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Starting school can present lots of new learning experiences for children, especially new tasks that they will need to do independently, like opening their lunch box and snacks and making new friends. Every day your child will go to the yard, usually twice a day, and often this can seem overwhelming and maybe even stressful at the beginning. Often, schools let Junior Infants practise going out to yard and how to ask others to start playing games before going out to yard with other year groups. After this, however, pupils often have fewer opportunities to seek one-to-one help than they may have become accustomed to.

There are a variety of things that can make yard difficult for pupils! Below are some ideas that could help.



Talk about Yard

When pupils begin school, they often get overwhelmed and may not know why, or what to do. Teachers often model how to behave on the yard and provide opportunities to role play how to ask someone to play, but yard time can often be more chaotic than pupils have experienced yet due to weather, noise and large groups of people.

A common complaint from pupils returning from the yard is that nobody wanted to play with them. Pupils can feel this way for a variety of reasons:

- the person that they usually play with was not in school and they couldn't find them to ask them to play. They may not have felt comfortable asking someone else to play;
- they asked someone to play but didn't understand the game that was being played or they couldn't agree on what to play;
- they were playing with someone who then began playing with someone else;
- they went to the bathroom and came back and the people that they were playing with moved on to play a new game;
- they struggled to initiate play or conversation with other children.

If a child gets upset during yard time it is a good idea for them to know that they can ask the adult on yard for help and the adult will help to mediate the potential misunderstandings.

However, if your child is feeling regularly excluded by pupils in their class it would be worth speaking to the class teacher or designated adult about it to see if there is anything else that could be done, collaboratively, between home and school.

Identify Emotions

Acknowledging the emotions associated with feeling left out is important, but having the language to do this can be difficult for children.

This resource: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-t-22558-mood-monsters-poster-set> is a useful way of introducing some helpful language.

You could take one poster at a time and read it to them like a story to see if they tell you that it reminds them of how they felt. They may say nothing at first, but when they get familiar with the feeling words, you could ask your child which one of the monsters represents how they felt today and why, to start the conversation.

You could try telling them about your day and how you felt to model for them until they feel comfortable doing so themselves. This may take a considerable amount of practice. If you are reading a story or watching a film, you could use the posters to acknowledge how characters might be feeling. It is often easier to describe the feelings of someone else than our own.

If or when they are able to communicate with you how they are feeling about the yard, try to gently encourage them to tell you what it is exactly that they are finding difficult. Often being cold, loud noise, blustery wind, or one of their close friends being out of school, in another class or moving school could be a big part of the upset and it is important to figure this out.

Building Self-Esteem

This resource is a lovely visual way to build self-esteem and can be done at home. It includes activities that take place in school also. <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-2549257-how-good-am-i-at-activity-sheet>.

The 'My Confidence Jar' could be filled with handwritten words or drawings of activities that your child knows that they can do and is proud of, for example, being a wonderful son/daughter, growing taller, drawing, reading, maths, talking to people, being kind, swimming, cycling, board games or computer games, etc.

Having a visual reminder of this is something that they can look at if they are feeling upset and is a good activity for building self-esteem. If they are feeling like they aren't good at anything, remind them of their Confidence Jar and encourage them to repeat these things to themselves.



Strategies

If your child feels left out during yard time, discussing with them what they can do when this happens can be helpful. They may get frustrated and feel like they did ask many people to play with them, yet nobody wanted to. This can feel hurtful and their feelings should be acknowledged and validated. It would be a good idea to have a strategy for them for what to do if they feel left out.

- Having a list of things that they could do on yard that they can tell you about, e.g.
 - I could play with _____.
 - If they're busy I could: look for ladybirds, chase butterflies, collect leaves, count flowers, look for pictures in the clouds.
 - I like skipping/running/hopping so I will practise the skills that I am good at, so that I can be even better.
- When feeling left out in school and feeling bad about themselves, encourage them to remind themselves of what is in their Confidence Jar.
- With the agreement of the class teacher and/or principal they could:
 - play a particular game on the yard that they like to play alone (skipping with a rope/reading a book)
 - play with pupils from another class
 - helping out on yard

Every child will feel left out on the yard or during the school day at some point in their time at school. Acknowledging this, talking to them about it, building self-esteem and helping them know that they have options when this happens should help.

