

## HOW CAN I...

# Help my child build positive, healthy friendships?

### Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- **Look for different ways for your child to meet other kids and make friends.** For younger kids, try setting up playdates at playgrounds, parks, libraries, or museums. For older kids, encourage them to try after-school teams and clubs.
- **Know your values.** Discuss what traits you value as a family - like kindness, honesty, or teamwork. Ask your child what qualities they think are important to find in a friend.
- **Teach good friend-making skills using real-life examples.** Talk to your child about your own valued friendships and how you treat one another. Show them what a healthy friendship can look like.
- **But also talk about setting friendship boundaries.** Teach your child how to say “no” politely if someone is not respecting their boundaries. Practice using phrases like “I don’t like that” or “I’m not comfortable with that.” Help them understand other people’s boundaries, too. Talk about how everyone has different comfort levels and needs.



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video on this topic.

## 8 Tips for Helping Kids Make and Keep Healthy Friendships

- 1. Create and support a variety of opportunities for socialization.** Focus on your child's interests and encourage activities where they can meet peers with similar interests, whether that be a sports team or theater.
- 2. Create an open and ongoing conversation about healthy relationships.** Discuss values with your children to help them understand what character traits are important to them and what they might look for in a friend.
- 3. Praise good friendship behaviors.** When you see your child being a good friend or notice them setting a healthy boundary — for instance, helping a friend with a problem or letting a friend know how they feel — don't be afraid to call it out and offer praise.
- 4. Model healthy relationships.** Your kids will learn just as much from your actions as from your words. Let them see how you act in your own healthy relationships, whether they are with your partner, a co-worker, or a longtime friend.
- 5. Help kids set their own boundaries.** Peer pressure starts young, and one of the most effective things parents can do is to help kids understand the importance of boundaries — and that they are a two-way street.
- 6. Practice at home.** A child's first understanding of how to behave in any relationship comes from their family. It's worth taking the time to model and use good communication skills with other family members. Even simple activities like playing board games or cleaning up together can help kids see how important it is to work together or wait to take your turn.
- 7. Work on problem solving skills.** Conflict is a normal part of even the best relationships — but how you deal with it can make or break a friendship. This is why learning to solve problems before they happen is important. Teach kids how to think from another person's point of view. Building skills like empathy and understanding can help kids work things out on their own.
- 8. Be involved, but not too involved.** For little kids, you can arrange and be present at a playdate — but give them space to figure things out in a safe environment. For older kids, you can offer to have a friend join in on a family activity but let them have some independence.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[Friends and Socializing Resource Center](#)

The Child Mind Institute

[How to Help Kids Make Friends: 12 Evidence-Based Tips](#)

Parenting Science

[How to Help Kids Navigate Friendships and Peer Relationships](#)

American Psychological Association

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The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.