



Friends Summary

Why Friends?

Helping your child to grow healthy friendships is essential. Through relationships, your child develops a sense of belonging. They come to better understand themselves through their interactions with their peers. And friends contribute to their sense of wellbeing.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“How can you start new friendships?”*
- *“What do you think it means to be a good friend? How does a good friend act?”*
- *“What would you like others to do to reach out to you?”* (Do they want to be included in games or fun activities?)
- *“How can you adopt those qualities and actions? How can you be the one to include others?”*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Tip Grab a large newsprint sheet of paper or poster board. Ask your child, *“What’s your favorite hero, book character, or movie character?”* Have them draw the hero on the poster board. Now list the many characteristics that hero might possess in being a good friend - *“Are they kind? Do they help others? Do they accept others for who they are?”*

Tip Sometimes feeling the need for friends, especially when you feel like you don’t have many, can make a child feel alone, vulnerable, and different. Reassure your child that it’s normal for any person to want to grow friendships. We all go through challenging times trying to find new friends.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model introductions for your child during regular weekly activities. *“Hi. I come in here weekly, and you’ve helped me many times. What is your name? It’s nice to meet you. This is my daughter.”*
- Introduce yourself and your child at new program drop offs (like first day of school or camp): *“Hi. We are excited to start. I’m Ian’s Mom, Kathy, and this is Ian.”*
- Brainstorm ideas together for ways to start up a connection: *“Are you both interested in animals? What does he enjoy that you would like to learn about?”*

- Try out listening strategies. Good friends are skilled listeners. (See listening tool for more!)
- Practice I-messages to disagree kindly: *“I feel frustrated when you talk over me, because I really want to tell you my story.”*

Tip Pick one style of listening, announce your plan to try out active listening at dinner, and engage in it with your family during a weeknight meal together.

Tip When it comes to figuring out who to invite over and when, follow your child’s lead. Who does your child talk about at home? That’s a perfect place to begin.

Tip Our children have plenty of time for screen time. Playdates should not be one of them. Adopt the motto: “Friends before screens.” Get out some novelty toys to attract their attention.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use “Show me…” statements like *“Show me how you can listen at dinner without interrupting.”*
- Recognize effort: *“I noticed how you used an I-message with your sister when you got frustrated. That’s excellent!”*
- Schedule playdates. They build connections and help your child practice the skills.
- Proactively remind: *“Remember when you walk in, you can introduce yourself?”*

Tip Use your child’s favorite stuffed friends or action figures to practice introductions or I-messages. For example, Luke (you) might say: *“I feel upset when you slash at me with your lightsaber, because I don’t want to get hurt.”*

Trap Don’t push your child to interact when you’re in public situations. This can embarrass them making it less likely that they’ll risk interacting with a new peer. Allow your child time and space to make connections recognizing it takes great courage to do so.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions: *“Did you sit with someone at lunch today? What did you play at recess?”*
- Reflect on outcomes: *“Remember we met Sam together on your first day of school and you are still hanging out with him? He’s become a good friend.”*
- Stay engaged. Ask yourself if you need to reteach or make changes.
- Engage in further practice. Role play or rehearse when needed.
- Follow through with logical consequences to repair hurt feelings when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *“I noticed you introduce yourself to the other girl at the market. Yes! Excellent.”*

- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

Tip Be specific. “Good job” seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - “*You went and found a common interest with the new girl you met. Love seeing that!*” - can promote more of the same.

Trap Avoid stickers, gifts, or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a demotivating effect on children. They will have a natural motivation to make friends. Focus on the basic human need for friendship as the best reward.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child’s success today and in their future!

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