

Tips for Parents of Young Children



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Supporting a child to make friends

Some children find it hard to make friends. Others might get upset if they feel left out or if a friend they enjoy playing with is playing with somebody else. It can be a tough time for a parent as you can feel upset and anxious for them.

While you can't make friends for them, you can help them to practice how to be a good friend. If you see your child struggling to make friends or if they are being left out, here are some tips to help.



Help them to develop social skills at home:

Here are some things that you can do together, while you are spending time together or playing, to teach them about their emotions and feelings and prepare them for friendships.

- **Role playing to help with sharing** – Sharing can be difficult for children as it's something they have to learn and can take a lot of practice. It can often cause conflict when children play and can lead to arguments and fallings out. You can help them at home by role playing with toys showing them how to share and play with other toys e.g. 'do you think teddy is upset that dolly took the toy from him?' or 'could dolly ask teddy if she can pay with the toy next?'
- **Develop a script** – You can help them to develop a 'script' that encourages sharing and keeping friends e.g. 'when you have finished playing with the toy can I play with it' and 'can we all play together as friends today so that nobody feels left out'.
- **Role playing to help with conflict** – You can also use role playing to help them to understand their and other children's emotions and feelings e.g. 'do you think dolly is upset that teddy shouted at her, would it be nice if teddy said sorry?'
- **Listen to them playing** – Sometimes if you listen to their role play games when they are playing alone, you can identify how they think people 'should' play and then pick up on a few things that you can help them with.
- **Be a great role model** – When you are with other adults, practice talking and listening e.g. 'what did you do today'... 'that sounds lovely, we did this today' this is a very simple but effective way to model a behaviour that your child can copy.

- **Read books about friendships** – This is a really simple but very effective way of helping children to understand friendships and what to do if the friends have conflict or fall out.
- **Make time to talk** – Set aside some one-to-one time everyday to ask how their day went and how they are feeling. Bedtime can be a good time for this.

How you can support them to make friends:

Once they have started in nursery or in school, you can also support them to make and keep friendships and help them address any issues or concerns.

- **If your child is shy** – Some children are naturally shy and making friends can be difficult. It can be really helpful to arrange play dates at your house where your child feels most relaxed. They should then feel more relaxed in school or nursery playing with that friend and in turn will begin playing with others.
- **Learning to just say ‘hello’** – If you are at a park or a play centre you could help your child to learn how to start a conversation. If they are playing next to another child, you could say ‘hello’ to the other child and their parent so that your child learns a simple but effective skill to make the first step.
- **Don’t react straight away** – Being able to resolve conflict is an important part of making and keeping friends. Falling out is completely normal. Try to stand back and let kids work out their differences for themselves at first so that they can learn an important life skill.
- **What to do when you hear ‘they won’t play with me’** – This can be really difficult to hear and you can feel overwhelmed and upset that somebody isn’t playing with your child. Try suggesting they approach the children with a new game that they can all play together. You can also try to encourage them to play with other children in their class to see what fun things they are doing. If you notice a pattern, try making a connection with the parents and maybe arranging play dates.
- **When to be concerned** – Arguments and falling out are very normal but if you notice your child is getting upset, becoming withdrawn and not wanting to go to school they may be feeling left a lot or being bullied. If in doubt, speak to their teacher or key worker in nursery. They will be in the best position to watch children interact every day and can maybe help to explain why there may be conflict and can try to help. They will have a behaviour policy in place and can advise and guide you.

Where to get additional help and support

School/childcare setting key worker or LSA (contact school/setting)

Education begins at home – gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/parents/education-begins-at-home/?lang=en

Advice on coping with bullying – www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Advice on helping children to share – giveittime.gov.wales/tricky-moments-and-common-behaviours/?lang=en

Advice on managing tantrums – giveittime.gov.wales/tricky-moments-and-common-behaviours/tantrums?lang=en

Families First Advice line – gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/families-first/contact-local-families-first-team/?lang=en

Dewis site for information on wellbeing – www.dewis.wales/

Family Information Service – gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/familyinformationservices/?lang=en

For helpful tips on managing challenging behaviour such as tantrums and for a range of positive parenting techniques, visit: www.gov.wales/giveittime