

How do children interact with others? ▶



Young children think the world revolves around them and what they want. Until they are about five, most children are self-centred and egocentric. They expect other people to adapt to their needs.

It is not easy for young children to play cooperatively with others. They play beside, rather than with, each other. This is known as parallel play. Because they do not understand cooperative behaviour, they have difficulty playing team activities.

Children begin cooperative play between the ages of about six and nine. They develop friendships within small groups that slowly become more enduring. They often play in a world of make-believe and act out different parts. They begin to play roles and to understand what playing a role is all about.

Still, competition at this stage is a series of one-upmanships. Children compare themselves with their peers, striving to see who is best. They are concerned mainly with being the best at the expense of others.

When do children understand the meaning of long-term goals?

In the 1950s and 1960s, child psychologist Jean Piaget carried out a series of tests on children to explore their understanding of time. He discovered that many children, up to primary school age, have quite a poor understanding of time and are incapable of understanding long-term goals. As children pass through primary school, they begin to develop some concept of time.

With this in mind, instead of long-term goals, coaches should set challenging yet realistic short-term goals for youngsters: a swimmer could work on having a more forceful kick; a hockey player could improve the accuracy of a pass.

Goals like these are within a youngster's control. Dr. Stuart Robbins says practices should focus on immediate, simple goals. "Building endurance is not an achievement easily recognized by small children, but learning how to do a cartwheel or handstand is a noticeable accomplishment." Activities that produce immediate improvement help children to feel better about themselves.

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