GROWING TOGETHER IN RELATIONSHIPS

Having supported them in developing emotional awareness and strategies to manage fears and worries, children require opportunities to apply their emerging social skills in relationships with their peers. Interactions and relationships in childhood are heavily influential on academic, linguistic and social development. Positive social relationships and experiences are critical for self-esteem growth and success across contexts. In addition, peer relationships engender the development of an individual’s ‘social being’, or the quality of ‘sociability’. This is the human compulsion to interact with others and attempt other social interactions, and has the potential to influence mental health and wellbeing throughout childhood.

Emotional intelligence is now considered a critical skill, perhaps of more importance than academic intelligence. This is because as a general rule, our level of intelligence and our level of success in life do not necessarily correlate. Success in the classroom, playground, home, work and social environment is more closely influenced by how well we relate to people and the nature of our relationships with others. This is why the opportunity to develop and maintain peer relationships is a critical area of learning for school-aged children.

A child’s primary relationship model often lies in their connection with their caregivers, childhood staff and early peer relationships. As influential individuals in our children’s lives, we have a wonderful opportunity to model and bolster emotional security, and demonstrate the features of healthy relationships. Our often instinctive ability to identify the needs and desires of our children are instrumental in providing a warm and positive response to these needs. Ongoing positive interactions build responsive and trusting relationships upon which our children take their examples in developing
positive peer relationships. As such, children have a better idea of what to expect in relationships and how to maneuver more complex relationships in late childhood and adolescence. In addition, such relationships are likely to motivate the child to attempt to initiate other associations with peers.

**Recognising Give and Take**

The development of fundamental social skills for positive relationships lies largely in “give” and “take” concepts. Repeated “give and take” experiences help children to foster other-awareness and an understanding of the relationship between actions and consequences. In early childhood, this may be as simple as an exchange of baby coos and sounds between parent and child. Later in childhood, this translates into sharing, turn-taking and collaborating with peers, and later still, into the exchange of complex information. Providing opportunities for these kinds of interactions in the home will greatly assist your child in developing the necessary concepts that underpin positive relationships with fellow classmates and safe adults. There are many things that we can do in the home and school environment to foster the skills necessary for positive relationship development:

**What we can do**

- Have conversations with your child. This will not only help to develop “give and take” concepts, but models appropriate conversation skills and other-awareness that will be essential skills for later social interactions.
- Allow your child to be part of making decisions (e.g. deciding what to wear on a weekend, or deciding what to have for lunch together). This shows your child that you value her contribution and provides her with the opportunity to say what she would like. You might even model some negotiation and compromise as your child begins acquiring more language!
- Share experiences with your child. This is critical for building confidence in sharing experiences with others and engaging in activities that may lead to friendship with others.
- Tune in to your child’s behaviour. This will allow you to respond appropriately to your child’s emotional needs, with encouragement, comfort and support. It can be difficult to identify these needs all of the time, however taking the time to have close and cosy moments with your child will help to foster security and emotional wellbeing.