



Help Your Child Learn Friendship Skills

We use our social skills every day – greeting a neighbor, giving someone a compliment, talking with your child’s teacher, getting along with co-workers, asking a salesperson about a product, or making new friends. These “friendship skills” are key to being a successful adult. You can help your child learn these skills by giving him or her time to talk and listen to people, play with others, and meet new people. Give your child a jumpstart on learning friendship skills:

INFANT:

- Talk with your child often. During baths, diapering, and over dinner are great times to start conversations with your child. Be sure to listen to your child’s “responses,” which may only be a smile at first, and then answer her. This will help your child see that conversations are two-sided and involve talking *and* listening.
- Introduce your child to new places. Let him spend time looking at his new surroundings. Talk with your child about what you see.

TODDLER:

- Encourage your child to use good manners when asking for a snack or drink. Remind him to say *please* and *thank you*.
- Help your child learn to wait. Waiting helps your child learn self-control and teaches him that others have needs too. Use a timer to help her understand how long “a minute” takes (e.g. “I’m going to set the timer for one minute, when it beeps, we will go play your game.”). When longer waits are required, prepare your child by explaining how long the wait will be; use distractions – small toys, books, crayons – to help her pass the time. Remember, what you do is a more powerful teaching tool than what you say: Are you able to wait patiently?

PRESCHOOLERS:

- Arrange “play dates” for your child, either have a friend come to your house, meet a friend in the park, or let your child go to a friend’s house. This helps build friendships with peers. If the play date is with a new friend, consider staying with your child until she feels comfortable.
- Role-play (rehearse) key social skills: meeting a new person, talking politely, using good table manners, or what to do when friends are not getting along. Use imaginary friends or stuffed animals to act out or practice different scenarios.
- Practice popular children’s games — kickball, Duck-Duck-Goose, Simon Says, Bingo, etc. If your child knows the rules of the games, he will feel more confident and be more likely to play these games with other children.
- Ask your child to draw a picture of someone being a good friend and a second picture of someone not being a good friend. Then, talk with her about what it means to be a good friend.

Book Suggestions

Chester’s Way. Kevin Henkes. Greenwillow Books, 1988.