

# STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PEER RELATIONSHIPS

EXAMPLES OF MICRO-CHANGES IN ROUTINES AND PRACTICES

## PEER FRIENDSHIPS

- Find multiple tasks for students to complete with a classmate and, occasionally, assign them to unexpected partners. These can be classroom chores, instructional tasks, or classroom privileges.
- Teach students to play non-competitive games that are appealing but have no clear winners and losers.
- Add many more attractive and developmentally appealing games to the playground with special attention to games that can be played by students with limited athletic ability, games for small and large groups, and games that are very physical or very sedate.
- Hold ‘game clinics’ in which a new game is taught at recess – start with a small group that includes a few isolated students. Once the game starts, anyone can join.

## PEER CONFLICT

- Solve frequent and predictable arguments in advance with classroom meetings.
- Have students who argue complete a ‘conflict worksheet’ together to talk through what happened and how to fix it
- Relocate playground games so that they don’t bump into each other.
- Write simple school rules for the common playground games (soccer, basketball, four square) that students often argue about.
- Make a routine for choosing teams once a week (balancing the skills on teams) and use those same teams until the next week
- Add more supervisors to the playground or change where they are located.
- Change what supervisors do: have them actively circulate on the playground and prompt students to play and resolve conflicts
- Shorten the length of the recess.
- Conduct a ‘recess workshop’ in which all students who tour the playground together while reviewing the routines, rules, proper use of equipment, entry/exit procedures, strategies for having fun together, and supervisors’ actions when there are problems. Add a booster workshop midway through the year.
- Hold ‘recess school’ for students who accrue more than three ‘sit outs’ in a month. In the school, students should over-practice the right ways to play games or use recess equipment, and relearn the routines and rules.
- Invite a prominent local athlete to the school to talk about good sportsmanship.

## AGGRESSIVE CONFLICT AND BULLYING

- Have students mark playground maps with the places where bullying occurs and plan extra supervision of these places.
- Encourage students who are the targets of bullying to play near supervisors.
- Conduct classroom meetings to increase empathy in the students who observe bullying and prepare them to stop it
- Meet with all playground supervisors to discuss aggressive conflict and ways to interrupt it.
- Sensitize students to bullying by using a video or read-aloud book (e.g., Bridge Over Terabithia) to prompt a class discussion of what it feels like to be bullied.

#### EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- There are several anti-bullying programs that have been shown to reduce rates of bullying in schools. Examples include: The Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999) alerts teachers, students, and parents to the varying and subtle forms of bullying and prepares them to respond promptly and decisively to discourage such behavior. Bully busters: A teacher's manual (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000) provides teachers with strategies to intervene to reduce bullying and prevent future incidents with classroom meetings and activities. Second Step (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000) teaches students social and emotional skills for violence prevention.
- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Program (Greenberg, Kusche, and Mihalic, 1998). Evidence has demonstrated that this classwide program strengthens the social competence of preschool and elementary children. The program includes 20-minute lessons taught three times each week on emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, and interpersonal problem-solving skills.
- Strong Kids (Merrell, Gueldner, & Tran, 2008). This curriculum provides classroom teachers with 10-12 half-hour lessons on diverse topics related to social emotional learning. One component of the program addresses students' competent peer interactions. Versions of the Strong Kids curricula are available for preschool, early elementary, late elementary, and middle school grades. Evidence shows small but robust improvements in students' social emotional competence.
- I Can Problem Solve (Shure, 1997). This was one of the earliest social learning programs and it continues to demonstrate significant increases in children's prosocial behaviors and decreases their social impulsivity. It is a year-long curricula that teaches students to think about the social problems that they encounter, consider alternative solutions, carefully consider the feelings of other students and themselves, and translate these into competent social behaviors.