

F E B R U A R Y
N E W S L E T T E R

INVITATIONS FOR LEARNING

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Are They Friends or Intruders?

Young children choose friends using the following criteria:

- If you are next to me, you must be my friend
- If you give me what I want, you must be my friend
- If you do what I say and want, you must be my friend
- If you do not do any of the above mentioned, you must be an intruder

Jacob and Carl were stacking blocks, one on top of another. David came over and started to put blocks on top of their stack. Jacob removed the blocks David put on their stack and yelled, "We don't want your blocks!" David said, "I can put my blocks there too." Jacob said, "We don't like you, do we Carl?" Carl said, "Yeah, we don't like you. Take your stupid blocks". The teacher came over and said to Jacob and Carl, "We are all friends at our school. Each of you take turns putting the blocks on and work together like friends."

The teacher thought she was modeling cooperation which forges friendship. I don't think that Jacob and Carl saw it that way.... They never asked for David's help. David intruded on their interaction.

Young children are very egocentric and can't believe that anyone else exists. I have heard adults say to groups of children, "Friends, lets pick up so we can go outside". Children often look at each other wondering who is my teacher talking to?

The word "Friends" implies that children are able to recognize the needs and wants of others. Most young children do not have this cognitive ability. They often only recognize their own needs and wishes.

Friendship isn't taught, it develops. Do you know some adults who are still developing friendship skills?

As children begin to recognize the need for others to participate in activities, friendships develop. For each child that time is different.

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Supporting the development of “friendships”

- *Provide multiples (So sharing doesn't have to occur)*
- *Encourage children to ask to participate with other children (“Can I stack my blocks on yours?”)*
- *Support children who have been rejected (“They are saying they don't want to play with you right now. I know you wish you could. Where are you going to play?”)*
- *Call children by their names(Avoid using the term “friends”)*
- *Provide different spaces for children to play (Either by themselves or with others)*

Be aware that children need to recognize their own needs before they can recognize others.