

Friendship, Peer Pressure, and Bullying

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Who Am I?

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When it comes to
friends and friendships,
what would you like
your child to be able to
do?

My goals today are to...

Give you a sense of what is going on for your children when it comes to making, keeping, negotiating, and losing friends

Give you concrete strategies and conversation starters to help to help your child have friendship success

The developmental role of friends

Elementary School

- Friendship is associated with a shared activity
- Parents and other adults play a large role in facilitating new and growing friendships
- Children become increasingly able to recognize others' feelings and intentions because they gain perspective-taking abilities

Middle School

- Peer group sizes typically increase
- Transitional moments increase feelings of anxiety
- Generally, girls' friendship networks are smaller and boys' networks are larger (intensive VERSUS extensive)
- Peer input becomes more important and relevant than that of parents/family

What peers provide

Support for figuring out abilities and interests

A way to learn how to interact with others

Independence from adults and the family unit

Development of identity

A way to learn how to deal with problems

Emotional support

Experiences with different people help them to develop their identity and help clarify what kind of person they want to be

As children enter middle school, they are thinking about sameness and establishing group identity in the context of change. Because it is the time with the most physical developmental difference, what else would you want but to create sameness?

How can I find people who feel like me OR who feel like the person that I want to be?

Why middle school friendships can be SO difficult...



Things we can expect

Children maintain limited numbers of friends. Kids generally have from one – ten “important” friends at a time, with an average of about five.

Each child has his own friendship temperament. Your child may be naturally shy, naturally outgoing, or even naturally bossy. And your child may have a very different friendship temperament than you. While you can't necessarily change your child, you can encourage him to stretch — a bit.

Conflicts with close friends are inevitable. Tensions arise at every age and stage, but the ability to resolve conflicts independently develops as kids get older.

Many children experiment with social power. By the time kids are 4 or 5, many discover that excluding or teasing someone makes them feel powerful and they find this exciting. Kids also test their powers to see how effective they are.

Helping your child make or find a friend

- Help your child to notice things of interest about other kids or ways that they are similar
- Encourage your children to listen to what is going on in a group and to join in. They can quietly fit in, add their opinions, or expand on what's already going on in the group
- Help your child arrange for time alone with another child, which is particularly helpful when children are working on developing social skills
- Pack lunches that are easy to share
- Sign up for the carpool
- Encourage your child to join clubs, sports, or other activities.
Friendships born of a common interest are likely to be deeper and longer-lasting than those born of convenience
- Help your child gain awareness of non-verbal signals: "Do you see Luis's face? He is concentrating. I don't think he wants to be interrupted right now."

Peer pressure and the influence of friends

Good pressure versus negative pressure

Kids take bigger risks when they are together

- In a research analysis of teen brain activity of kids playing a driving game either with friends or alone, when friends were nearby, teens took greater risks (running red lights and crashing)
- Brain scans showed that the reward center of the brain gets hyperaroused when peers are present

Peer pressure looks different at different ages

- “Let’s not talk to Lance today”
- “Don’t ask that question - you’ll seem like such a loser”
- “I have weed in my backpack. Meet me in Central Park later on”

Peer pressure can be OVERT or COVERT

Helping your child address and avoid pressure

LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN - and try to avoid judgment

Pay attention to the tone your child uses, ask them how they felt about their friend's choices, ask if they would have done anything differently

Encourage independent thinking: "What would you have liked to have done differently?" "If it were you, what would you have done?" "What did you not like about that situation?"

Talk through challenging situations, ideally before they happen:

- "What would you do if all of your friends were at the mall and they decided to get their noses pierced and you didn't want to?"
- "What might you say to Alexis if she really wants to have lunch with you but you want to go to the lunchtime meeting about Aragon High School?"
- "If you're in a car with someone who has been drinking, what are some things you could do and say?"



If a friend comes over and behaves badly, you have to intervene; then have a talk with your child about him. If you don't, your child may think you endorse the behavior or just don't care!

“Marco was being rude. He kept throwing Legos all over the place even after I told him to stop. I didn't like how he was treating you or me [**you've observed FACTS about the child; separating the child from the behavior**]. I'm curious: Tell me what you like about him” [**you share your thoughts, then you listen**]

“When Sara comes over, you watch lots of violent and scary movies. [**facts**] You used to not like those movies at all, so I'm curious what's different now. What do you think?” [**share thoughts, listen**]

If you notice bad behavior or pressure in your child's friendship...

But, after all, you are the parent!

Sometimes you do need to limit a friendship — specifically, if your child is spending time with someone who will damage his safety, self-esteem, or reputation

Expect more push back as your child gets older

It will be easier to limit a friendship if you've already had conversations with your child about your concerns: "We've talked a dozen times about when Charlotte said mean things about you and you've gotten upset. Think about all we've tried to fix things and it keeps happening. She will not be invited back to our home and you won't go to hers unless she apologizes to you and can show you and I was she's doing to improve her ways."

When to intervene in a child's friend's behavior

- If it was your kid and you'd want to know, call the parents and/or call the school
- Use specific examples to help show your concern: "When Kelly was over this afternoon, I heard her throwing up in the bathroom after the girls ate pizza. I thought you should know."
- Making a call to the parent and/or the school is particularly relevant when it comes to safety issues: substance abuse, bullying, talk of suicide or self-harm, eating disorder behaviors, abusive relationships with family, parents, or romantic partners, etc.
- You may lose a friendship with the parent and your child may lose the friend, but you must do what you can to protect that child

How to “break up with” a friend

Start with a conversation with the school counselor:
Can there be a face-to-face conversation? Can we try to solve the problem? OR can this relationship be ended with kindness?

Talk to your child about it being OKAY to have once been friends with someone, but to no longer be friends. You could talk about times when you have chosen to end a friendship

Discuss how your child would want someone else to end a friendship with them - help them practice “treat others the way you would want to be treated”

Help your child put space between them and the friend - unfollow on social media, find other things to do at lunch, spend time less frequently outside of school

Brainstorm ways your child could address questions from the friend about why they aren't hanging out

Bullying

Bullying is willfully causing harm to others through verbal harassment (teasing and name-calling), physical altercation, or social exclusion (intentionally rejecting a child from a group)

Why do kids engage in bullying behaviors?

- The more kids care about being popular, the more aggressive they are
- A way to create or maintain social status
- Past trauma
- Low self-esteem
- Desire to get attention
- Lack of positive social skills

The meanest kids tend to be the most desperate



Several way to reduce bullying and its impacts

- Promote positive body language. Tell your child to practice looking at the color of her friends' eyes and to do the same thing when she's talking to a child who's bothering her
- Encourage him to think and talk about the ways he is unique, special, wonderful, and brave. A child who feels confident and proud is less likely to be impacted by what others say
- Practice a script. Rehearse the right way to respond to a tough kid (you might even use a stuffed animal as a stand-in) so your child will feel better prepared. Teach him to speak in a strong, firm voice -- "Stop bothering me!" or "I'm not going to play with you if you act mean"
- Encourage your child to be the better person. One of the best comebacks to bullying is to ignore the behavior. Once a child sees that their actions do not have the intended impact, she'll lose interest
- Help your child stand up in moments when he is a bystander. Encourage him to practice what to say, talk about how and where he can seek help, and brainstorm ways that he can show kindness to a child impacted by someone's negative actions or words

Roleplay for EVERYTHING!

- 1) If your child has difficulty making friends or is nervous about it, roleplay starting a conversation, asking to play, inviting someone to come over, complimenting someone's outfit, etc.
- 2) If your child is feeling pressured by a friend, roleplay ways they can get out of a situation or address the way it is making them feel
- 3) If your child is unhappy with what their friendship with someone is like, roleplay how they can express their feelings
- 4) If your child needs something specific from a friend, roleplay how they could ask for it
- 5) If your child needs to end a friendship, roleplay what they might say to their friend to do it kindly
- 6) If your child gets frustrated by or is needy when it comes to friendships, roleplay what they can say and do when their friends can't play with them or aren't available
- 7) If your child is in conflict, brainstorm some solutions and roleplay them together

All of this boils
down to...

What makes
someone a
good friend?

Timeless ideas for friendship success

- Get to know your child's friends: make your house the house where friends feel welcome, have family dinner and invite your child's friend to join
- Get to know your child's friends' family: CALL before your child spends time with another person's child, know where they are going, if adults will be home, when your child will be home and how they'll get there
- Talk about the friendship you see in the media or in books: Does it look like a good friendship? Why? What makes this person a good friend?
- Be a friendship role model yourself
- Look beyond appearances when it comes to our child's friends
- Separate your feelings and needs from your child's – you have a ton of life experience, but your child is experiencing and wanting different things
- Remind your child and different friends fill different needs - and that that is okay!

Books About Friendship You May Want to Check Out

- [The Unwritten Rules of Friendship](#) by [Natalie Madorsky Elman](#)
- [Best Friends, Worst Enemies](#) by Michael Thompson
- [Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys](#) by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson
- [Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through Seven Transitions into Adulthood](#) by [Lisa Damour](#)
- [Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls](#) by Rachel Simmons
- [The Curse of the Good Girl: Raising Authentic Girls with Courage and Confidence](#) by [Rachel Simmons](#)