



Helping Your Child Connect with Others

Every parent wants their child to make friends, get along well with others, and show kindness and care. The foundation for these skills starts at home—children learn how to relate to others based on their earliest relationships, especially with their parents. The way you interact with your child helps shape how they will build friendships and understand the feelings of those around them.

Teaching Your Child to Be Kind and Empathetic

Empathy is the ability to understand and care about how others feel. You've been teaching your child this skill from the very beginning, simply by responding to their needs with love and attention. When you comfort them when they're upset, they start to understand what it means to be cared for—and often, they will try to do the same for you. You might notice your child giving you a hug if you look sad or offering a favorite toy to cheer you up.

You can continue to encourage empathy by helping your child notice other people's emotions. For example, if another child is upset, you might say:

"Look at Mia's face. She looks sad. Let's see what's wrong and how we can help."

This helps children recognize emotions in others and learn how to respond in a caring way.

Helping Your Child Make Friends

Even at a young age, kids start figuring out ways to connect with others. Your child may copy another child's actions to get their attention or offer them a toy as a way of saying, "Let's play together!" You can encourage these interactions by:

- **Setting up playdates** – Spending time with other kids gives your child a chance to practice social skills.
- **Having extra toys available** – When there are plenty of things to play with, kids are less likely to argue over sharing, making playtime more enjoyable.

As your child approaches preschool or daycare, these social skills become even more important. Whether they're starting a program like Head Start, preschool, or pre-kindergarten, knowing how to interact with other kids will help them feel more comfortable and confident. The ability to make friends is just as valuable as learning ABCs and 123s!

What If Your Child Doesn't Respond the Way You Expect?

Some children, especially those with special needs or developmental differences, may struggle with social interactions. They might avoid eye contact, dislike being touched, or have a hard time expressing their feelings. If you notice signs that something seems different, don't blame yourself or your child. Instead, consider seeking advice from a specialist who can help you understand what's going on.

If You Have Concerns, Here's What You Can Do:

- Write down what you've noticed about your child's behavior.
- Talk to your child's doctor about your concerns and ask for guidance.
- Look into early intervention services—many communities offer programs to help young children who need extra support. If your child is over three, your local school district may have resources to assist.

If there is a developmental challenge, identifying it early can make a big difference in getting your child the help they need. Even if your doctor or school can't provide direct support, they should be able to point you in the right direction.

Social skills take time to develop, but with love, patience, and encouragement, every child can learn how to build meaningful relationships with others.