



"Let's Be Friends"

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Introduction

Let's Be Friends is a prevention curriculum that teaches young children positive social skills. The purpose of *Let's Be Friends* is to present useful tools to students that enable them to take active roles in the creation of a positive social environment, which encourages kindness, compassion and responsibility.

The Ophelia Project[®] is delighted to provide this fun and educational friendship unit designed for primary school students. We believe that it is important for schools to add a fourth “R” to the “Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic” adage, which is **Relationships**. In today’s schools, an intense focus on math and reading literacy is pushing the teaching of social skills farther out of the elementary school.

Children should be taught the skills to know how to:

- Get along with others
- Be a friend
- Be part of a social group

In general, people - even teachers - assume that children know how to interact with one another in positive ways, but what actually occurs in classrooms challenges this belief. The potential for meanness, both inside and outside of the classroom, is taking on new and more creative forms. Another alarming phenomenon shows that children are much more likely to talk back to their teachers and to other adults in their lives. These adults seem to tolerate, and implicitly condone, a greater amount of negative behaviors. It follows that students are demonstrating increased aggressiveness, reduced respect for adult authority and insensitivity to the feelings of others.

Research shows that children learn what is considered acceptable social behavior by observing adults, siblings, peers and older schoolmates. Each group’s activities contribute to the formation of a child’s normative beliefs about how to behave, especially as the child experiments with different kinds of behaviors and receives feedback from those around her. By the third grade, most students have already developed normative beliefs about how to function in a social environment, and these beliefs guide future behavior. If a child’s early formative experiences involved much screaming and yelling as a form of communication, he or she has likely learned to expect this type of behavior from others and most likely believes it is an acceptable way to communicate with others. A child who is allowed to tease, taunt or exclude another student in the classroom, lunchroom or on the playground learns that his

actions are sanctioned and he will continue to use them.

The Ophelia Project[®] is committed to empowering the kid in the middle, often called the bystander, witness or the silent “it’s-none-of-my-business” student. We believe that everyone plays a role in creating positive, safe social climates. Therefore, everyone has a responsibility to become involved in addressing peer aggression. Acts of aggression often occur when adults are not around, so we must count on the children present to take a stand if we truly want to address the aggression in a community.

Our programs strive to develop a sense of personal power within each child, such as:

- Recognizing my responsibility to protect myself and my classmates
- Making the effort to welcome a new student into my work or play
- Speaking out to defend a classmate when s/he is being treated unfairly
- Reporting to an adult when a classmate needs help and is in trouble

The Ophelia Project[®]'s initial efforts focused on middle schools, where students hurt each other through numerous different forms of aggression. Covert bullying is a common practice in middle schools, a place where many adults silently support exclusion, teasing, rumor spreading and gossiping by failing to take action or by being unaware that there is a problem at all.

We encourage teachers of young children to be diligent in holding themselves and their students accountable when their actions knowingly and unknowingly hurt someone else. Through this prevention curriculum, The Ophelia Project[®] encourages teachers to help students get in touch with their own emotions and those of their peers, because lessons in building positive relationships last a lifetime.