



## What parents can do to help their child with friendships

Some parents may want the teacher to step in and 'fix' things for their child. This may be necessary in some circumstances, for example when bullying is occurring, however in most cases talking things through with your child and providing them with ample opportunities to practice their new skills in social situations is more powerful. It is important to remember that social and emotional competence develops over time, in the same way that literacy, numeracy and other skills are developed. These are twelve points that may be useful.

### 1. Don't be over-involved in the child's issues or harsh about their friends

- Over-involved parents can complicate things. Help problem solve, rather than getting involved in all the little details
- Over involvement by parents causes blaming and can make later change difficult for children
- Don't lay down harsh rules about friends – discuss benefits of the relationship

### 2. Address any learning difficulties, unresolved issues, disabilities or conditions

- If you are concerned about unresolved issues speak to a professional, such as your child's teacher, Principal, GP, or psychologist
- Academic performance, peer relationships, self-esteem, mood and personal organisation can be compromised by learning difficulties or other disorders
- Classroom failures can lead to frustration and make students vulnerable to peer rejection
- Monitor your child. Bullied children are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression than their peers <sup>1</sup>
- Anxious or depressed children are more likely to have less friends than other children



### 3. Identify with your child their strengths

- Help your child to find their talents and build on their interests
- Help your child realise their own strengths
- Put them in charge of things like putting furniture together, fixing things at home

### 4. Be a resilient and reflective parent who does not spoil their child

- Be resilient, understand children need to sort things out themselves, unless it is bullying
- Learn to remain calm and take responsibility for your own emotional reactions with others, your children can model your behaviour – good and bad
- Do not spoil your child or allow others to spoil your child. Spoilt children can, give-in easily, be mean, bossy, always wanting their way and can be angry

<sup>1</sup> Rigby, K. (1998). *The relationship between reported health and involvement in bully/victim problems among male and female secondary school students*. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 3(4), 465 - 476.

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## 5. Offer advice when requested and be available

- Assist and help them with decisions they make
- Be there when friendships break down or 'things happen'
- Encourage them to always do their best. Expect them to treat everyone the way they would like to be treated

## 6. Encourage children to speak, problem solve and be kind

- Encourage your child to speak up, to talk about and try to solve a concern or the problem
- Discourage verbal, physical aggression and threatening behaviour with siblings and others
- Discourage negative comments. For example, 'That's a crap picture!' They work against making friends

## 7. Invite or suggest other children come over

- Some parents don't invite others to play, which can make it harder for those who lack places to play safely, to make friends
- Set up easy situations so they can invite a friend e.g. make and eat a pizza and watch a video
- It can be hard and more work for parents but an open house policy, whereby children know their friends are welcome in your home to hang out, can assist with friendships

## 8. Be friends with your partner (if possible) and others

- Many children reflect parent behaviours. Treating other adults as friends is a very powerful way to demonstrate friendship
- Model social behaviour with your relatives and friends. Take every opportunity to go on outings and meet with relatives and friends, so your children can see friendships and pro-social behavior in action

## 9. Be involved in sports, community and school groups

- Allow your children to make friends in different settings; introduces them to a variety of peers
- Join groups such as dance or theatre groups, church youth groups, the Reach Foundation, adventure or camping groups, life saving, music, scouts, especially in the local community as there may be other children from your child's school which simplifies catching up

## 10. Talk about friends (when eating at the table, watching TV, cooking or driving) and build the relationship

- Talk about things you do with friends. Often we expect children to tell us about their day and friends but neglect to share ours with them
- Continue to build your relationship with your children by regularly chatting and talking with them and always being there for them throughout good and bad times



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### 11. Don't hide the fact that friendships need to be worked at

- Like all healthy relationships there will be ups and downs, but what's important is that you demonstrate that you value friendships enough to make an effort to work at them.
- Remind your child that most people have moments where friends may lack maturity and at times they may need to sort things out

### 12. Help ensure they feel safe

- Assess immediate play or leisure time environment, put strategies in place to reduce risk from harm, gangs, and anti-social behaviour
- Give some ideas about safe places such as at home, Aunt Deb's house and Ian's place, community centre, nearby coffee shop, local skate bowl
- Let them know there is nothing so bad it can't be talked about with a trusted adult.

## Notes about the child

### Strengths, interests, activities enjoyed, child's ideas and values

### Current friends, who the child plays with or naturally seems to gravitate towards

### Ideas to assist or things that can change

### Review

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