

SOLUTION.

DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIP SKILLS

Helping your teenager develop friendships



Positive, accepting and supportive friendships are an important part of the journey to adulthood for your teenager. For some teenagers, it can be tough to make friends, particularly during remote learning periods and lockdowns. Some teenagers need some extra support to develop and maintain friendships. Here are some tips which might help you and your teenager with their developing friendships:

ENCOURAGE REFLECTION

Encourage your teenager to reflect on and discuss with you what they feel are qualities they appreciate in a friend, and what qualities they think others appreciate in them as a friend. Encouraging your teenager to think about what they value in friendships may help them to feel more aware of the types of connections they are seeking with others, as well as develop your teenager's confidence in and awareness of their own positive qualities.

BRAINSTORMING TOGETHER

Your teenager might be feeling worried about what they might do or say in certain social situations. It can be helpful to discuss different social scenarios your teenager is feeling worried about, and to brainstorm together ways that your teenager potentially could cope with that situation, as well as strategies they might have used in the past to help. This may help your teenager to feel more prepared for social situations as they will have a mental toolkit to draw upon when in need.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Encourage your teenager to become involved in extracurricular activities that suit their strengths and interests. This might be sports clubs, school holiday programs, or online clubs. Involvement in activities outside of school can help to build your teenager's confidence, as well as provide the chance for them to bond with other people with similar interests.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Encourage your teenager to become involved in the community. This could be through volunteering or through a part-time job. Working in a place with other people your teenager's age can provide them with a chance to build connections and practice their social skills in a structured environment. Try to remind your teenager that forming friendships can take a little while. To support your teenager's confidence, encourage and praise your teenager's attempts to connect with other teenagers.

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CONVERSATION STARTERS

If your teenager finds it challenging to start conversations with others, it can be helpful to practice these conversation starters at home together. You and your teenager could discuss different topics they find interesting that they could chat with other teenagers about, or activities they could ask others to do with them. This can help to build your teenager's confidence in their skills, and to give them some guidance and structure from which to start a conversation.

JOINING FRIEND GROUPS

Sometimes it can be challenging to know how to naturally join in on a group of people who are talking. Discuss and brainstorm with your teenager ways that they could know how to best enter a group conversation. Some strategies your teenager might try are:

- Before entering a group, observe the group from a distance for a little while
- Approach the group and try to make eye contact, particularly with someone you might already know
- Make sure you feel comfortable with the topic the group is discussing or activity the group is doing before trying to enter
- Wait for a break in conversation to say something
- Show an interest in the conversation by asking questions, nodding your head, making occasional eye contact with speakers, and leaving gaps for others to make comments and be a part of the conversation as well

Some of these skills might help your teenager feel more confident about approaching groups.

FINDING A GROUP

Spend time chatting with your teenager about where they feel they fit in best, and what group or crowd they feel most comfortable around. Chat with your teenager about some common interests, strengths or topics they have with the groups they feel most comfortable around so that your teenager could chat about these topics when approaching people with similar interests as them. Discuss your teenager's strengths and what makes them great, unique and special. This can help to build your teenager's self-esteem and confidence when approaching new friends.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

Below are some community youth support groups and activities which are run in the Western suburbs of Melbourne through Brimbank City Council which may help your teenager to feel more connected:

- Youth In-Search Program - Mentoring and peer support program
<https://brimbankyouth.com/programs/youth-insearch/>
- Empowering Moves Program - Social group fitness program
<https://brimbankyouth.com/programs/empowering-moves/>
- B-Heard Youth Support Program - Community youth support service
<https://brimbankyouth.com/programs/b-heard-youth-support-program/>

Many other groups and activities can be found on the Brimbank Youth Directory at:
<https://brimbankyouthdirectory.com/>

