



Many children seem to attract friends like magnets. They seem to always be surrounded by other boys and girls and never have a problem finding someone to play with. For others, making and keeping friends comes with a little more effort. What can you do to help support your children's efforts in friendship building?

Children's social skills develop in predictable stages. When they are toddlers, children are not really interested in friends, although they may play side-by-side. Two year olds and even young threes are still only concerned with themselves as they play and will likely interact only when they see another child with something they want. Children begin to make friends and cooperate in play as four and five year olds. Friendships become very important to the kindergarten and the primary age child.

Our mission is to promote family involvement by providing information on topics of interest in early childhood education to the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.

Building Friendships



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Not all children are eager to have lots of friends. Even though they may enjoy certain aspects of spending time with other children, they sometimes prefer playing alone or with a few select friends.

Social skills can be taught! Parents can help a child understand how their actions are viewed by other children. This takes patience and problem solving routines. When a child has interacted in a group and been rejected, questions like these from a caring and watchful parent can help:

- “What happened?”
- “What did you do?”
- “Why do you think they didn’t want you to play with them?”
- “What could you do next time?”
- “What would have been a better way to let them know how you felt?”

Give your child opportunities to play with other children his or her age in your home. Help him or her succeed with one or two friends at a time. Choose a playmate from school or the neighborhood to invite over to your home for an afternoon. Plan ahead with your child some of the activities and toys they might enjoy together. Some ideas include:

- Purchase a special toy that is reserved for times when friends come over to play. Bake cookies together to take to a sick friend. Have a dress-up drawer with old hats, shoes, ties, purses, wigs mirrors scarves and other play items..
- Read books together about how friends act toward one another. Sometimes a child can work out problems with friends by reading about others who have had problems with friends and found ways to solve them.
- Encourage your child by reminding him/her what a good friend he/she is to you!



Provide opportunities for your child to develop relationships with peers. Children need practice in order to learn to share, take turns, resolve conflict, and feel the joy of friendship. Playing together gives children all of this—plus a chance for parents to connect with other adults, too! At this age, being present during play dates is important as children often need help learning and practicing their new friendship skills. And it's a good rule of thumb to keep play dates short for little ones—45 minutes-to-an-hour is about right for most toddlers. For older toddlers, you can use their playtime with peers to nurture relationship-building skills by:

- Suggesting, when appropriate, that children turn to peers for assistance or to get answers to their questions: “You are wondering how to get the little doll to sit in the high chair? Why don’t you ask Jeremy? I just saw him feeding her a few minutes ago.”
- Asking children to imagine how their behavior might affect others: “I see that you told Greta that she can’t play ball with you. How do you think that made her feel?”
- Encouraging children to work in groups or as teams, when appropriate: “Sam and Kyle, could you please put the cars away? Then you can help me get your snack ready.”
- Helping children to see others’ points of view, which encourages empathy: “Casey is feeling sad because his mom had to go.”

References:

Some of the information for this brochure was taken from:
www.zerotothree.org
Supporting Your Child’s Relationship-Building Skills