

# Parents as Partners: Friendship

## What is friendship?

Friendship is a mutual connection between people who want to share shared experiences and communication. Friendships start to develop during childhood when children are learning to interact with each other. They learn skills such as how to agree/disagree, to exchange meaningful words and gestures, and to accommodate others' temperaments. These skills are foundations for developing and maintaining friendships.

## Why is this important?

Friendships promote happy feelings, increase a sense of belonging and reduce stress, and therefore have a positive effect on a child's overall wellbeing and promote good mental health.

Making friends is an important part of growing up and a vital part of a child's social and emotional development.

Friendship teaches children empathy. Through friendship, children learn to interpret social cues, learn more about themselves and develop their sense of identity. Friends can help navigate challenging developmental experiences.

## What skills does my child need to learn to be a good friend?

### **Cooperation**

- how to share, how to take turns, how to work together towards a common goal

### **Communication**

- using words to explain what you want and listening to others respectfully
- paying attention to body language, e.g. making eye contact, smiling, being able to read others' nonverbal reactions

### **Understanding and managing feelings**

- being able to express feelings in ways that help others understand you
- recognising and responding to others' feelings

### **Accepting and including others**

- recognising others' needs for respect and friendship.

## Will my child have arguments with friends?

Childhood friendships can have many ups and downs. Arguments are a natural part of friendships, however, sometimes it can be difficult for children to manage and understand them. Problems with friends can affect how children feel about themselves and their enthusiasm for activities that involve others. Children learn more and more complex social skills from those around them as they develop.

## What support can be provided at home?

### **Take time to talk**

Discuss how your child is feeling and how their friend might be feeling. Remind them that friendships always have ups and downs and talk about next steps. Children often find it easier to talk in informal situations where they feel less pressure. Find a relaxed time to talk to children about feelings. Asking, "What makes you angry/hurt/upset?" can be a good way of starting a conversation about their feelings.

Once you find out what they were angry about you can help them think up better ways to handle the problem. This kind of conversation doesn't work while a child is really angry or upset, sometimes it must wait until later.

### **Find alternatives**

Getting children to think through a difficult situation helps them develop problem solving skills. Asking, "Is that what you wanted to happen?" or "What else could you have tried?" encourages children's helpful thinking. Thinking of alternative solutions helps children plan different ways of reacting next time. Be sure to praise their efforts.

### **Have ways to calm down**

When emotions are strong, it is easy to act without thinking. Encourage your child to take control and allow time for the emotions to subside. Walking away, using a quiet spot to think or doing something else like riding a bike or listening to music, are all activities that can assist in reducing strong emotions.

### **Try a Problem Solving Approach**

1. Encourage the child to describe what has happened
2. Ask about how they felt
3. Ask them how they think the other person might see it and how they might be feeling
4. Get them to think of ways they could do things differently next time
5. Encourage them to try the new approach – get them to practise with you so they feel more confident
6. Check back with your child to see how things turned out.