

Helping your child make friends

Friendships are essential for children's development. But making and keeping friends are skills children need to learn. Here are some ways you can help them learn to be a good friend.

Children make friends differently as they grow. Here are the basic stages of early friendship.

Babies as young as **six months** get excited about seeing another baby and may crawl to other children.

Twelve to 18-month old toddlers can play peekaboo or other simple games with other children. They may like to sit near their friend but still play alone with toys. At this age, it's normal for some toddlers will be more social than others.

Two and three-year-olds can sometimes show empathy and kindness. They may try to comfort a friend who is upset or ask why someone is crying.

Around three years old a child is likely to enjoy playing with other children, in pretend play, singing, and playing games. They may be able to name their friends and want to play with them.

At **about four years old**, your child will be forming friendships and may enjoy playing in small groups. They will practice how to play with other children, and they can tell the difference between a friend and other children they know. Many play with different



children every day. At this age, it is very common for children to develop imaginary friends. This is a sign of a healthy imagination.

How to help your child make friends.

There are many ways to help your child develop and practice the social skills they need to make friends.

Be a role model. Show them how to be kind and caring. Bring your child along when helping a neighbor. Let them help when making food or doing something special for your friends. Talk about how you listen to your friends and consider their feelings.

Read and talk about friendship. As you read books together and watch television, talk about examples of friendship. Point out sharing, taking turns, and kindness between characters. Discussing the character's feelings and how they treat others can help your child learn how to be a friend.

Role Play. Practicing what to say and do in everyday conversations and situations builds your child's confidence with others. You can practice situations like:

- How to introduce yourself and your friends to someone new
- How to take turns in conversations
- How to apologize
- How to be understanding of other people's mistakes
- Words that help you cooperate, negotiate and compromise politely
- How to be a good sport and handle both winning and losing gracefully



Practice during playdates. Supervised playdates are an excellent way for children to build friendships and social skills. Take some time before playdates to help your child think about the following:

- Which toys to leave out for sharing and which toys to put away
- How they can make their friends feel comfortable
- What activities will everyone enjoy together
- How will they know if their friends are having a good time
- What to do if there is a disagreement

Stay close, but not too close. Your child needs your help to guide them as they navigate their social world. Some children are shy or anxious and may need your help to meet other children or start a conversation. Some children struggle with behavior and may need a caregiver nearby to help them stay regulated. But once your child is having fun with others, you can step back and let them learn to play with others. Stay close so you can step in if trouble breaks out or your child needs reassurance, but don't hover.

Looking for more tips?

[How to Help Your Toddler Make Friends](#)

[How to help kids make friends: 12 evidence-based tips](#)

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