

## Popularity and Friendship Problems

After parents, friends may be a child's most important teachers. Friends teach children lessons about the importance of loyalty...what it means to give and take...how to be a leader and a follower. Sometimes, friends teach children things they can't learn any other way – from how to tie a shoe to how to wear their hair.

Friends also help children do better in school, researchers say. Children who know they have friends are more likely to take risks – to try out for a school team, volunteer to work a math problem on the board, or to serve on a school or class committee. Children who have friends also find it easier to make other friends.

### What Helps Children Make Friends?

1. Develop an interest. Children who like playing soccer can usually find other friends on a soccer field.
2. Be interested in others. That's especially hard for children, who mostly think about themselves.
3. Know when to give in. Winning arguments doesn't always win friends.
4. Smile. No one wants to spend time with someone who's a sourpuss.
5. Keep confidences. Children need to learn not to betray a trust.
6. Provide support. Friends study, play, and sit together. They give each other compliments. They're there when the other person has a bad day.
7. Be presentable. Kids don't need to wear designer clothes to have friends – but they do need to dress neatly. Good manners and a good sense of humor also help.
8. Value themselves. The best way to make and keep friends is to believe in yourself.

I Don't Like My Child's Friends. What Should I Do?

1. Spend time with your child's friends. That doesn't mean you need to turn into a 10-year old. But it does mean you'll make a point of being around when your child's friends are over.
2. Help your child find other friends. Encourage your child to join clubs and activities.
3. Set limits. If you think your child's friends are encouraging negative behavior, you may need to set clear limits about whether—and when—your child can spend time with them. Some friends may only be allowed in your house if you are there.

How Can I Help My Child Resist Peer Pressure?

Kids need to fit in. But they also need to know that there are times when they can't go along with the crowd. Teach your child some ways to say no to things that are illegal or against your family's rules. Here are some ideas:

1. Make an excuse. "I have to babysit my little brother."
2. Change the subject. "Could you believe how hard that history test was?"
3. Offer a better idea. "Why don't we watch TV instead?"
4. Blame you. "My mom would ground me forever if I went to a party like that."
5. And if you think your child's friends are encouraging illegal or dangerous behavior, forbid your child from seeing those people.