

# Quick Guide: Boosting Peer Engagement

Engagement State	Help Within The Current State	Boost To a Higher State	Strategies To Avoid
<b>Solitary</b>	Adult engage with child to assess reason for solitary state. Listen to the child then offer support.	Recruit a peer to ask child to play. Give friendly direct instruction telling the child to engage with peers. Provide an appealing and developmentally appropriate activity to draw the child to parallel position with peers.	Avoid benching or isolating a child during social times. Avoid pushing a child into an activity as opposed to inviting them and drawing them in.
<b>Onlooker</b>	Model being interested and focused on peers activities. Use language like “Look at Jimmy,” or “What are they going to do next?!”	Recruit a peer to invite the target child to join in play. Encourage the target child to play with peers or to ask a friend to play.	Avoid embarrassing the peers by making them feel that they must perform under scrutiny. Avoid reinforcing this state as a preferred state, i.e. don’t let the child only watch all the time.
<b>Parallel</b>	Support good social positioning, reinforce parallel play verbally or with other reward.	Join into play with the child. Cue child to notice peers.	Avoid being overly directive or positioning yourself in such a way that blocks children’s view of one another. Avoid helping too much.
<b>Parallel Aware</b>	With well-timed comments, verbally highlight to the children that they are playing next to each other. Praise their play skills. Add elements to the play to keep it exciting.	Ask peers if they can demonstrate play moves or games for each other. Verbally prompt target child to watch the peer. Model focusing on and being interested in the peer’s activities.	Avoid interjecting too many comments or adding information that might obscure the children’s awareness of each other. Don’t overly focus on the play objects.
★ <b>Joint Engagement</b>	Provide an environment that makes playing with peers easy. Clearly state that playing well with friends at school is the goal. Fade back and support from a distance as children maintain successful peer engagement.	Prompt the children to make a game out of what they are doing, i.e. taking turns setting goals. Teach children the rules and pragmatics of popular games. Provide equipment and scaffold efforts by children to advance engagement.	Avoid interrupting play and over-managing behavior that might be less-skilled or a bit rough. Instead, allow the children to set the tone for what is fair and fun as much as possible.
★ <b>Game With Rules</b>	Help the children get the game started or iron out any problems related to the game rules, turn taking, etc. Play with the children for a few minutes and model the appropriate behaviors. Make sure to fade out. Cheer them on.	Overlay a pretend play element onto the game. Add a component that draws out personal disclosures. Fade out of the activity to allow for maximum peer engagement and check back periodically.	Avoid dominating play as an adult. Don’t stop the flow of play between peers. Avoid implementing overly punitive measures when children exhibit rough behavior.