

Role Models

5 Strategies to help your child develop & navigate friendships

From our award winning education team



1. It's not about your child's personality, it's about social skills

If your child struggles to make new friends or build existing friendships, take a moment to reflect on which exact part they struggle with. The ability to have effective social interactions can be summarised into 4 specific skills;

1. Starting and keeping a conversation going

- Chatting to a friend on a play date or knowing what to say when they meet someone new

2. Listening and understanding others

- Knowing when and how to listen to others without interrupting

3. Responding to social cues

- Saying hello back to someone or picking up on the fact that someone is feeling embarrassed

4. Having positive interactions

- Being able to laugh with others, share a joke and share a positive moment

All of these are skills and you can help your child get better at any of them. This is not about their personality but about a specific skill they might need to strengthen.

"These are all skills children can learn."

2. Teach your child to use 'I statements'

Many children struggle to assert themselves simply because they don't know how to. They don't know what language to use and how to communicate their opinion.

Focusing on themselves as opposed to others, helps them stay firmly in the assertive category.

The minute we start directing our responses at others and blaming or accusing, we edge closer to the aggressive.

Teach your child to define how they think, what they feel and what they need.



Some examples of this are:

- "I feel upset when I'm the only one not invited"
- "I have a different idea"
- "I don't like it when you say that"
- "I don't like it when you say that"
- "I need some time out"

3. Common interests & humour

Help them find children with common interests to share in their knowledge and love of a particular topic. You can help your child do this by encouraging them to join a club (in-person or online), talk to their friends to find out their passion points and encourage your child to be ready to talk about their interests when they meet new people.

Humour is another great connector; help your child develop their sense of humour and encourage them to seek out those who are on the same wavelength as them. A shared sense of humour with a friend helps your child feel understood and valued.

We can help our child develop their sense of humour by showing them how we as adults are ready to laugh at ourselves when we do something silly, we can also use sarcasm and puns to show our child how it's possible to be playful.

4. Help them develop their emotional awareness

Friendships and interactions with others often trigger big feelings and emotions. Help your child name and recognise these feelings and emotions.

Some common examples are jealousy, frustration, embarrassment, and disappointment. When these emotions arise you could say;

“I wonder if you might be feeling jealous of your brother...let's talk about what that feels like”

“I wonder if you might be feeling disappointed about not being invited to the party, let's talk about what that feels like”

Learning to name and understand big emotions will help them respond to the inevitable ups and downs of friendships.

This is important when it comes to maintaining relationships and building the emotional resilience to bounce back from uncomfortable moments or disappointments, allowing your child to build successful long-term friendships.

5. Allow conflict

Conflict resolution is an essential skill and one your child will need for maintaining friendships and interacting with others. Rather than stepping in to prevent or resolve arguments between siblings or friends, allow your child the independence to develop and apply these skills. You can do this from the side lines, being there to support and model where necessary.

For example: your children are arguing over using the Ipad

Instead of: "I'm taking the Ipad away if you're going to argue about it"

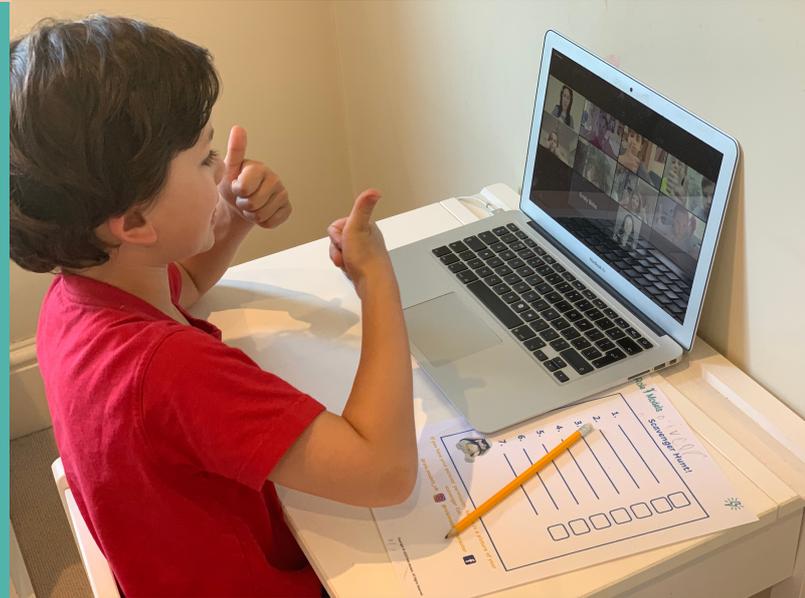
Try: "I see two people both wanting to use the Ipad... but that's not possible. I'm sure you can both find a way to figure this out and find a solution. Let me know if you need my help, I'll be in the kitchen"



Finally, it's important to remember that if your child is struggling to interact with others and navigate their friendships, it is not a sign of poor parenting.

Navigating and maintaining successful relationships is a lifelong skill that many adults struggle with. However, we can't just hope that our child develops these skills naturally without modelling (which is when we show our child the skill in question by demonstrating it ourselves) and teaching them how.

If your child is struggling with the ups and downs of friendships, now is the time to take action! Investing in support for them now will provide them with a lifelong toolkit to fall back on in their future.



Book a free consultancy call with our education team to find out how we can help support your child

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