



## FRIENDSHIP AND YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

*Friendships in the early school years are an important part of a child's social and emotional development. For many children, friendships come easily. Other children may need some help and encouragement as they navigate the increasingly complex social environment of this stage in life.*

---

## The Importance of Friendships in the Early School Years

Parents can probably remember the pleasures of their own early friendships, and perhaps some of the rough spots as well. For children, these early friendships play an important role in their emotional health and their growth into more confident, self-aware, caring, and socially comfortable adolescents and adults.

### **Friendships in the early school years help -**

Build your child's self-esteem and self-confidence—by enhancing the sense of belonging and feeling cared about beyond the confines of the family.

Instill important life skills—like sharing, cooperating, getting along with others, understanding different viewpoints, and working through conflicts.

Decrease stress and anxiety—by replacing negative feelings associated with isolation and loneliness with positive feelings that come from mutual respect and the support of friends.

Improve your child's health—through active play with friends.

These benefits of early friendship continue and multiply as your child grows older.



## Make time for your child's friendships

As a parent of a school-age child, you don't have as much control over your child's friendships as you did in the toddler and preschool years. However, you can support your child's friendships by making time for and nurturing them in subtle ways:

Encourage your child to invite friends to your home, and make them feel welcome when they visit. If a friend lives outside of your neighborhood, schedule time for them to play together.

When your child has friends over to your home, observe how they play and interact from a discreet distance, without interfering with or controlling their activities. Explain where in your home and outside they are free to play. You might suggest activities for them, but let them decide how to be together. Be available if they need help with something, but don't insert yourself into their play or step in to avert every conflict.

Take cues from how your child interacts with friends to set the length of their time together in future playdates. If either child struggles with conflicts or unchecked emotions, keep the play dates on the short side—one to two hours. If they get along easily, extend the time, perhaps considering a sleepover.

If your child doesn't make friends easily at school, look for activities outside of school that might spark a new friendship.



### **You might consider:**

*Sports, dance, theater, Art, music class or martial arts programs*

*A chess or book club for children*

*Classes related to a special interest, such as robotics or nature*



If your child has special needs, you may need to gently suggest to other parents, teachers, or sports coaches ways your child might participate in activities in different ways. If your child loves soccer, for example, but doesn't have the physical ability to play, you might suggest a role as scorekeeper or the one who throws the ball in.

Don't overschedule your child just for the sake of making friends. Many children need quiet time to recharge or pursue their own interests.