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Regional  
Behavior



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# OH, Behave!

## Encouraging Children to Help Each Other Using the Buddy System

### Tip of the Month:

Use the "peer partnering strategy" to take advantage of the powerful role children play in teaching one another.

For more information on this idea, check out the highlighted box on page 2!

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Open our latest public resource, a growing library shelf of virtual binders that include archived issues of the HSB newsletter, *Oh Behave!*, a collection of Disaster Response Resources, and a binder of scripted stories for classroom use! Click [here](#).

Visit any early childhood classroom and you'll most likely hear them referring to each other as "friends" or "buddies". While friendship building and positive social interaction come natural for many children, some children need additional help in this area. Establishing a buddy system in your classroom is a great way to support children as they develop these important skills. A buddy system is the strategic pairing of certain children to support one another with specific skills and abilities and can be a bridge to appropriate play and social interaction; it is an important strategy for building relationships among peers, building self-esteem and empowering children. The buddy system is beneficial to both children because it allows the child with the skill deficit to feel empowered and valued, provides them with a safe space to try out or practice challenging tasks comfortably and promotes self-esteem. For the buddy with the skill mastery, it helps to develop leadership skills, reduce competitiveness, foster a sense of purpose and helps to develop empathy. These benefits to children transcend far past their time in the classroom. It helps to build self-confidence, establish meaningful friendships, supports later success in school and life, and it builds resiliency. The early establishment of these skills are powerful predictors of long-term success in the adult years.

To effectively pair children, we must first observe and tune in to learn about children's individual differences, strengths and challenges. When we have a clear picture of the strengths and challenges that each child pos-

sesses, we are able to formulate pairs and groupings based on one child's skill deficit and another child's proficiency in that same skill. Consider this following example: Ms. Mary Mack notices that John is outgoing, friendly, prefers cooperative play and is popular amongst friends. Jacob, on the contrary, is quiet and reserved, is often an onlooker, stays close to the teacher for much of the day and never initiates interaction with other children. This is an ideal pair for the buddy system. Clearly, John is proficient in his ability to make and maintain friendships, exhibit pro-social behaviors and seems to be headed towards a bright developmental future. Without intervention, Jacob will likely struggle to engage socially, encounter challenges with relationship building as well as human connection which is proven to be an important footing for healthy development and success later in life.

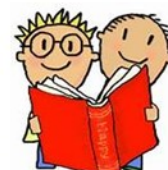
To use the buddy system, first consider your environment. Provide toys and materials that promote cooperation and sharing. By replacing materials created for individual use with those made for cooperative use, you help increase the opportunity for children to play together. You might swap your art easel for a large piece of paper taped to a wall so that children can create together, for example. Another example might be to arrange your sensory table so that children stand across from each other instead of beside each other.

Ensure your classroom climate is one that is conducive to building and nurturing healthy friendships.

We do this by giving attention to children engaging in friendly behaviors, modeling friendly behaviors ourselves, asking permission before joining children's play, referring to each other as friends, sharing, assisting others and giving compliments.

Be careful how you describe the task to the peer buddy. It is an activity, not a chore or punishment. Describe it as an opportunity; you might say "Jack, you are very good at sharing materials, can you be a buddy to Jill to help her learn to share too?" Provide clear directions to the peer buddy outlining the amount of time or duration that they will be paired together. You might provide cool matching bracelets or badges to help children remember that they are in "buddy mode." Provide the peer buddy with clear directives and check on the pair periodically to see how things are going, prompt role reversal, provide support and provide meaningful praise. Debrief with the pair afterwards and provide specific feedback. Allow children to reflect on their experience as well. It is important to highlight the benefits to both children, not just the child with the skill deficit.

It is important to record the successes and challenges of the buddy system and make any necessary adjustments. Periodically rotate buddies to prevent buddy burnout and to allow children to experience meaningful interactions and build friendships with a variety of peers.





**Question:** I would like some ideas of how to practice the buddy system during center time. Right now I have my centers set up so the children can pick which center they want to go to as long as it is open. How can I pair the children together so they can learn from each other without telling them?

**Answer:** That is a good question. I would create a center rotation system that limits the number of children that can be in a center at one time. Allow the children to rotate from center to center. For example, the rotation goes from Dramatic Play to Science to Blocks to Art to Library and so on. Then you can pair the children together by two. Have them start in one center and they rotate together. This put the whole class into pairs for centers. Each day should be a new set of buddies. This also helps you make sure everyone gets to each center because where you stop in the morning, you can pick back up in the afternoon.

...From the "Tip of the Month" on page 1

The [Devereux Foundation for Resilient Children](#) (specifically from the *Facing The Challenge* training series) shares there are many ways to pair children together, but one fun way that appears random is to make two cardboard cubes. On one cube, place the names or pictures of children who have mastered a skill. On the other cube, include the children who need a little extra support learning the same skill. No matter how you roll the two cubes to partner children for activities, you will end up with a peer model in each pair.



What are some toys and materials that encourage children to naturally partner together for play? Do you have these in your classroom? Balls, puppets, wagons, two telephones, teeter-totters, dress-up clothes, dramatic play materials, board games, rocking boats, etc. Remember, these items can help lead to cooperative play, but the goal is for children to focus and interact with one another.

Do you have a question you would like to see answered in our column? Feel free to email it to [AskTheBehaviorSpecialist@gmail.com](mailto:AskTheBehaviorSpecialist@gmail.com). We will keep your identity private. Your question is probably one someone else needs answering, so ask away! Your time is appreciated!



## Social/Emotional Book Nook



Kindness is a friendly hello. A roaring cheer. A quick boost. Kindness is what makes us strong! Follow a group of children as they extend kindness in all sorts of situations: on the playground, at lunchtime, and on a neighborhood street. This sweet board book shows how kindness helps build friendship and community.



In each issue you will find a new card to help you build your very own "Calming Choices" Card Set for your classroom.



When I am upset, I can...

**DO SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME HAPPY**



For durability and repetitive use, print on cardstock paper and laminate.

### Group Activity: A Little Help From Your Friends

Give each child a tissue to place on his head. Instruct children to move around to the tune of music while keeping the tissue on their heads. If a tissue falls off, the child will freeze. Another child needs to help the frozen child by placing the tissue back on the frozen child's head, allowing the frozen child to rejoin the game. This game helps preschool-age children become aware of the power in helping one another.



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