pretend to call somebody if you have two phones and you can call your friend on the other line. Or children love to just pull wagons with babies or dolls around in the classroom together, so having two of something- two wagons. We don't have to share, but we can both participate and play together. And then of course the language that we use and we model in the classroom as well is really important. So, whether that's acknowledging prosocial behavior when a child has done a great job of sharing or taking turns, or comforting a friend who may be sad or missing a parent, or helping resolve conflicts and trying to support that autonomous problem solving and conflict resolution by maybe first modeling how to do that and what those strategies are to help children eventually be able to resolve those differences when they arise within their friendships. So, those are also really great strategies to use.

Emily: Thank you so much. Those are really wonderful strategies. And, Carrie, thank you so much for having me here, again. I really appreciate it. And we'll read those chat answers back in D.C. Thank you.

Emily: Wow. That was such a great opportunity to speak with Carrie. I really loved thinking about ways we can use books to support young children's friendships.

Carol: Absolutely. And while we were watching it, it looks like many of you have submitted answers to the chat. So, let's take a look. Somebody said that their favorite book about friendships and relationships is Pout Pout Fish. Another person said they like the book Little Blue Truck.

Emily: I love Little Blue Truck too. Oh, and then Pat-A-Cake. Yeah. That's good, because it takes two to pat a cake. Margaret and Margarita and The Best Friends Book. Those were all great responses. Thank you to everyone who participated. And remember, if you'd like to continue the conversation, we'll be on MyPeers to talk more about this in the coming weeks. Now I'd like to welcome Donna Wittmer, author and expert in peer relationships. Welcome, Donna.

Donna Wittmer: Oh, thank you.

Emily: So, tell me when do we know that peer relationships really start with young children?

Donna: They start very, very early. I think Teachers see it all the time in their rooms of course. It's not your imagination when you see babies really staring at each other. They really have an interest. They like to be near other babies often. Six-month-olds will look at pictures of six-month-olds more than other ages. Nine-month-olds will look at pictures of nine-month-olds more than other ages. It's as if they're really tuned in to each other- have a great interest in each other. So, it happens early.

Emily: It sure does I guess. Yeah and then older infants- a little bit older?

Donna: Oh, they all look concerned, and they'll sometimes try to comfort another child that's distressed. You often see them pat a back like someone's patted their back. So, they try to comfort other children.

Emily: So, then as they get a little older, what happens?

Donna: By the end of the first year and into the second year, peer relations really blossom. I know many of you have seen that. Someone told me a story about two children- an eight-month-old and an eleven-month-old- who were making faces at each other and just had belly laughs because they were just having so much fun with each other, and that's at the end of the first year.

Emily: That's beautiful.

Donna: And friendships, we know, develop early. I'm interested that some of you have seen it even by six months, but definitely by one year we begin to see friendships. Children will want to be near another child. They'll greet the other child when the child comes in. They'll grieve if that child is missing. They'd like to play with that other child. And their play is more complex. It's as if they're in tune with each other. They take turns more easily and just really enjoy being with each other.

Emily: That's so interesting this idea that play with a friend is more complex than play with another child, and really speaks to the importance of keeping peer groups together. Right?

Donna: Yes.

Emily: Because we know that the more complex play is, the more learning is happening. So, that seems like really important.

Donna: Right. We want a group of children to move to another room; not just one child at a time.

Emily: Yeah. That makes so much sense.

Donna: Yes. And if that happens, friendships are more likely to develop.

Emily: And more complex play.

Donna: Exactly.

Emily: Wonderful.

Donna: Yes.

Emily: So, tell me about toddlers and their friends.

Donna: Well, during the 12 to 24-month period you'll see so much. It's becoming more interesting and more complex, I guess is what you would say. It's so much more than parallel play. Mildred Parten in the '30s talked about parallel play, and we do see that where children will play by each other and not even seem to be aware of the other child. In fact, they might even crawl over a child as if that child's not even there. But if we really look closely, we'll see such intricacy in their play. They imitate each other. And imitation is a form of communication with each other. If they want to learn a new skill, they'll imitate a more skilled peer or an adult. But if they want to relate, connect really emotionally interact with another child, they'll imitate that child. It's a way of forming a relationship. It's really a way of relating to other children.

Emily: That's amazing.

Donna: So, imitation- even when you see one child banging a spoon, then everybody else starts banging their spoons. You're like, "Oh, no." But you can think about it as they're all communicating with each other and learning how to relate to each other.

Emily: Wonderful.

Donna: And then there is the idea of the kinesthetic conversation. Kinesthetic means you move your body. And so much of their interactions as toddlers are with movement. Silence, movement, following each other, run and chase, taking turns. "Oh, I'm the leader now. You're the follower." It's just back and forth. And they're learning so much in those kinesthetic conversations. It's almost as if they're learning how to take turns. "Okay. It's your turn to now run, my turn." They're learning valuable skills for when they have verbal conversations actually.

Emily: That's amazing.

Donna: Yes. So that's really a fun thing to look for with young children. And then shared meaning is another piece of what happens in those years in toddler and with two-year-olds. They share a meaning that we may not begin to understand at first, unless we look really closely. Hitting is an example. If a child goes like this and hits, then that may mean, "I don't want to play with you right now. Please go away." If they hit with a toy, that means, "Will you play with me?" And of course a fist, children respond to that just like we do. It's definitely a threat to them. So, they know what those mean. We think hitting is hitting, and we can't allow hitting. If we need to look at see what's the response of the other child. How are they understanding that communication?

Emily: Wow. So, it sounds like they're really connecting before they have the language that we use.

Donna: Exactly.

Emily: Interesting.

Donna: So, they really do have lots of different ways that they interact in those years.

Emily: Yeah. And so as they get a little bit older, around 30 months or so, I know they're more and more social. We actually have a really lovely video of these two children who are good friends. We saw them earlier giving each other a hug, and we'll see them again. So, let's go ahead and watch this video. [Student talks excitedly to teacher]

Teacher: Axel did it? What did he do?

Student: Let me... Let me.. Play with me!

Teacher: Axel played with you? You're excited. Danna's excited. She's happy. Axel, Danna's happy that you were playing with her.

Emily: I just love watching that video. I could watch it over and over. But I think my favorite part is the way that the teacher really was able to step in and support that relationship in such a positive way and say, "Did you see how happy it made her when she wanted to play with you?" She really pointed out that prosocial behavior.

Donna: She celebrated it as well as the children celebrating it with each other.

Emily: She did. Yeah, so I love that video. So, tell me, as we switch gears a little bit, about empathy and how that develops in the early years.

Donna: Okay. empathy requires that a child really be able to take the perspective of another child and kind of feel how that other child feels. And that takes a while to develop.

Emily: That's hard.

Donna: Some of us as adults have a hard time with it. They're developing it during those first few years. Some people call it baby empathy, because we really do see that kind of prosocial behavior with young children, the kind, caring, loving, affectionate kind of behavior with each other. They help each other. They might even defend another child, or they'll go get a teacher to help if a child is distressed. I have a wonderful example that one of my students told me about toddlers in a play group. One child got her finger kinda stuck in a drawer. I'm not sure how that happened, but it was stuck. And another child came along. And rather than pulling the drawer open, stuck his thumb in her mouth to comfort her. I often say, "We would not do that." Right?

Emily: No.

[Laughter]

Donna: The toddler was really trying to find a way to help the other child.

Emily: Yeah. And I know we see a lot of times with very young infants, they may offer their pacifier to another baby in that way but then when they get older, like around 18 months we see they're really able to take that perspective of the other child and will instead bring them their special blanky.

Donna: And we can really be excited about that when that happens.

Emily: It's a huge step, isn't it?

Donna: It is. It really is.

Emily: It's wonderful. So, aside from our excitement, what else can Teachers and other adults do to support these early relationships?

Donna: I think the first thing is to know each child very well, to understand their temperament, what they can tolerate with other peers. Maybe they don't like to be crowded or have other kids touch them too much. Some children are exuberant. They just love to be with the other children, and they'll hug them and grab them. So, once we know the temperament and we know sort of what some of the family wants for their children, we can tune into that and help them with their peer relations. The second thing that's so important is to look at the adult child relationship. We want to look at peers, but first we need to look at ourselves and what's happening with children. What are they learning about relationships? Are they learning that they're kind, loving, caring? Do they learn kind of the give

and take in conversation- kind of reciprocal interactions? All of these carry over to peer interactions. The other really important piece is that children need to feel safe- very safe and very secure before they'll move out with peers. They need to feel like they can come running back. They often come scampering back to the teacher just to touch base and have what's called emotional refueling. That's a Margaret Mahler term where, "I need some fuel from you to help give me energy so I can go back and venture out into the world one more time." So, thinking about that adult-child relationship, what are those like for children? That's really the foundation- the basis for peer interactions. And then modeling for children. I think we talked about that a little bit. Just being kind. Sharing. Being gentle with children. I often say take your own temperature, as a teacher. Are you warm with young children? Children can sense that warmth and feel safe and secure with Teachers.

Emily: That's so important.

Donna: That's right. And then adults can teach. They teach all the time. "Like Rahkia, look, Howard has a runny nose. Can you help get a tissue for him?" You're helping teach them how to help another child.

Emily: I have a friend who says babies are always learning, so every environment is a learning environment.

Donna: Exactly.

Emily: So, everything you're doing really is teaching. So, you have to be really mindful of that. It's so important.

Donna: And looking for those opportunities. "Letty looks so sad." It's important that you go to help, but also maybe taking a peer with you and saying, "She looks so sad. What can we do to help her?" and see what ideas that child has. That's helping the child learn how to comfort another child.

Emily: Yeah. with you and saying, It is really good to think about teaching that. We know that infants and toddlers are still learning how to be in relationships What can we do when they have challenging moments? And I'll tell you, you won't be surprised. Our most common question is what can we do when children use their teeth to communicate.

Donna: Sure. Absolutely. It's very important to remember their teeth are new to them, and they need to try to use them in different ways.

Emily: True.

[Laughter]

Donna: However, we need to think about what we can do in a teaching setting to help young children learn other ways rather than biting and hurting another child. We know they're just learning language. They're just learning how to show affection. They feel stress that they often don't know how to handle it. They're just learning about ownership and possession and sharing and giving, and what's the difference in those words. So, obviously you will have conflicts. You will have biting as the children are learning the new behaviors. They will say, "Mine." When they say, "Mine," they also say, "Yours."

Emily: That is so true. And I just want to point out, we have a resource mentioned on the Viewer's Guide of some online lessons that can really help you think through behavior, particularly around biting. But I just want to point out that sometimes things that feel difficult to adults are actually developmental milestones. So, we may not love that they're saying, "Mine," but we need to recognize that they are showing a sense of something can be mine or yours. We can have things. Can we talk a little more specifically about biting, because I know that's a big one.

Donna: Right. It definitely is a big one.

Emily: It's hard.

Donna: In one conference I asked the Teachers how many had been bitten. Almost all of them had been bitten by a child at one point. So, they're learning about the difference between self and others. You need to think about the reasons why children might bite. And then we're on our way to thinking about solutions for that child. If we observe and the child always bites before lunch, we can begin to

understand that that child might be tired, they might be hungry, they're not sure how to handle the tiredness and the stress.

Emily: I'm also crabby when I'm tired and hungry, so I understand.

Donna: You don't bit, though, right?

Emily: I don't bite, though. No.

[Laughter]

Donna: It's because they don't have the language. Then we can help them learn the language. Some children, as I said before, are so exuberant. They just will start hugging, and then they just end up biting.

Emily: I have met happy biters.

Donna: Yes. Happy biters. Affectionate biters.

Emily: Yes.

Donna: Exactly. Frustration- "I want it now" -and just learning how to regulate their behavior and control it. And then stress. We need to really look at how stressed a child might be in their environment at home and in the program. And, again, that goes back to temperament sometimes. Sometimes some children can tolerate more noise than others. And so once we think about that reason, we can begin to think about some solutions for that child. If it's language, again, you start to help the child learn new words. If it's stress, we just have to really work on the whole environment and calmness and helping the child know how to handle that stress.

Emily: I have to say this brings us to a theme that we've really had throughout all of these episodes, which is the critical importance of really observing young children and sort of stepping back and thinking what's going on for them, and what can I do as the adult that's going to be the most helpful learning experience for them. It sounds like biting is similar to all of the other ways that we look at things. It's really about figuring out what's going on right now for this child, and what makes sense.

Donna: And thinking about it as communicating. What is the child communicating when they do that? are they communicating their frustration? Are they communicating anger? Are they just trying to communicate and really don't know how?

Emily: Exactly. Well, thank you so much for spending some time on that. I think that was probably really helpful for people. And now I have a fun question for you. Tell me a little bit about your favorite aspect of very young children's friendships.

Donna: Well, as you might guess, there are several. I could probably talk about it all day. I think the concept of seeing with new eyes. I think Dr. Alice Honig talks about that. It's like, "Wow, we're changing our viewpoint." Once we begin to see some prosocial behaviors, we begin to really notice them and comment on them, take pictures of them, document it, show parents. Really emphasize it in the room. You will always have conflicts. If we can see the other part with new eyes, it helps change our feelings about young children and we can make it happen with the environment and with our interactions. And then that whole idea of shared meaning, that they might have some meanings between them that we can begin to understand by observing. So, often even with conflicts, sitting back. What does it mean to each other? How are they handling it? Then the whole idea of kinesthetic conversations.

Emily: I love that.

Donna: And how important that is for toddlers and two-year-olds. So much of their interaction and relating to each other is about imitating and moving around in different ways. So, that's very important. And then I love the concept of toddler glee.

Emily: Me too.

[Laughter]

Donna: A researcher writes about toddler glee, and it's a time when children are just enjoying each other so much that they're laughing, they're having fun with each other. There is the example of two little girls twirling around a pole and just twirling so fast and just laughing and enjoying each other. And the teacher later found out they were spitting on each other, and that's what was making them laugh. But there was definitely a toddler glee there, and we really want to support that with young children.

Emily: That's a great story. Thank you so much, Donna. I really appreciate your coming out here and sharing some of your expertise with us about this topic. I love it.

Donna: It's been fun.

Emily: Thank you so much. And remember, if you have any questions for Donna, you can submit those at any time during the show and we'll answer them in our upcoming Coffee Break. Next, we'll hear from an infant toddler teacher about how she encourages friendships between young children in her classroom.

Teacher: Encouraging them to like greet their friends every day- you know, I always encourage them to say, "Good morning," when their friends are coming in. Say, "Hello." We encourage them to give hugs a lot when they're leaving at the end of the day. And we encourage them to play together. Sometimes my kids will come and want to throw the ball back and forth with me, but I'll throw it back and forth a few times, and then I'll say, "Why don't you go play with Yahya," or, "Why don't you play with Maather," to encourage them two to interact with each other. So, I encourage it that way, and I also do a lot of small group play where I kind of encourage them to just interact with each other and also myself to get them kind of playing in a smaller group versus a larger group to kind of build those relationships and interactions.

Emily: I love this teacher. She's really able to talk about some of the ways that she's supporting friendships between children.

Carol: Exactly.

Emily: One thing she says is she greets the childreyn when they come to school. She says their names. And that's helpful for children to remember, like, "Oh, that's Joey." And then she talks about sometimes starting play with children, and then kind of inviting in a peer, and then stepping out, which really helps set up a lovely situation where children can play together without having to initiate it, which sometimes can be really hard for young children.

Carol: Very. Yes. She did a great job.

Emily: She really did.

Carol: She does. In other videos we've seen of this teacher today, we notice that she also values children's friendships.

Emily: She does.

Carol: She comments on them and appreciates Danna's excitement over Axel playing with her. Really great. Really great. So, now we're going to challenge you to try it out. Watch for important friendships between the children in your classroom. When you see children playing together or even struggling a little bit, try stepping back and observing before you help them. Wait and watch. You might be surprised at how well they handle it.

Emily: And don't forget, we'd love to hear from you about how that's working. Make sure you log on to MyPeers to share your experiences with this Try It Out. Okay. So, next, we're going to hear from our friend Peter about how the ELOF can support your work in helping children form these essential relationships.

Peter Pizzolongo: I'm Peter Pizzolongo, Director of Training & Technical Assistance Services at the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. This portion of Teacher Time we'll focus on ELOF: The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. ELOF is a framework that represents the continuum of learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

what children should know and be able to do during their formative years from birth through age five. ELOF outlines and describes the skills, behaviors, and concepts that Early Head Start and Head Start programs must foster in all children, including children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities. ELOF is organized in a way that can help education staff and families understand child development and guide the ways in which we help children learn. You can learn more about ELOF by going to the ELOF pages on the ECLKC Website, the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. For today's topic, Can We Be Friends? Supporting Early Peer Relationships, our ELOF segment focus is on the domain Social and Emotional Development. This domain includes goals for relationships with adults, relationships with other children, emotional functioning and infants and toddlers having a sense of identity and belonging. I'm going to focus on the subdomain relationships with other children. This subdomain has two goals. The first goal is, "Child shows interest in, interacts with, and develops personal relationships with other children." The developmental progression leading toward this goal begins with young infants looking attentively at other children, touching their faces; recognizing other familiar children and smiling at them and making sounds directed to them. Before most children are 18 months old, they are participating in simple back-and-forth interactions with other children knowing some of their new friends' names. As toddlers, children typically seek out other children for social interaction, develop friendships, and engage in more elaborate play with friends. By the time children are 3 years old, they are greeting their friends by name and showing preferences for playing with some children more than with others. The second goal is, "Child imitates and engages in play with other children." We typically see many instances of this in Head Start and childcare centers and family childcare homes. The developmental progression begins with young infants watching attentively what another baby is doing. This progresses to infants making similar sounds as another infant and playing next to other children with similar toys, what we know as parallel play. Most toddlers can join in playing with other children, sometimes even taking turns or doing joint activities with a common goal, such as building block structures or engaging in simple dramatic play scenarios. By 36 months, children typically can engage in extended play with other children; even simple cooperative play with their peers. As an infant or toddler teacher, you might be wondering what happens next. When children have had experiences being with and playing with others, most three-year-olds will engage in and maintain interactions with other children without support from an adult. They will demonstrate prosocial behaviors with other children: helping, taking turns and sometimes even sharing with other children. Preschoolers often have well-established friendships with others. And, at times, conflicts happen and preschoolers can use their problem-solving skills to resolve these conflicts with other children. How do adults promote social-emotional development in young children, beginning with the experiences provided for infants and toddlers? We've heard some suggestions from our guest experts on this episode, Donna Wittmer and Carrie Germeroth, and during the Teacher Voices segment. Adults in infants' and toddlers' worlds model what good relationships between people look like. We provide opportunities for infants to explore each other safely and gently. We acknowledge young children's prosocial behaviors. "I see that Joey is helping Sonya get the blocks to stack really high. Wow." As Teachers of young children, you make decisions about the experiences you provide for them and how you will interact with each child based on appropriate expectations of what children should know and do at various stages of their development- information you can access through the ELOF and your program's curriculum. And you know each child in your care, her individual strengths and interests and the social and cultural context in which she lives. You use that information to plan the experiences you set up, the teaching practices you use- acknowledging, encouraging, giving specific feedback, asking questions, giving information- to help the children in your care build good relationships with each other. It all begins with an understanding of appropriate goals for children's learning and the developmental progressions that lead to these goals. The ELOF is a tool for education staff to use to help with that understanding. I hope that this segment has helped you to better understand the Early Learning Outcomes Framework and you recognize how the ELOF can help you to be a better teacher.

Emily: Thanks, Peter. That was really great information for understanding children's learning and development. In the previous episodes we've talked about the incredible importance of infants' and toddlers' relationships with their primary caregivers. However, infants and toddlers also learn a tremendous amount from their peer relationships. Children begin their lives in the social world of their

families. However, many children are introduced to the social world of peers early on, and all children spend increasing amounts of time with children their own age as they mature.

Carol: Yes. Peer relationships differ from those they have with parents and siblings and teach them unique skills that impact their development. Peer relationships are more balanced, and the peers tend to bring more similar levels of ability, reasoning and skill to their interactions. Amy Hunter is joining us today to talk a little more with us about these interactions. Welcome, Amy. So glad you're here today.

Amy Hunter: Great to be here, Carol.

Carol: So, what do infants and toddlers learn about relationships from peers?

Amy: Infant and toddlers learn so much from their peers. They learn about the social world, and they gain emerging social skills. They learn what to expect from others and what others expect from them. They learn emerging, sharing, cooperating, respecting other's things and other's space. They learn communication skills and begin perspective taking, emerging empathy- those skills. And as they develop, they have more confidence in those interactions. They gain more confidence themselves in their ability to regulate their own emotions and control their impulses.

Carol: That is so good. We didn't know all that about our youngest children. How do infants and toddlers learn from their peers?

Amy: They learn, as we said, a lot from their peers. And we'll talk about how in a minute. But, first, we want to step back and think about the first relationships that infants and toddlers have are with their families. And those other primary caregivers. And how those responsive interactions create the expectations that infants and toddlers will have for their peer relationships.

Carol: Right. Right. It's like laying the foundation.

Amy: Right. So, when those are loving relationships, then they will engage in loving relationships with their peers. Observing their peers. Testing things out. And we talk about testing things out. Sometimes they're testing things out might be a little more rough than we might expect. The poke might be a little too hard, or the hug might be slightly more aggressive, but that's how they're testing those boundaries by doing.

Carol: Of course. They all do that. I love to see young children talking and trying to work together. How do infants and toddlers engage with their peers?

Amy: Infants and toddlers are able to engage socially with their peers from very early on. Infants and toddlers begin with observation, and their interest leads to imitation and then simple interactions, like handing over a toy or rolling a ball or simple touches. And infants begin to look at their peers and have that like locked-in mutual gaze as early as 2 months.

Carol: Wow.

Amy: And by 3 months infants are having that initial touch to their peers. They're reaching out. That kind of grabbing and touching their friends and their peers. And by 6 months of age they have those direct smiles to their peers. Right? And they begin vocalizations to their peers. And as they grow, their interactions become more and more responsive of the friends around them. And they gain that basic awareness of what other children are experiencing. And so as they have increasing awareness, they begin to understand and behave in a way that's sensitive to the other children. And as that happens, they gain more confidence in their social skills, and increasing sense of their own self-worth. And that confidence is really critical in having them maintain those peer interactions and those friendships.

Carol: That's really great information. I don't know if we always think about developing peer relationships at this young age, but that's wonderful information to learn. So, why are peer infant-toddler relationships so important?

Amy: I'm so glad you asked. That's a great question. Infants and toddlers form relationships in group settings, and those relationships can lead to positive outcomes for children long term. And so that emerging social competency in infancy actually has been linked to later social functioning. So, research

supports the connections that very early peer relationships actually predict those relationships that occur later in life. And so specifically as children engage in more complex play with their peers, they were more competent in their play- predicting competency in their play in the preschool age and middle age.

Carol: Of course. They're like practicing, and they get better at it and they grow with that skill.

Amy: Right. But it's also important on the flipside. Children who may be having some peer difficulty or some concerns that we see in their peer relationships, that can also be predictive of later peer problems. And so it's really important that Teachers of infants and toddlers pay really close attention to those peer interactions. And if they see something that might be concerning, like a toddler not having the mutual interest in other children, or not ever smiling, or not ever paying attention to other children and engaging with them, it's really important to get that checked out and to get some evaluation or some assessment of what might be going on there.

Carol: That's really good advice for caregivers and parents to know. Speaking of caregivers, how can caregivers support peer relationships?

Amy: It's critical that caregivers understand the importance and the impact of early peer relationships. And one of the most important things I think they can do is recognize those positive social interactions that are naturally occurring with infants and toddlers. It's so easy to focus only on the negative or the problematic- those conflict moments. But it's really critical that Teachers and parents recognize when those positive behaviors between children are occurring. A caregiver can say something like, "You're interested in what Joey's doing. Let's watch and see what's happening."

Carol: Yeah. That's so important. We do focus a lot of times on the negative behaviors or the hitting. But we forget to look for those positive interactions. It's very good advice.

Amy: That's really easy to do. A couple other things they can do is encourage parallel play- children just playing on their own next to other children and making sure the environment is set up so that children at all different developmental stages can be playing near each other. Some of the equipment in the environment can really facilitate that- a staircase that leads to a slide where two children can walk up together and two children can slide down together. Those kinds of environmental pieces can be really helpful.

Carol: So, parallel play will lead to peer play. I love that.

Amy: Absolutely. Another strategy that Teachers can use is helping other children notice children's feelings. So, a teacher might say something like, "It looks like Sasha's feeling really sad right now. I wonder if she's hungry or tired. Maybe she misses her mom."

Carol: That's really good. Children do not have the perspective of other children. So, it's the adults in their care- it's important for them to point that out.

Amy: Right. And, finally, I think it's really important for Teachers to be on the lookout for any concerns, as we mentioned earlier. These concerns can be predictive early on of problems later, and so noticing those and really paying attention to those early on.

Carol: Great. So, we spent a lot of time thinking and reflecting on how we support infants and toddlers, but what about support for the caregivers?

Amy: That is a great question, and it's one of my favorite topics. We know that caring for infants and toddlers is tough, demanding work both mentally and physically. We actually have data to show that caring for young children can take a toll on our mental and physical health. And so we really do need to be intentional about how we support caregivers and how we support one another doing this work.

Carol: That's great advice. It really is. Where can caregivers go to get support?

Amy: Great question. Well, every Early Head Start program has a mental health consultant, and so that mental health consultant can be one of many sources of support that Teachers can go to and talk to about how they're doing and how they're feeling. Hopefully also Teachers have a supportive supervisor with an open-door policy that caregivers and Teachers can go and talk to that supervisor

about how they're feeling, how they're doing, if they have questions. Another piece of support that I think we sometimes forget about is the critical peer support- the theme of the day. So, as a teacher, do you have a trusted colleague, whether it's your co-teacher or whether it's another teacher down the hall? Or if you're a family childcare provider, do you have a network of other family childcare providers? Peers who are doing the same work you are, who understand the experience that you're having, who you can trust to talk to about all of the challenges that you might be having. Sometimes those Teachers- I will say oftentimes the Teachers spend more time with each other than they do with other family members or friends certainly, and so those relationships can be incredibly sustaining and helpful and just the boost you need to be the best teacher you can be, or they can be challenging and really impact the care that's provided for the infants and toddlers. And so I think it's worth it to work on those relationships, to be a wonderful model of relationships for infants and toddlers.

Carol: That's such great advice. Just wonderful. Thank you, Amy, for reminding us that peer relationships are not only important for our children, but for all of us as well. Thank you.

Amy: Thank you.

Emily: That was so great to have Amy back again.

Carol: Yes.

Emily: So, the resilience tip for today is to connect with your peers for support. Humans are social beings. We need connections with each other. Make an intention to work on establishing positive connections with at least one or more of your colleagues who can support you in doing this important and difficult work in caring for infants and toddlers and working with their families. Meaningful relationships with coworkers and positive reinforcement of others may be just the boost you need to support your work. Finally, coworkers and peers can be such a wonderful source of accountability for your own health and wellness goals.

Carol: Thank you for another wonderful episode of Teacher Time. We can't wait to hear from you on the MyPeers community. And don't forget to send your questions for Donna Wittmer to answer in our next Coffee Break.

Emily: We have had so much fun today learning from our guest experts about the value of peer relationships and how we can support them. Thank you for joining us, and please enjoy this last moment of learning for the 2016-2017 series of Infant Toddler Teacher Time. Look for this and the other episodes of this season's Teacher Time on the ECLKC. We hope to see you next fall for another season of Teacher Time. Bye everyone.

Student: Axel! Axel!

[Laughter]

Teacher: It's Axel!

Student: Gotcha! Gotcha! I gotcha!

Student: Hi, Rochelle.