

Helping Your Child Make and Keep Friends



Highlights

Making friends is important for children's development, but it isn't always easy.

How your child makes friends will change as they grow up.

There are ways you can help them to make friends and be a good friend.

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Why is it important for my child to make friends?

Having friends is important for everyone. A friend is someone to confide in and get advice from.

For children, making friends is an important part of their development.

Learning to get along with friends builds your child's self-esteem and sense of identity. It can also teach them important skills, such as:

Social skills

How to be respectful and caring

How to share, take turns, and manage conflict

Friends are also important for physical health. Playing with friends often involves physical activity.

Children can have different types of friendships, including:

Best friends

Friends they play with in a group

How do young children make friends?

Some children will find it easier to make friends than others. One child might love interacting with other children. Another may be quieter and prefer to watch rather than join in.

How young children make friends will depend on their age and development.

From one year old When your child is a toddler, they will start to show kindness and respond to the feelings of others. As they develop language skills, they will form relationships.

From three years old From 3 years old, children often meet others at playgroup or childcare. They are likely to play with the children you introduce them to. They may start to play structured games that may involve rules and responsibilities. Some children may develop their social skills through having imaginary friends.

From four years old From age 4, children usually have friends at preschool or daycare. They might play with different children each day. These friendships can be one-sided.

Older children Older, school-age children will start to form lasting, supportive

friendships. As they grow, your child will become more understanding of any differences between them and their friends. School-age children will also learn to deal with conflict.

How can I help my child make friends?

Children need different skills to make friendships last. For example, they need to practise how to:

- Share
- Listen to others
- Handle conflict

Some of the ways you can help your child learn to get along with others include:

- Showing them how to take turns
- Playing games with them so they can learn how to follow the rules
- Teaching them that it is okay to lose at games
- Showing through your own friendships what it means to be a good friend

You can teach your child how to listen to others and understand other people's feelings by:

- Talking about different scenarios and how they might make different people feel
- Showing them how facial expressions and body language can mean different things

Teach your child to talk to others by encouraging them to:

- Make eye contact and take turns when speaking
- Be curious and ask questions
- Talk about things that they like

You can create situations for your child to interact with others, to practice making friends. For example, you can:

- Organise playdates
- Take your child to meet others at a park
- Enrol your child in activities like sport or drama

How can I help when friendships go wrong?

Parents are often worried about their children's friendships. It's common for children to come home and say that:

They don't have friends
No-one likes them
They have fallen out with a friend

My child is falling out with a friend
When your child is playing with a friend, watch out for conflict. Try not to interfere straight away. It's important that your child learns how to manage their friendships by themselves.

You can help your child learn to manage their emotions. Teach them:

To pause when they feel like they are getting upset and angry
To take deep breaths
To think about how they are feeling
To think about how their friend might be feeling
How to decide what to do, maybe by talking to their friend or by taking a break

If your child has a fight with a friend, talk about what happened. This can help them understand why they or their friend are upset. You can role play ways to make up with their friend. Help them learn that:

Saying sorry is better than staying angry
Everyone makes mistakes

My child is struggling to make friends
If your child is struggling to make friends, they might:

Appear anxious
Not eat their lunch
Avoid daycare or school

To help them, you can:

Ask them how they are feeling

Encourage them to tell you if they are having friendship troubles

Work to build their self-esteem

Teach them how to play with other children

Urge them to keep trying and practicing social skills

Tools And Assistance

If you're concerned about your child's friendships, you can talk to your child's teacher. They can help your child at school. They can also talk with you about how the preschool or school can help your child feel included. You can also talk to:

Your doctor

A child health nurse