

FACTSHEET: Benefits of Mixed Age Grouping for 3- To 5-Year-Old Children

Mixed age grouping is a practice in early childhood education where children of different ages are grouped together in the same classroom or learning environment. This approach has been shown to have a number of benefits for children, including:

- **Enhanced social and emotional development:** Mixed age groups provide children with the opportunity to interact with and learn from peers of different ages. This can help them develop social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution. In a mixed age group, children have more opportunities to learn to be patient and tolerant of others.
- **Increased academic achievement:** Studies have shown that children in mixed age groups tend to achieve at higher levels academically than children in same age groups. This is likely due to the fact that they are exposed to a wider range of learning experiences and have the opportunity to learn from more experienced peers.
- **Improved self-esteem:** Mixed age grouping can help children develop a positive sense of self-worth by providing them with opportunities to take on leadership roles and help others. It can also help them to feel more confident in their abilities by seeing that they are capable of learning and succeeding alongside older children.
- **Greater diversity:** Mixed age groups provide children with the opportunity to interact with children of different ages and developmental stages. This can help them to develop a more open-minded and tolerant view of the world.
- **Relatable family dynamics:** Outside of kinder, children learn a great deal from having fun and exploring with their younger siblings, older siblings, cousins or friends. Mixed age grouping in an early childhood setting enables children to play with others of various ages, learning new ways of doing and of being. Children are provided with the opportunity to establish amazing friendships with children of all ages.

In addition to these more general benefits, there are also benefits for each child, dependent on their age and previous kindergarten experiences. Benefits for younger children:

- **Exposure to advanced language skills:** Children aged 2-3 are exposed to more advanced language levels and complexity shared by older children, which helps to develop their communication skills. Observing and listening to other children express themselves, e.g. “I feel angry” or “I need help”, enables a child to associate appropriate words to feelings and action, which increases their ability to self-regulate and develop emotional awareness.
- **More complex play episodes:** When younger children play with older children, the play is often more complex. Children who are older in age or are more developmentally advanced extend on younger children’s ideas. Younger children often look up to older children and are able to follow the ideas suggested to them and become more involved in the play. Lev Vygotsky coined the term zone of ‘*proximal development*’ to refer to the set of activities that a child cannot do alone or with others of the same ability but can do so in collaboration with others who are more skilled, older or through practice. Mixed age grouping beautifully supports children as they explore in their particular zone of proximal development.



Benefits of mixed age grouping for older children:

- **Development of confidence and leadership skills:** Children with a high level of competence are able to practice their leadership skills and offer support to those who are younger or children who may be less capable or confident. They provide direction to support others, enforce class rules and ensure the safety and wellbeing of those nearby.
- **Practice nurturing and care for others:** Older children are able to practice nurturance as they mimic the role of a mother, father or carer, when interacting with younger children. While caring for younger children, older children develop leadership qualities at an early age, enabling them to become independent and confident individuals.
- **Language versatility:** When communicating with younger children, older children may be required to make amendments to their language so that they're understood by younger children. They may be required to increase or differ their body language to support the verbal cues given to younger children.



St John's Lutheran Kindergarten educators are trained to identify a child's needs and to adapt, plan and implement different teaching strategies to support the learning and development of every child. We recognise each child as unique and work collaboratively with families to ensure the best opportunities are provided for their child's needs.

As educators we are aware that not everyone shares our thinking and ways of working. Many see risks and these include fears that older children may overwhelm younger children, older children may be under stimulated as the range of experiences is limited and younger children inhibit their plans, or younger children may be influenced by older children and grow up too quickly. We have found these fears are no different to other ways that children are grouped, as even in children who are grouped by age there is a wide range of skill level, maturity level and experiences that impact on how and where children play and how they interact and get along with others.

If you have any concerns about mixed age grouping and how it might suit the needs of your child, please reach out to our staff who can speak to you further about this new approach for our service.



St John's Lutheran
Kindergarten

