

Bar-Ilan university

**The presence of a friend while toddlers cope with the
stress of separation from their parent in daycare**

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Abstract

In Professional literature of the past few decades there is an indication that friendship may be identified among toddlers from the age of two and even at younger ages. At the age of two, friendship between toddlers is characterized by single word verbal communication and short fractured interactions. During the third year of life, the interactions are more elaborate and are of longer periods. Among steady sets of friends the social interaction is more elaborate than among children that are not friends.

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the relation between social interaction and the ability of toddlers to withstand stressful situations in the toddler's daycare settings. Toddlers separation from their parents, when parting at the toddlers ;Vandell& Mueller, 2001 (קליין וגבעון, 2001) daycare setting is considers a stressful incident 1995 Rubin, 1980 in Rubin and Sloman, 1984; Howes, 1983).

The first research assumption was that it is possible to differentiate between toddlers who are friends to toddlers whom are not, based on observations of the social interactions among toddlers at the age of two to three , according to criteria that define friendship as suggested by Howes(1983) For example, Howes (1993) suggest that the level of play between toddlers that are friends will be higher than the level of play between toddlers that are not friends.

Vandell & Mueller, 1995 Rubin, 1980 in Rubin and Sloman, ; 2001 (קליין וגבעון, 2001) (1984; Howes, 1983

This research also assumes that children that are in a close physical presence of a friend will turn less to a caregiver during the interval of separation from their parent and immediately following the separation. These children will exhibit less

behaviors that indicates stress, such as: clinging to their caregiver. These children will exhibit more pro-social behaviors that conveys empathy towards their friends at the day-care center, than children that are not in close physical presence of a friend.

Attention was also directed in this research towards the difference in the duration of the interval of parent- child separation in comparison between incidents where a child's friend was present to those where the friend had yet to arrive at the day-care center.

Thirty-eight participants from the age of twenty- four months to thirty-six months took part in this research. Recorded video sessions documented parent- child morning separation interval at the daycare center in two situations when the child had a friend close by and when not. Determining the level of play and its complexity was done with accordance to Howe's (1983) criteria. The findings indicate that the criteria that originally was developed for children at the age of three and above is appropriate for toddlers at the age of two. In order to evaluate the significance of the presence of a friend, behaviours that were exhibited within stressful situations and behaviours that were exhibited in free from stress situations, were studied.

It was found that the level of play between friends is higher than the level of play between children that are not friends. It was also found that when a friend is present there are significantly more pro-social behaviors such as sharing a new object that a child brings with him to the day care center, conveying interest in the emotional state of a friend, positive physical contact, smiles and so forth.

A stressful situation is characterized by behaviors such as: aimless wandering, staring and clinging to one's parent. With reference to non- stressful situations behaviors, there is a significant distinction in the tendency to exhibit pro-social behaviors (such as: sharing, assistance and comforting).

In situations where a friend was not present, negative behaviors were exhibited as in grabbing a toy and verbal and physical aggressiveness. As to the duration of the interval of child – parent separation, the findings show that when a friend is not present the average length of time of the child- parent separation is longer than when a friend is present (47.57 seconds verse 27.34 seconds accordingly). The findings of the current study underscore the significant benefits in the presence of a friend during the child- parent separation interval. It is significantly evident that the presence of a friend offered relief for a child separating from his parent: the time-frame of the child –parent separation was shorter, positive behaviors were exhibited such as sharing an object and positive physical contact. Behaviors that indicate stress such as wandering and staring were significantly reduced.

According to this research's findings, children involved in friendship experience less stress and exhibit more positive behavior in the presence of a friend. Therefore, it is presumable that these children feel more relaxed and they approach less their care-giver for consolation. Hence, encouraging friendships in educational frameworks of toddlers may facilitate the ongoing duties of the caregivers.

The conclusions of this research support the hypothesis that encouraging friendships in the toddlers' at the age of two years is vital for the toddlers in daycare settings. Friendship allows emotional resources that form a basis for modeling future social relationship