



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of kindergarten students.

Peers, Play and Friendship

“Dad, can Grayson come over and play?”

You may feel you have heard that question too many times. However, friends are an important part of a child’s life. They provide emotional support, teach acceptable behavior and offer a level playing field that older siblings and adults cannot deliver. A child’s interactions with peers are how some of life’s most important attitudes and behaviors are shaped and lessons are learned. Kindergarten-age children typically appreciate other children for their skills or similar interests. A child who enjoys climbing on playground equipment will find other children who also like to physically challenge themselves.

Children and Popularity

Often, so much emphasis is placed on popularity that having only one or two good friends may not seem like enough to some adults. However, for young children, the quality of their relationships, not the quantity of friends, is important. The number of friends a person has can vary considerably at any age.

Tips for Playing With Peers

- Role play friend interactions with your child. Children benefit from practicing with you. By doing this, your child will see that a peer may want the first turn or the best toy. You will be able to offer good solutions and kind words as a model for what you would like your child to do when playing with others. Together you can think about positive conversation starters he or she can use when approaching an unfamiliar child.
- Use dolls, puppets or books about friendship topics to engage your child and discuss relationships with peers.
- Encourage your child to smile, look up from what they are doing and say “hello.”
- Get together with other families with similar-aged children for a specific activity. Pack a picnic, visit a park or go sledding together. This type of activity puts far less pressure on children than sending them out to play while adults who are familiar with each other visit.

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How do kindergartners like to play?

Kindergartners begin by building and creating with objects, taking on roles and using props. They will eventually move on to formal and informal games with their peers such as hopscotch or playing catch.

Arguments over which game to play and what rules to follow seem to take up a lot of time. Going through this process, as long as nobody is being hurt, will help children develop their abilities to reason, judge what’s appropriate, weigh points of view and learn how to reach consensus.

Play is a child’s work. It teaches many important skills and lessons for life. Build play into your child’s day.

Tips for Playing With Peers (continued)

- Try this game to help your child learn positive ways to talk to others and, at the same time, understand and handle some teasing. Tell your child what you are planning to do before you begin. Start by saying something negative to your child (“that sweater is funny looking”). Ask your child to say something positive in response (“I like this sweater; my grandma made it for me”). Switch roles and have fun with this activity. Learning to identify and ignore some teasing is a useful life skill.
- Help your child arrange to have a school mate play at your place from time to time. Trust your child’s taste in friends if you see nothing dangerous about the relationship. When children play under your supervision, you have a wonderful opportunity to enforce your rules and infuse your values.
- Let your child see you being a friend. Talk about how you help others and how they help you. Your child will learn to recognize your social connections as well as the joy and meaning your friends and peers bring to your life.

Observe Your Child at Play

Aggressive, loud or destructive children tend to be **rejected** by other children. Timid, cautious, shy children may become **neglected** because they go unnoticed, not because other children don’t like them. Children who know how to enter a group by taking on a minor role in play, smiling, communicating pleasantly and working their way into the group while following the rules tend to be **accepted**.

If you notice that your child is having trouble playing with age-mates, consider what needs work and formulate a plan, then coach your child respectfully during one-to-one play dates.

Your child may need help learning to be more assertive, less aggressive, more polite, less timid or just more savvy about social rules of children his or her age.



Go here for more information on this and other topics.

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The Power of Play

Children are growing up in a rapidly changing world characterized by pressure to succeed in all areas. They have less time and opportunity to play and just be kids. Even so, research confirms the importance of play in children’s development. What can play offer?

- **Physical development** refines children’s gross and fine motor skills and body awareness.
- **Social development** provides rich experiences needed to learn social skills, handle exclusion and dominance, and share power, space and ideas with others.
- **Cognitive development** improves planning skills, problem-solving abilities, academic skills, attitudes and language development.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone’s life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Play memory. You can make your own game, or use a regular deck of cards using only a few matching pairs at first and adding cards as the child learns to play the game.

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