



## Children's Friendships

Working out peer relationships is an important part of school-age years. Children's friendships do more than provide them with playmates today—they are key building blocks for children's development and adjustment as adults. Friendships, for example, help children learn social skills, problem-solving skills and self-confidence.

Loving and nurturing family relationships give children a good foundation for moving out into the social world. What else can parents do to help their children navigate peer relations?

- **Provide opportunities** for your children to socialize. Inviting a friend to your house to play is one option. Organized group activities such as sports, dance classes, art or nature classes, or special-interest clubs are another. Some children who are shy may find it easier to socialize in a group that is focused on a special interest, rather than in a free-play situation. Others may prefer one-on-one play in their own home.
- **Respect your child's individuality.** One child may like to have one "best friend" while another may be happiest with a variety of friends. What matters is what is satisfying and comfortable for your child—which may be different from your own social style. While it is reasonable to be concerned about a child who seems to have no friends, a variety of friendship patterns can work for children.

- **Talk with your child** about social situations and their feelings and experiences with friends. Problem-solve together ways to handle difficulties with other children. Help your child learn empathy by talking about what others in a situation may have been feeling. Try to model a balanced approach to friendships — you can sympathize, for example, without blowing a problem with a friend out of proportion.
- **Let your children and their friends solve conflicts themselves** as much as possible. Children tend to have more conflict with their own friends than with other children. If a disagreement bubbles up when your child is playing with a friend, give them a chance to work it out before you intervene.
- **Talk to your school counselor** if you are concerned about your child's peer relationships. Children who are rejected or ignored by their peers may benefit from the counselor's support or local resources they can identify.



## Giving to Others

### ***Donate Old Toys***

Make a list of local charities that need children's toys. Talk over the list with your child and select one to which you will make a family donation.

Go through your child's toys together and identify ones that could be donated to a charity—toys your child has outgrown, presents he already had, or toys that have never interested her.

Sort them into two boxes: Ready-to-Go and Fixer-Uppers. Go through the Fixer-Uppers together, cleaning and making repairs. Depending on how many toys you collect and their condition, this project may stretch out over some time.

When the toys are ready, take them to the charity together.

### ***Donate Time***

Make a list of local charitable or community activities that would be suitable for a child and that you could do together. A local foodbank or other organization that collects things might welcome your help in boxing items or stacking them. Or volunteer to help clean up a local park on a Saturday afternoon. Or call your PTA president and volunteer to organize a parent-child clean-up day for the playground.



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