

20 - 7. Social competence and peer relationships

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© SPMM Course 7. Social competence and peer relationships Through friendship, children learn cooperation, sharing and conflict management. They also learn empathy and group belonging. Studies suggest that peer rejection can later result in depression, school drop out and other psychiatric issues. (Cairns, Cairns and Neckerman, 1989) Social competence is a complex concept involving social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural skills. It is the foundation upon which ability to interact with others is built and also perceptions of own behaviour is developed. There are several approaches involved. Peer regard/status Define social competence based on popularity amongst peers Social skills Behaviours demonstrating social skills are used to determine social competence Relationship Social competence is based on the ability to form and quality of relationships Functional Context-specific, it is concerned with the identification of social tasks

Peer groups are comprised of children of similar age, background, social status and often with similar interests. This primary social group can influence several behaviours and beliefs. Children look to join peer groups that accept them, even if they are involved in negative activities disapproved by parents. Peer acceptance: the extent to which a child is viewed by peers as worthy and likeable companion. This is assessed using sociometric techniques Popularity: Popularity is not the same as having many friends - many popular children do not count having a large number of friends.

1. Popular children: liked by many disliked by few
2. Rejected children: disliked by many liked by few
3. Neglected children: neither liked nor disliked (few nominations in sociometric measurements in a classroom)
4. Controversial children: liked by many but also disliked by many
5. Average-status of acceptance: nearly 1/3rd of the class - liked or disliked by a moderate number of peers Popular children show the following characteristics: Respond positively in unfamiliar environments

© SPMM Course □ Initiate interaction in new social groups □ Comment constructively in groups □ Blend smoothly with new peers □ Pleasant temperament □ Academic skills □ Display ease when interacting with opposite gender

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