

Foster Childhood Friendships To Raise More Resilient Kids

Children learn integral social skills from childhood friends that last a lifetime.

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I see many lonely children in my practice. The reasons are varied and many. Some kids spend time between two family homes. With the transitions back and forth, it is more difficult to make time for friends. Some kids are so over-programmed that they have little social time left over. And some kids spend too much time online or hooked up to some kind of device or video game and miss out on real-life relationships.

Developing and nurturing relationships is critical for child happiness. Children learn integral social skills from childhood friends that last a lifetime. Interpersonal success is also an important protective factor that helps foster resilience — the ability to bounce back from setbacks. In our hectic lives, it is critical that we help our kids become strong and resilient.

To have good friends, you must first be a good friend.

I encourage parents to prioritize the social relationships of their children. Ensure that your children have time to spend with friends. If your child is not yet able to create their own social life, provide a helping hand by organizing playdates for younger kids or outings for older kids. Offer to drive the your child and their friends to and from activities like movies, swimming or skating. If you plan to take your children to a hockey game, buy an extra ticket so they can invite a friend. Host a potluck at your home and invite some families from your child's class. (You might just find that you create new friendships, too!)

Sometimes, parents try all of these things and yet their children are still struggling to connect with new friends. For some people, friendship skills come easily. However, for others they may need some help developing social skills.

Time and time again I've seen that when it comes to friendship, this is the number one rule: "To have good friends, you must first be a good friend." This reframes the conversation from a passive one ("Will kids like me?") to an active one ("What can I do to show that I am a good friend?").

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Here's my list of **the** 10 characteristics of good childhood friends:

1. Able to think of the needs of other people, as well as their own.
2. They are patient and kind and polite. They are never mean.
3. They know the difference between right and wrong. They help others be the best version of themselves possible.
4. They reach out to new classmates and invite newcomers to sit with them. They are inclusive and embrace diversity.
5. They share, take turns and invite others into their play.
6. They do not call names or tease or tattle. In fact, they stick up for other kids being bullied.
7. Good friends are open to the ideas of others and are not stuck in only playing what they want to play. They try to not be bossy.
8. They try not to interrupt or butt into lines or conversations. They have some sense of personal space.
9. They try to resolve conflict peacefully and say sorry when needed, and they also say "I forgive you."

10. Good friends continuously try to be mindful of creating a genuinely fun and enjoyable play environment.

We can combat child loneliness by underscoring the importance of friends and prioritizing social times in our lives.

When kids are encouraged to develop the mindset that "To make friends, I must first be a good friend," they move forward thinking about their own growth and development. They also position themselves as a leader in the classroom and playground, a leader who is helping make their tiny bit of the world a better place.

With our hectic lives and addictions to screens, it is easy to overlook the importance of real-life connections. The consequence can be a feeling of loneliness and isolation. We can combat child loneliness by underscoring the importance of friends and prioritizing social times in our lives. We can also help our kids develop friendship skills that will last a lifetime.