

FIVE WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN MAKE FRIENDS

FRIENDSHIPS LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR STRONG SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS, HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM AND BETTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.

Cultivating friendships during the early years offers a variety of settings for children to pick up and practise social, communication, cognitive and emotional skills. Support from friends helps them cope better with changes and stress. The art of making friends involves learning to share, taking turns to listen and speak in a conversation, and showing consideration and empathy towards others, among other skills. Here are five ways parents can support their children as they take their first steps towards making meaningful, lasting friendships.



1 SHOW YOUR CHILD HOW TO BE A FRIEND

Children learn from watching what you do. Show them how you behave and communicate with your own buddies. Model desirable behaviours such as greeting your friends politely, initiating and maintaining conversations, and showing respect and concern. Refrain from belittling, bullying or gossiping about your friends.



2 CURATE THE MEDIA THEY ARE EXPOSED TO

Select books, movies and videos that celebrate friendship as a starting point to talk about different aspects of friendship. It is a fun and easy way to engage children and teach them to recognise the qualities of a good friend and what a healthy relationship looks like.

3 BE THEIR EMOTIONAL COACH

Falling out with friends happens from time to time. Encourage children to talk about their feelings rather than trivialising them (e.g. "You're being silly/sensitive"). Do not simply punish children for lashing out or throwing a tantrum. Teach them to recognise and control their emotions. For example, ask your child: "What can you do when you get angry or frustrated?"



4 EXPLORE SOCIAL SITUATIONS TOGETHER

Young children are still learning to regulate their emotions and behaviours. Some may behave impulsively, while others may be shy. Role-playing is one way for children to practise and rehearse their responses. Talk to them about social cues. For example, ask your child: "How do you make your friend feel welcome?" or "How do you know if your friend is unhappy?"



5 ENCOURAGE ACTIVITIES THAT FOCUS ON COOPERATION

On play dates, suggest games where children work toward a common goal, such as scavenger hunts, puzzles, and arts and crafts. Avoid toys that discourage social interaction such as video games, or toy weapons that provoke aggression or conflict. Oversee play dates with toddlers, as they need close supervision to guide them on appropriate behaviours. Give older children space to work things out on their own, so that they get a chance to flex their social skills.