

Promoting Collaboration Skills Among Young Children

Children engaged in STEM learning have opportunities to develop many skills. One of these is the ability to collaborate with peers, and practice teamwork in solving problems.

Even though children are naturally drawn to engaging in social interactions, it can be sometimes challenging for teachers to promote quality collaborations--language differences and impulsive emotions can influence children's eagerness and ability to connect. But we know when children develop relationships, when they express and negotiate ideas, that they begin to support each other in higher levels of understanding.

So, how can we help young children learn and practice the art of collaboration? A few ideas are suggested below.

Consider the environment. Arrange tables so two chairs can be placed side-by-side or across from one another. Invite children to participate in play areas in groups of 2-4 to encourage interaction.

Pair “teachers” and “learners”. Assign book buddies with varied language abilities. Guide children to support each other as they share books.

Promote conversations. Establish a writing or book area with space for story retelling using puppets or props. Encourage children to dictate or act out favorite stories.

Support teamwork. Brainstorm ways children can work together outside. Invite them to build tents, pull heavy items, or play cooperative games.

Promote leadership. Establish “helper” jobs that can be accomplished by pairs of children. Encourage children to talk about roles and take turns when working together.

Encourage independence. Guide children to ask peers for help instead of solely relying on adults. Role-play situations where children might help one another with specific requests (put on a jacket, pick up spilled crayons, etc.)

Implement STEM project-learning. Help children understand a goal or problem to solve. Model how to describe observations, ask reflective questions (“I wonder...” or “What would happen if...”) and identify roles to support teamwork.

Establish a classroom culture that allows children to feel confident as they interact and communicate with each other.

