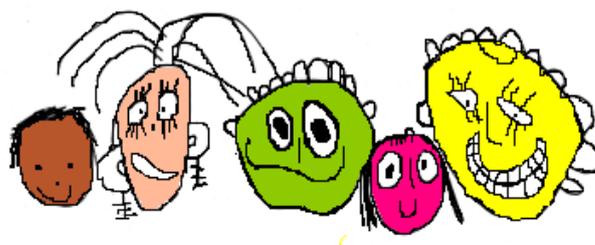


## Hamilton Community Pre-School

*"Where discoveries, learning and fun connect."*



### Information Sheets for Parents

# Developing Social Skills

From birth, children delight in positive social interactions with people. Children spend almost every waking minute developing their relationships with parents and caregivers. Through these first relationships, children learn that they can trust others to care for them, get their needs met and enjoy life with others. As they grow, children begin to form a wider network of relationships including friendships with peers and other adults in their lives. However, relationships with their significant caregivers remain a central influence on children's lives.

Parents and carers provide a secure base from which children explore the world around them. Children turn to their parents and carers when they need comfort or are feeling unsure and need reassurance. When faced with new people and situations, children are guided by the emotions and behaviour of their parents and carers. As children's skills and self-confidence grow, they become more independent and have more control over their behaviour.

Social skills are a common concern among parents. Often children can have difficulties in making and keeping friends. They may be left out of games at lunch, not get invited to other children's houses or may even be teased by some children. An important aspect of maintaining friendships is **social skills**.

**Social skills** are specific behaviours such as smiling, making eye contact, asking and responding to questions, and giving and acknowledging compliments during a social exchange. These behaviours result in positive social interactions and have been linked to positive developmental outcomes, including peer acceptance.

### How can I tell if my child is having difficulties with social skills?

- Little use of eye contact,
- Uninterested in social interactions,
- Difficulties initiating social interactions,
- Difficulties interpreting verbal and non-verbal social cues,
- Inappropriate emotional response,
- Lack of empathy towards others.

It can be upsetting for parents to realise that their children are having difficulties making friends. Research has shown however, that social skills can be effectively taught to children.

## **How to encourage your child to develop social skills**

- Help your child make friends by letting your child play with other children.
- Offer suggestions on ways to handle situations at school and with friends.
- Children learn a lot by observing how adults interact, so it is important to always model appropriate behaviour, such as greeting shop assistants and using people's names when possible.
- Help your child to understand different points of view by describing feelings and having conversations about how other people might feel. This can help your child to develop empathy and will help them deal with conflict when it occurs.
- Help develop conversation skills such as asking questions and listening to others
- Discuss behaviours such as teasing and bullying with your child, to help them understand that some comments could upset others.

By the time your child has started preschool we would expect that they would be displaying these stages of play (Mildred Parten's Stages of Play)

- **Associate Play (3-4 Years):**  
When a child starts to interact with others during play, but there is not a large amount of interaction at this stage. A child might be doing an activity related to the children around him but might not actually be interacting with another child. For example, Children might all be playing on the same piece of playground equipment but all doing different things like climbing, swinging, etc.
- **Cooperative Play (4+ years):**  
When a child plays together with others and has interest in both the activity and other children involved in playing they are participating in cooperative play.