

Friendship skills: Suggestions for families

Parents and carers are children's first and most important teachers when it comes to relationships

The ways you relate to your children and the guidance you provide helps develop children's social skills. You can help children develop and maintain friendships by modelling effective social skills, providing opportunities for children to practise interacting with others, and offering support when they go through difficulties. Taking the role of a coach helps children learn the skills they need for themselves.



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The following suggestions may be helpful

Make time to play too

Parents and carers can improve their children's social skills by playing with them regularly. Letting children choose and lead the play allows you to be playful with them and encourages them to practise skills for cooperation and negotiation. Making time for play helps strengthen your relationship with them as well as their skills. Avoid criticising and make it fun!

Allow your child to try all sorts of different activities

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Invite children for play dates

Having friends over to visit helps children to establish friendships and practise their social skills. It also provides an opportunity for you to provide on-the-spot coaching for children as they develop their friendship skills. Providing positive guidance and helping to structure activities (without taking over!) can be very important when establishing new friendships.

Child says...

"There's this girl in my class who is really mean to everyone in class, and so we are all mean right back to her."

"Maybe she thinks we don't like her, and so she's being mean to us?"

"Well, I like her when she's not being mean."

"Maybe I could invite her over to play after school?"

Talk with children about what is happening for them with their friends

Find a relaxed time, like the drive home from school or after dinner, to talk about what is happening in your children's friendship group. By doing this, you let them know that you are interested in their wellbeing, and this can also be an opportunity to share some of your experiences and to help them solve any problems they might have.

Encourage positive, relevant strategies

Parents and carers can talk about, and encourage, friendly and cooperative strategies that can help their child to develop friendships. For example, encouraging children to negotiate or compromise when trying to solve conflicts with peers is a strategy that is more positively received than aggression or verbal threats.

Take a problem-solving approach

Parents and carers don't need to have the answers to all of their children's problems. You can support your children to think through a problem for themselves by talking with them and asking some useful questions. For example:

Parent/carer asks...

"Why do you think she is being so mean?"

"That could be one reason. Do you like her?"

"So how could you show her that you do like her, and that there's no need for her to be mean?"

Affirms: "That sounds like a great idea to me."

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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