



No friends or few friends

Behaviour support and student management are key aspects of teaching. Teachers and other school professionals are constantly required to respond to challenging, difficult or emotionally 'needy' students on a day-to-day basis. The following strategies can be used as part of general teacher practice or more formally through the establishment of individual learning plans, behaviour support plans, student management plans or whole school management plans.

For guidelines, templates and more information on writing behavioural support plans, created by the Victorian State Government, Department of Education and Training, [click here](#).

Student strategy
1. Complete the Psych4Schools Making friend's questionnaire (Year 3 to Year 8).
Purpose. To assist the student to identify strengths and areas they can develop to improve peer acceptance and friendships.
Action. Assist students in Years 3 to 8, to complete the Psych4Schools Making friends questionnaire highlighting statements or phrases to identify areas they believe they need to work on. With the student, nominate 1 - 2 areas they will focus on during a 3 – 4 week period. Support the student by suggesting how one or more goals might be best achieved. Help keep goals realistic and achievable. One or two short weekly or fortnightly reviews with the teacher can clarify and reinforce targeted behaviours to help effective change to occur. Meetings should be encouraging with a focus on personal growth rather than causing the student to be embarrassed.

Teacher strategy
2. Give the student a prop to use in the school ground.
Purpose. To provide the student with an object that will draw other students to them in the playground, and encourage others to initiate appropriate social interactions with the student.
Action. Give the student an object such as a ball, large chalk for drawing on concrete, or a long skipping rope to take outside at recess and lunchtime. The student and others should see the object as desirable.



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Teacher strategy

3. Help students understand that real friendships are voluntary, and develop through trust, mutual respect, sharing, and give and take.

Purpose. To assist the student to understand that friendships often grow through activities people like to do with others (e.g. games, interests, passions), through sharing friends, having similar thoughts and ideas, or enjoying the same places and events. Friendship can also develop through an 'unexpected' event or situation.

Action. With the class, spend up to 10 to 15 minutes once a fortnight discussing friendship and related stories and activities, for example,

- Short stories from the book '[Unlikely Friendships](#)'.
- Newspaper articles about unlikely bonds and friendships that can form between animals such as '[You're just labradorable](#)'.
- Suitable content from the [Australian Children's Television Foundation](#) and the [Australian Centre for the Moving Image Generator](#).
- Friendships formed through sporting clubs, life saving clubs, associations such as scouts and guides, or examples of friendships students have observed through friends and family, such as parents or siblings forming effective friendships.

Teacher strategy

4. Give the student a classroom or school role.

Purpose. To give a student a sense of responsibility and meaning in the classroom, helping to build self-confidence and resourcefulness by assigning the student a role.

Action. Assign the student a role such as technology manager, weekly messenger, desk cleaner, pet-carer, bookshelf monitor, food or lunch order deliverer, lights and fans monitor, office messenger, chair stacker, telephone operator, pencils and texta monitor, Casual Relief Teacher assistant, paper passer, floor manager, door opener and greeter, tutor or buddy to younger students. Alternatively, arrange roles outside the classroom for example, Physical Education teacher assistant, School Maintenance assistant, veggie patch weeder, weekly reading to a beginner's class for the last 10 minutes of the school day.



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5. Implement a kindness program.

Purpose. To promote kindness and respect for others as these values are key determinates of peer acceptance.

Action. Challenge students to initiate at least one act of kindness towards a person at school and home each week. Consider rotating recipients to ensure all students are treated positively. For activity ideas and free lesson plans see the *Random acts of kindness foundation*. Acts of kindness at home could be established from the beginning of the school year or beginning of term as a weekly 'homework' task.

Make a large class poster or class book to share ideas and responses from recipients.

Teacher strategy

6. Targeted teaching of social skills.

Purpose. To provide feedback to students about how to improve socially.

Action. Work individually or with pairs of students. Identify one or two skill areas to develop and coach them at least twice a week. Choose pairs wisely.

Talk through a specific social skill and give feedback for a few minutes once or twice a week for several weeks (or more if needed). Though labour intensive, this will reduce the time spent assisting the student throughout the year with friendship difficulties, peer acceptance and/or behaviour problems.

Areas to develop may include: alternatives to hurting or 'bossing' others, reducing annoying behaviour, body language and personal space, how to join games or conversations, playing by the rules, speaking to others without using 'put downs' or aggressive language, or using social graces.

Set action-specific goals and revise regularly. An example of an action-specific goal: Engage in eye contact with the other person for most (at least 60%) of the conversation. If this is too confronting, have the student look at the other person's nose or forehead while they are talking. This is preferable to setting a general goal of improving eye contact.



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7. Teach social communication to the whole class for several minutes a few times per week.

Purpose. To explore social communication activities with the class and develop age appropriate social skills.

Action. Use one quick exercise from a social skills program each day, such as *Bounce back* or *Friendly Schools and Families* or ask a question such as 'What could you do if you had a best friend who didn't want to play with you today?' or for older students, 'What could you say to someone who borrowed \$5 a week ago and still has not returned it?' Have students discuss in pairs or small groups and report back to the class.

Teacher strategy

8. Teach reciprocity and sharing of thoughts as part of oral language groups or circle time activities.

Purpose. To understand that reciprocity and sharing of thoughts and ideas through social communication is integral to friendship and peer acceptance.

With increasing age, to get along with peers, students need to:

- **Learn to cope** with an occasional 'personal dig', nickname, or infrequent tease. While students should not tease one another, there are things they can learn to do and say to help reduce the likelihood of teasing. For example, on occasion are you in other people's faces, do you hog the goal area in ball games, are you 'rough' with others without realising?
- **Use social graces.** For example, remembering names and faces, knowing how to politely join in, exit or 'repair' conversations, knowing what to say to others when you are initially introduced, and how to apologise and make and give excuses.
- **Handle verbal conflict**, arguments and debates. For example, using a typical conflict situation, have two (linguistically able) students model a short banter where each student holds a different but valid perspective, such as, whether one needs to ask permission to join in group games during break times or whether they should be able to simply join in. Explore both perspectives.
- **Understand that the majority decision rules** in games and most social situations (as long as it is played safely and fits the school rules).
- **Appreciate that in certain situations, rules may be bent**, relaxed or broken. For example, when playing informal team games, some standard rules may be suspended or relaxed. For example, there may simply be a play on rule if the soccer ball goes out during a 5 or 10-minute game at recess.
- **Know how to justify behaviour.** For example, if you have been misunderstood or not listened to, ask others to listen for a moment, so you can restate your case or perspective.



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Action. Individually, in pairs, or in a small group, roll the Psych4Schools *Social Skills Dice*, to stimulate discussion based on the sentence starters. A class poster or a booklet that reflects examples of each of the social language skills can be made.

In circle time, students take turns to speak.

When working in pairs, or small groups each group reports back one or two interesting examples or interesting highlights to the class.

Teacher strategy

9. Teach the students how to handle social rebuffs and rejection.

Purpose. To provide the student with strategies to assist self-confidence improving the likelihood that they will try again, rather than give up after social rejection.

Action. Many students 'give up' after the first rejection or ask a closed question that can be responded to with a simple, 'No, you can't play!' rather than making an 'open' assertive statement or assertive action which improves the chances of being included in games or social situations. See table below for examples:

Unassertive statement or action	Likely outcome and response	Assertive statement or action	Likely outcome and response
'Can I please join in?'	'No!' Dejected student walks away.	Student is rebuffed. 'Okay, I will watch the first game, and then ask to play in the next game.'	'Sure, Jordan is about to finish up, so it's your turn next.'
Student stands nearby and watches others play 4 square.	Student misses out playing the game.	Student simply stands in line with other students who are waiting their turn.	Student gets to play and even survives several goes before getting out.
'No one let me play with them today!'	Student shuffles around the asphalt area feeling unhappy.	Student requests access to a class ball or arranges with the Physical Education teacher to borrow a ball for break times.	Other students ask if they can play and they all agree quickly on a game to be played.



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Student has been following others around.	'You're too weak to play with us, just p-off follower.'	'I do have a game to share that doesn't require super strength. It's called ... (marbles, jacks, chalk drawing) and I have it here in my pocket.'	One of the students says he is prepared to 'give-it-ago'. Eventually the others join in.
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As an additional activity, have groups of students brainstorm in writing typical issues that could confront them or others. Use the table headings above to produce wall charts to share with the class and classes across the year level.

Teacher strategy

10. Develop peer relationships by pairing positive like-minded students.

Purpose. To foster friendships among those who have not become friends on their own, but potentially may become friends through sharing mutual interests.

Action.

- Group or pair students who share common interests in class or in year level activities, or help the student to foster common interests with others. Group or pair students who are skilled or interested in for example, chess, collections, magic, performing or entertainment, cartooning or storyboarding, martial arts, athletics, swimming and so on.
- Work with the group or pair to assist in making a presentation about their interest.
- In addition, create lunchtime clubs, such as craft, gardening, chess, cricket, basketball and netball.

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