



VOYAGE ACADEMY

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COUNSELING CORNER

Children learn by example so be mindful in how you interact with others. Every time you strike up a conversation with a friend or neighbor, your child is aware. Every scenario becomes a learning opportunity, allowing your child to see how you join in, negotiate, and problem-solve.

How to Help Kids Make Friends for the New School Year

Welcome back Parents! We are looking forward to another great year here at Voyage. With the start of a new school year it is common for kids to have worries about making friends. Maybe their friends are not in their same class this year, or perhaps your student is new to our school and left behind some cherished friendships at an old school. Regardless of their situation, it is common among students to worry about their ability to make new friends to help them through the new school year. Friendships are important no matter your age. As a parent, it is important to help guide your child in making friends and finding friendships that can last a lifetime.

Decades of research suggests that parents play a big role in teaching children how to make friends. Kids who make friends easily are prosocial- caring, sharing, & helpful. They also have strong verbal skills and know how to keep their selfish or aggressive impulses in check. Most importantly, these kids are good at interpersonal skills: empathy, perspective-taking, and moral reasoning. Skills that it takes to make friends can be developed with practice: Conversational skills, Interpersonal skills, and Emotional Self-Control. Here are some research-based tips to help a child who wants to make friends but is not sure how:

1. Be an "Emotion Coach".

Everyone has negative emotions and selfish impulses. To make friends we must keep these responses under control. Children develop better emotional self-control when their parents talk to them about their feelings in a sympathetic, problem-solving way.

2. Practice Authoritative Parenting.

Authoritative parents relate to their kids with warmth and attempt to shape behavior through rational discussion and explanation of the reasons for rules. Studies show that authoritative parents tend to have kids who are less aggressive, more self-reliant, more self-controlled, and better liked by peers.

3. Teach kids how to converse in a polite way.

The earliest lessons kids learn about communication happen at home. Teach children the skill of active listening and how to make appropriate eye contact, position the body in direction of the speaker and how to remain quiet, only making relevant verbal responses. Teach children how to trade information and not to be a conversation hog. Offer advice to children about how to make new friends.

4. Foster empathy and sympathetic concern for others.

Empathy must be taught and modeled in the home. Children won't just learn empathy without the help of trusted adults. Showing children how to treat others in an appropriate and loving way is crucial for children to learn this skill.

Kids today seem to have busier schedules than ever before, as we shuffle them off from one activity or sports practice to another. Some can jump right into social situations, while others struggle. If your child doesn't make friends like other kids the same age, he or she may just need some coaching and practice time on simple social skills.





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Please reach out if there is anything I can do to support you and your student here at Voyage.

Parent's play a big role in teaching children how to make friends.

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5. Help kids read facial expressions.

Teach children to read expressions on faces and discuss emotions that they see. When reading to your child ask questions like, "does this person look happy or sad", "why do you think they might feel sad". This will help children to pay attention to others expressions and assist in effective communication.

6. Coach kids on how to cope with tricky social situations.

Talk with your children about specific situations and how they could respond. Talk with them about what to do if they see some children playing and want to join them. Some examples of this are:

- Before making your approach, watch what the other kids are doing. What could you do to fit in?
- Try joining the game by doing something relevant. If the kids are playing restaurant, see if you can become a new customer.
- Don't be disruptive or critical or try to change the game.
- If the other kids do not want you to join in, don't try to force it. Just back off and find something else to do.

7. Monitor kids' social life.

Supervise where kids play and help kids choose their friends. Help children to choose friends who are good influences and model good behavior that you want to see in your child.

8. When possible, let kids try to work things out on their own.

Hovering over our children and trying to intervene every time an issue arises, robs children of the chance to develop their own social skills. Give kids the opportunity to try but be available to help if needed. Encourage children to talk out their feelings with friends so they can learn how to communicate.

9. Be aware of bullying.

Bullying is not a healthy part of childhood, and experts agree that adults need to get involved if bullying is occurring. Bullying is the use of force, coercion, or threat, to abuse, aggressively dominate or intimidate. Remember that not all negative interactions among peers are considered bullying. Bullying behavior is often repeated and habitual. One essential prerequisite is the perception of an imbalance of physical or social power. This imbalance

distinguishes bullying from conflict. Bullying is characterized by three criteria: (1) hostile intent, (2) imbalance of power, and (3) repetition over a period of time.^[2] Bullying is the activity of repeated, aggressive behavior intended to hurt another individual, physically, mentally, or emotionally.

10. Take time to observe and understand how your child socializes.

Pay close attention to your child's interactions with others. Does your child behave differently than his/her "norm" at home? If so, why? Your child may struggle starting conversations. He/she may have anxiety in large groups. Depending on what behavior you see, you can then decide where to focus your attention, what skills need building, and how you can contribute.

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Reinforce and praise your child's friendship making efforts. Make it exciting and rewarding to practice trying new things. Even when your child is only making slow progress, make sure to reinforce his/her efforts. Acknowledge each small success and tell your child how proud you are that he/she keeps trying.

"You will move in the direction of the people that you associate with. So it's important to associate with people that are better than yourself. The friends you have will form you as you go through life. Make some good friends, keep them for the rest of your life, but have them be people that you admire as well as like."

- Warren Buffett