



# Supporting Your Child's Friendship in Primary School

Parents are often concerned about their child's friendships, if they have the skills to make friends, and whether they have enough of them. Learning how to make and keep friends is an important part of growing up and there are ways as parents that you can support your child's growth in this area.



Here are some tips and ideas on how you can help support your child.

## Why are friendships important

Friendships are important for school age children as having friends is good for self-esteem and wellbeing. When a child has good friends they feel like they belong, and when a friend cares about them they will feel good about themselves. Playing with others is more than just something kids do to pass time. It can teach turn-taking, sharing, and cooperation. Friendships help children to develop life skills such as getting along with others and sorting out conflicts. Children who have problem solving skills and the ability to get along with others, are less likely to have social-emotional difficulties later in life.

## Friendship skills

Every child does not automatically have the skills to make and keep friends. Some children will need more help than others.

## Social Reminders

Your child may benefit from simple social reminders. This may include reminding them to introduce themselves to new people or saying hi to their friends and classmates when they see them. Shy or reluctant children may need help practicing social statements such as "Hi Mary, can I play with you?" or "That looks fun, can I join in?" Having a rehearsed statement ready to go can make social situations easier for shy or worried children.

## Role model skills

Role model being a good friend and using friendship skills. Talk to your child about what they see you do. When reading stories or watching movies point out and discuss the friendship skills you see the characters using. Encourage your child to listen to others, to play co-operatively, and to speak positively. Help your child to think of ways to be kind to others. Let your child see you use these skills. Teach your child the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships – a good friend will make them feel good about themselves.

## Opportunities

Provide your child with opportunities to make friends or to build friendships. This allows them to practice the skills that you have been teaching and modelling for them. This may include joining non-competitive activity groups such as scouts or drama.

## Playdates

Playdates can be very effective in supporting friendship development if they are done well. If your child is struggling with friendship skills keep playdates short and structured. Support you child in any area of play that they have difficulty.



Try to start a playdate with a snack and drink to help everyone relax. Talk with the children about what they can do and areas that they can play in. Plan some activities such as craft, baking, building a fort, or outside play. Cooperative play is better than competitive play such as board games or video games.

Stay nearby while the children play so that you are available in case they need assistance. Coach them through any problems that arise and support them to problem solve. Try not to just provide them with the solution and encourage them to think for themselves. Praise them when they play cooperatively or solve a problem.

If frustrations arise offer the children a break from their play and redirect to a different task that is not as challenging.

If a play date at home is not possible invite the other child to an activity (library, movie, swimming) or a playground. This will not be as structured, but you can still be nearby to guide and encourage.

## Help with friendship troubles

If your child is having difficulties with an on-going friendship you can support them at home. Listen to their worries or concerns about the friendship. Ask open ended and exploratory questions (tell me more, can you explain that to me?). Empathise with how your child is feeling and ask them how you can help. Brainstorm ideas with them to help them navigate the difficulty. Keep the conversation going so they feel they can talk to you anytime.

If it appears that your child is being treated unkindly or is being bullied by a school friend, approach your child's teacher or school for direction and support.



## Stay connected with friends in the holidays

The school holidays can pose challenges to friendships. Help your children to think of ways to maintain their friendships and social connections. Make plans to meet with friends before the holidays start.

## Seek additional help if needed

If you feel that your child needs more support with friendship skills than you can provide, you can ask the school for support or seek out a social skills group for children in your area. You may be able to access social skills support from a private Speech pathologist or Psychologist.

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## You can also find helpful information at:

[KidsHelpline.com.au](http://KidsHelpline.com.au)  
1800 55 1800

[RaisingChildren.net.au](http://RaisingChildren.net.au)

[BeYou.edu.au](http://BeYou.edu.au)



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