

Helping Children Make Friends

August 6, 2019

For children, making friends is a vital part of growing up and an essential part of their [social and emotional development](#). Friendships enable children to learn more about themselves and develop their own identity.

Just like adults, some children seem to make friends easily and get energy from being around lots of other people. Others can find this tiring and overwhelming while still others may be slower to warm up and need time to watch what happens before joining in with a group.



Whatever their personality type, children can learn skills early on in life that will help them make friends – and keep them. Communication skills, interpersonal skills and managing feelings are three key things parents can help children practice and master and that will serve them well as they grow into adults.

Communicate with their peers. Children learn communication skills by watching how you socialize with others – and how you interact with them. Making conversation with someone new involves both trading information as well as active listening (keeping eye contact, remaining quiet and responding verbally). When you do those things, children will follow your lead. During play dates or other social events, encourage your child to meet new people and practice these skills. You can also provide practice time at dinner or in the car through active conversation and sharing and listening.

Be “friendly.” Encourage your child to take turns, use nice manners and respect the personal space of others. Playing board games with children can help them acquire and practice some of these early skills. For older children issues like keeping secrets, showing empathy and fitting in will become bigger issues. These issues can be best addressed through open conversation and role playing. Know who your child’s friends are and when issues pop up, listen, get both sides of the story and provide guidance where you can – and when appropriate, let the kids try to work things out on their own.

Assist children in managing their feelings. Children who struggle to manage their emotions and actions may often be rejected by their peers. Many children will learn to cope from watching the adults in their life. [Modeling appropriate ways](#) to express anger and frustration are especially important as are learning cooperation. It’s important that children’s feelings are validated, so be sure to listen and give empathy when setting expectations for children’s behavior.

Giving your child the chance to play with other children from preschool or playgroup can help them put into practice the skills that have been worked on at home. [Talk to other parents](#) about playdates, either at your home, at a local park or somewhere else that gives the children plenty of space and things to play with, and watch their friendships bloom!