

Social Skills & Making Friends – Information for Parents

Social Skills & Peer Relationships

Children are not born with social skills. Some children may learn these skills naturally but others do not. **It is important that social skills be taught to all children.** Skills need to be learned, practiced, generalized to new settings, and maintained using reinforcements.

Children learn about relationships through example. Your relationship with your child sets the template for their future relationships.

Peer relationships are important for children's well-being and development. Peer relationships provide children with developmental and social opportunities that are not available in children's relationships with adults.

<http://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/HealthyRelationshipsPaper.pdf>

Making Friends

There is a lot that goes into making and keeping friends. A big part of it is learning and practicing social skills. The benefits of social success in making friends can build self esteem and lead to success in other areas.

Building Friendships

Making new friends can be difficult for some kids and teenagers. If you find this hard, it doesn't mean



there is anything wrong with you. Consider the following advice on building your social skills and hopefully creating new healthy friendships:

- Watch and learn from sociable people.
- Practice socializing with family or current friends.
- Listen, and don't always feel like you have to talk.
- Ask people about themselves. It shows that you care what the other person is saying and that you find them interesting. Make eye contact while they're speaking and follow up with a couple of questions.
- Be aware of your body language to make people feel comfortable talking and show that you are listening.
- Be patient, the process can take time. Friendship is a two-way street. Just because you might want to be friends with someone doesn't mean they want to be your friend... and that's ok.
- Detach yourself from technology. If you are constantly on your devices, this can make it harder to socialize with people you are around.
- Get out there! Join clubs or groups at your school or in your community that interest you. Go to parties or social events. The more people you socialize with, the more people you'll have an opportunity to talk with, and the more likely you are to make new friends!
- **Don't forget who you are!** You shouldn't feel that you have to give up a part of yourself to make friends with others.

<http://au.reachout.com/how-to-make-friends>

How Parents can Help

- **Prepare for social interactions.** Teach your child conversation starters or review "what-if" scenarios, like "what if Sam says you can't join the group?". TV can also be a great practice tool. Use the characters on TV to explore how your child thinks others may react to the social skills or situations presented.
- **Practice.** Provide opportunities to teach and practice new skills in a structured and safe environment. Role play situation and provide praise and encouragement while learning new skills.
- **Discuss Social Skills.** Talk with your child about social cues and social rules. Point them out when you see them in other people. For example, "Do you see how Mr. Jones backed up when Zach talked to him? That's because Zach was standing too close." Some kids have more difficulty with social skills than others.
- **Remind them how there are different types of friends.** Explain that not all friends need to be 'best friends' and that not all friends may be best for all situations.
- **Understand what your child wants and needs.** Not all children need or want to have a large friend group. Check in with your child to see what they are looking for in new friends.
- **Talk about what's important in a friend.** Ask them about what qualities make a good friend and explore what your child has to offer as a friend themselves.
- **Help them recognize possible friends.**
- **Explore new ways they can start friendships.** Consider the interests of your child and encourage activities that would promote social interactions with other kids.
- **Talk about behaviours that can damage friendships.** Some behaviour, like interrupting or nonstop talking, may make it more difficult for your child to make or maintain friendships. Help your child connect how their behaviours impact other people and review ways to promote social skills.
- **Explain that friendships don't have to be forever.** Kids learn that others have different values and points of view. Kids may also experience negative behaviors by others like lying or cheating. Let them know that friendships can change and support them to spend time with friends that are positive.
- **Keep your eyes and ears open – be available for support.**

<https://www.understood.org/>

References for Social Skills

- <http://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/HealthyRelationshipsPaper.pdf>
- <https://www.understood.org/>
- <http://au.reachout.com/how-to-make-friends>

Phone Numbers:

- Call Health Link Alberta: 811
- CYFAMH Intake: 780-342-2701
- Youth Addiction Services Edmonton 780-422-7383
- Mobile Response Team: 780-427-4491
- Call 211 – Alberta Community resources
- Catholic Social Services: (780) 432-1137
- The Support Network, Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)
- Kids Help Phone: 1 800 668 6868