

PARENT Talk



Before Friendships Can Form

Children are never lonely when they have best friends with whom to share giggles, secrets, and a game of tag, toys, sad times or an ice cream cone.

Children who feel good about themselves, share with others, console their friends and relate well with adults are attractive to other children. Parents want their children to be social, happy and popular with others, because they may recall lonely moments from their own childhood.

When a child cries, "Nobody likes me," parents remember the pain and loneliness of being excluded or being the last child chosen for the team or having childhood difficulties in learning social skills.

Realistic self-image important

Social skills and the first signs of friendship begin during the toddler years, but at ages 6 to 8, a child's image of himself or herself in relation to peers becomes very important.

Children with a realistic understanding of themselves are likely to make friends more easily than those children whose self-image is inflated or weak.

Adequate self-esteem in children is essential to developing friendships. Parents can be most helpful by clearly looking at their child and setting realistic expectations.

If a child has been strongly criticized, his or her self-image may be too low to make friends. On the other hand, if a child believes himself or herself to be a "super kid," other children may avoid him or her.

It is important for parents to remember that children have different social habits. Young children tend to like other children who are similar; older children find friends who have different interests.

If there's a problem, adults can help

If a child has not gained the necessary social skills for making friends, parents can offer support.

Whatever the problem, listen carefully to what a child is saying and feeling. Let the youngster know you understand his or her feelings, and then offer suggestions for improvement through humor or a game.

Daily positive reinforcement is one way to help a child modify his or her behavior. That is, when a youngster is making a sincere effort or showing signs of progress, compliment him or her.

Parents can be supportive as children identify areas where they lack skills or confidence. Poor reading skills or being overweight, for example, may make a child feel inadequate socially.

Helping children learn to like themselves and cope with disappointments is the basis for developing confidence.

Allow for differences between children

Of course, not all children are sociable to the same degree. Some children are loners and less outgoing than others. The overriding question is whether a child seems happy and content. If so, then a child's socialization is probably OK.

In addition, parents need to help their youngster realize what qualities – beyond appearances – they like in friends. Friends may be special because they are kind, obedient to their parents, a good student, and a hard worker, honest and fun to be with.

Childhood friendships may last for the week spent at camp, all summer until school begins, or for a lifetime.

Once children feel confident about themselves and their social skills, they may have best friends at school, church and in their neighborhood.

If you need more help ...

Call Crisis Services 24/7, at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, TTY users call (810) 232-6310. ©