

Provide your child with many chances to play with neighborhood children, classmates, teammates, and others. The more practice they get using their new skills, the more their confidence grows.



Give positive and helpful feedback on the child's progress.

Children respond well to rewards. Notice when your child uses a new social skill, either in role-play or in "real life." You should encourage more of the same actions with praise, hugs, and smiles.

Tell the child what he did correctly and talk about what might happen if he continues to use his new social skills.

Keep corrections as positive as possible by asking, "What could you do instead? What might happen?"

Have patience.

It takes time to make friends. Support your children while they're learning difficult new skills.

Putting Knowledge to Work



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GALE A. BUCHANAN, DEAN & DIRECTOR

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Helping Children Make Friends



The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

College of Family and Consumer Sciences
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Helping Children Make Friends

Friends are not a luxury; they are a necessity!

Experiences with other children are needed for social and emotional growth. Making friends comes naturally to many children, but for some children it takes lots of trial and error.



It is a fact that some children are given the cold shoulder by their peers and classmates. When you watch these friendless children in action, some behaviors are easy to see. These children may be bossy, loud, sarcastic, impolite, or violent.

Children who are “well liked” do have certain social skills.

- They know how to break the ice with people they have never met before.
- They have positive attitudes and reactions.
- They know how to manage conflict.

Children who lack these skills can learn them, and the happy result is usually improved “likability” and more friends.

Social skills may not turn unpopular children into friendship magnets, but they will give children the tools they need to make one or two good friends. It’s the quality, not the quantity, of friendships that matters.

What can you do?

Parents can help children develop the skills they need to make and keep friends.

Show and tell: social skills.

Be specific when you talk about social skills with your child. If you say, “be nice,” explain that it means smiling, saying “please” and “thank you,” and sharing. Violent behavior (hitting, biting, kicking, stealing, or swearing) will not win any friends.

Talk about different reactions and possible results to show the benefits of using new behaviors.

Demonstrate good social skills yourself. Treating your own friends well shows your child how much you value friendship.

Understanding normal child development.

Young children learn their first friendship skills from their relationships with their most important caregivers (usually parents). When those relationships are based on trust, consistency, and support, children soon learn to use their friendship skills with other people they meet.

All children grow through stages, and these stages include developing the ability to make

friends. For example, most children younger than two don’t understand the idea of sharing. That idea is much easier for them to learn when they get a little older. Empathy, the ability to understand how their behavior affects other people, is also learned gradually. Many children are not able to grasp the long-term impact of their current behavior until they are 12 or 13.



Provide opportunities for the child to practice social skills.

Children do not learn just by seeing and talking about new information. They need “doing” experiences, too. Practice using a new skill in short role-play situations (5-10 minutes).

Give the child a chance to practice the skills in everyday life. For example, for a child who is usually loud and bossy, reply, “When you speak softly and say please, then I will answer your question.”

Quietly observe the other children around your child. Are they using the negative behaviors you’re trying to change? Maybe it’s time for some new friends.