Conversations between children are important. Through conversations children learn information, language and social skills. Children who are the best communicators tend to be the most successful socially. Success or difficulty with communication may affect self-esteem and attitudes about learning and being in school. We can encourage children to interact with each other by using the following strategies:

1. Set up Small groups
   - Limit the group size to three to four children.
   - Interact with each child in the group; note which children in the group might be left out and include them.
   - Get at the children’s level and be face to face with them.
   - Engage in play with the children; take one of the roles to model how to pretend and what to say. E.g. during “restaurant” pretend to be a customer and say, “I would like a hamburger please”, or while playing with play dough say, “I’m making a snowman”.
   - Fade out your support when things are going well between the children.
   - Stagger routines if possible, e.g. some children have snack, while some go on a walk and others go to circle.

2. Create a physical environment that promotes small groups
   - Create book nooks, art centre, housekeeping corner.
   - Limit materials so children have to share, e.g. one pair of scissors.
   - Break up large areas into smaller ones using bookshelves or other units.
   - Provide small spaces that only allow two or three children to gather.

3. Set up collaborative tasks with one other peer
   The best tasks are real life ones, e.g. cleaning a spill, mixing materials for sensory activity, handing out snack items such as plates and napkins.

4. Direct conversations away from yourself
   - During snack time, if a topic emerges, encourage peers to comment to each other. For example, “Tell Anna the best part of that movie”, or “I think Jason went skating this weekend too. Tell him what you liked about it”.
   - Encourage the children to listen to each other. For example, “Jason, Anna is telling you about skating. Look at her with your eyes”.

Strategies to Encourage Peer to Peer Interactions in Early Childcare Settings
5. Encourage interaction during outdoor play
- Provide props that encourage group play, e.g. wagons, two seater trikes.
- Model language to use during this time, e.g. “tell everyone the bus is leaving. All aboard!”

6. Set up dramatic play themes
- Children can take on different roles in small groups such as: Restaurant (cook, waiter, customer); Doctor’s office (doctor, patient, parent); Puppet theater (props to retell a story told at circle time); Store (salesperson, shoppers); Train or bus station (ticket taker, passengers).
- Provide a script to help children interact, e.g. “Jerry, tell the doctor your baby is sick”
- Eventually, fade away your prompts and coaching.

Other fact sheets on parenting your child are available at your local Community Health Office/Centre or online at http://vch.eduhealth.ca

For more information, contact a Speech-Language Pathologist or Public Health Nurse at Vancouver Coastal Health

www.vch.ca

Adapted from:

and

“Pathway to Play: Developing Play Skills in Young Children”. Sandra Heidemann and Deborah Hewitt

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