

SOLUTION.

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

Helping your child develop friendship skills



Making friends can be a challenge for some children. Social skills are the skills we use to communicate with others. Some children find it difficult to understand and use social skills needed to help with making and keeping friendships. Some children need some extra support to help them develop some of these social skills to help them make friends.

Here are some tips that you could try at home to help support the growth of your child's social skills and friendships:

CO-OPERATIVE GAMES

Encourage your child to participate in cooperative games and activities with other children where the children involved all work towards a common goal.

This can help your child to connect with other children in a way that does not involve the children competing against each other. Examples of cooperative games are jigsaw puzzles, or children all working on building a craft activity together. While cooperative games are great, it's also okay for your child to play on their own sometimes. Children experiencing playing alone can help them learn how to be comfortable and creative while alone, and can help them to learn how to enjoy their own company.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Encouraging your child to become involved in extracurricular activities can help your child meet children with similar interests.

This might include involvement with sports, art clubs, dancing, or anything else your child is interested in.

CONNECTING WITH PARENTS

Connecting with parents of other children can help to foster connections between children. Meeting up with other parents and their children after school at the local playground for a play date may help your child to connect with others.

These meet-ups could provide the opportunity for you to discuss your child's common interests with parents of other children, and different activities your child and the other children could do based on these interests.

ROLE PLAYING

If your child finds it challenging to start conversations with other children, it can be helpful to practice these conversation starters at home together.

You and your child could discuss different topics they find interesting that they could chat with other children about, or games they could ask other children to play with them.

This can help to build your child's confidence in their skills, and to give them some guidance and structure from which to start a conversation.

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PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Perspective taking skills are the skills used to understand how someone else may be thinking or feeling, or why someone might be behaving in a certain way. Perspective taking skills are helpful in developing and maintaining friendships. Some children need some extra support to grow their perspective taking skills. Here are some tips on how to support your child's skills:

- When reading books, watching videos, or playing games together, point out characters, and ask your child to describe how that character might be feeling, and why they might be feeling that way
- Pretend play - When children engage in pretend play where they play the role of someone else, this play often involves having to understand the thoughts and feelings of the pretend character. Involvement in activities and events involving drama and acting might help your child's perspective taking skills grow

TURN TAKING

Sometimes children find turn-taking challenging. Turn-taking skills can be really helpful in maintaining friendships. Some children need some extra support to learn how to take turns. The following tips may be helpful to support your child's turn-taking skills:

- Use a visual cue to show your child whose turn it is during turn-taking activities. The person whose turn it is might hold a special toy or card, for instance.
- Model turn-taking behaviour to your child. This might involve going around the dinner table at dinner time and each person taking a turn to speak about a topic or their day
- Use a timer to show how long a child has left of their turn playing with a toy or game, for instance
- Play games which involve turn-taking, such as board games. Try to indicate whose turn it is by saying 'my turn' and 'your turn' throughout the game

WINNING AND LOSING

Provide opportunities for your child to experience losing at a game so that they can learn how to cope with losing. Playing family board games is a helpful way to practice this. Normalise losing to your child by showing your child that you recognise that it can feel upsetting to lose sometimes, and emphasise how great it was that your child tried so hard. Model good attitudes when losing in front of your child. When your child wins, praise your child for their efforts, and remind them that it's helpful to say 'good job' to the person who loses in a game and to be respectful of their feelings. It can help to link back to how your child felt when they lost, and what would have been nice for someone to do or say to them when they lost.

