

Having friends is an important part of every child's development. Healthy friendships have been linked to positive impacts in areas such as self-esteem, academic performance and mental health. Yet, even the BEST friendships have "ups and downs!" Some issues can be especially difficult and painful. It's normal for parents to feel concerned. Helping your child navigate their social world can certainly feel like a complicated task, but there are many resources out there to help! Below are **a few quick tips** that we find especially beneficial:

- **Encourage your child to spend time with peers, find commonalities, but appreciate differences.** If your child needs guidance finding friends, one way to help is by finding opportunities for your child to meet children with similar interests (e.g., sports teams, music or art class). While finding commonalities is great, encourage your child to appreciate and value differences!
- **Really listen and ask questions.** Give your undivided attention and include visual cues such as eye contact and nodding along. Ask open-ended questions that will help you learn more about the situation and explore your child's thoughts and feelings. **Also, remember to show empathy and validate your child's feelings.**
- **Ask how you can help.** Instead of rushing to "fix" the problem, ask your child if they *want* your advice or feedback before automatically giving your own suggestions. Try brainstorming potential solutions *together*. Role-playing different scenarios can also be an excellent tool.
- **Keep open communication.** Friendships are constantly changing. Continue the conversation on the "ups and downs" of friendships, qualities of a good friend, peer pressure and how your child feels when with his or her friends. Make sure to let your child know that you are there for them and available!
- **Model good friendships.** Be a role model and show kindness, empathy, inclusion and respect towards friends to set a great example. Teach and model social skills important to positive peer relationships such as listening, speaking up, sharing, negotiating, problem solving and understanding feelings.
- **Don't force your child to stay with or change friendships.** If you do not think the friendship is healthy and/or that the friend might be a bad influence, it's best not to forbid it. This could backfire and make the friendship more attractive. Instead, talk to your child about your concerns (focusing on the behaviors, NOT the friend) and try and limit their time together.
- **Don't ignore bullying behaviors.** If you find out your child is bullying, teasing, excluding or gossiping, speak up. Hold them accountable and help them find empathy towards others.
- **Get to know your child's friends, and when possible, their parents.** Try to gain a better understanding of who your child is spending time with. Also, knowing the parents makes it easier to navigate concerns such as where your child is going and supervision.
- **Talk to your child about peer pressure and making choices.** Talk about strategies that help to resist the pressure to go against the values that your child has been taught and how important it is to make good choices.
- **Monitor friendships to help avoid risky and unhealthy behaviors.** Youth need supervision. Keep tabs on where your child is going, who they are going with and what they are doing.
- **Talk to a professional.** If your child is really struggling with friendships, you and/or your child should talk with a school guidance counselor. Schools often help connect peers and might offer social skills groups. **Needham Youth & Family Services also offers services on issues related to social and peer concerns. For complete information, visit our website at: www.needhamma.gov/youth.**

For more detailed information on friendship issues, please see:

<https://imperfectfamilies.com/your-childs-friendship-drama-dos-and-donts-for-parents/>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/What-Parents-Can-Do-to-Support-Friendships.aspx>

<https://www.verywell.com/7-characteristics-of-a-bullyproof-friendship-460644>

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