

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Helping Your Child Make Friends



For many people, human interaction starts at a very young age. As young children our parents may have us join play groups to interact with other children. Through these social interactions - play groups, school, extracurricular activities - we learn how to get along with others, make friends, learn to share, and develop our social skills. For children in foster care, however, they may not have had these opportunities. Combined with their life experiences and diagnoses, children in foster care may find it hard to make and keep friends. They may not have had positive interactions

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Additional Information

Center for Adoption Medicine -
[Friendship, Social Skills and Adoption](#)

Parenting Science -
[How to help kids make friends: 10 Evidence-based tips](#)

PBS Parents -
[Fostering Friendships](#)

PBS Parents -
[Helping Your Child Make New Friends](#)

Psychology Today -
[How Children Make](#)

modeled to them before, which makes it harder to know how to behave in certain situations. Helping your child learn these social skills is crucial to their development and their ability to function in society.

Causes of Friendship Problems

There are a few reasons why a foster or adopted child may have a hard time making friends. Understanding these issues and what causes them will help you help your child overcome any social issues.

Attachment Issues - Kids in foster care often have some level of attachment issues. Between their upbringing, moving from one foster home to another, and possibly a disrupted adoption they have taught themselves that relationships are not permanent. As a result, they translate those feelings over to friendships.

Lack of Social Boundaries - It is very likely that children in foster care were not taught appropriate social boundaries, especially if they were abused physically or sexually or they witnessed abuse in the home.

Externalizing Behaviors - Children in foster care often have a hard time verbalizing their feelings, which translates into anger, bullying, temper tantrums, etc.

Lack of Emotional Regulation - In addition, children in foster care may not have a handle on their emotions, and can become upset easily. It is also likely that they are functioning at a younger emotional level than their peers, which makes it hard to relate and respond appropriately.

Social and Emotional Development Issues - As stated before, children in foster care are often functioning at a different age than their chronological age. This poses problems when

[Friends](#)

The Social Skills Place, Inc. - [Understanding Your Adopted Child - How to Help Them Make and Keep Friends](#)

Resources

Adoptive Families Bookstore -

[Friends/Social Situations](#)

List of books covering friendships and adopted children

[Best Friends, Worst Enemies:](#)

[Understanding the Social Lives of Children](#) by Michael

Thompson, Ph.D., Catherine O'Neill Grace, and Lawrence J. Cohen, Ph.D.

[It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend:](#)

[Helping the Child With Learning Disabilities Find Social Success](#)

by Richard Lavoie

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they are trying to relate to their peers. They may be perceived as "annoying" if they are functioning at a younger social development stage. This can also create internal conflict within the child, as they struggle to figure out how they are supposed to act.

Making Friends

The following are a few ways you can help your child make friends:

Teach social skills - A child in foster care was probably not taught how to interact with others in a positive, and constructive manner. In some cases, it is possible your child was not exposed to social situations until they were placed in foster care. As a result, they have not developed the social skills that other children their age have learned. It is up to you to help your child learn the following social skills:

- Listening to others
- Speaking up
- Saying positive things/compliments
- Recognizing and understanding feelings
- Calming down
- Problem solving
- Asking for help

Talk about friendship - Ask your child what they think it means to be a friend, and why. Share with them what qualities you like about your friends, and why.

Don't apply pressure - It may be tempting to pressure your child into having a friend over or going over another child's house, but you can't force your child into a friendship. Instead, try encouraging them to reach out to other kids, and if they seem hesitant, find out why.

Model a good relationship - Social modeling is a powerful tool. Your child is looking up to you to see how you interact with other people, and is

applying that knowledge to their interactions with peers.

Communicate with the teacher - Talk to the child's teacher, principal and guidance counselor to find out how your child behaves in school, and if they are being social with other children. Your child's teacher can keep an eye on your child, and encourage peer interaction as needed.

Encourage group activities - Talk to your child about what types of group activities they would be open to. Getting them involved with a sports team or a club is a great way for them to meet other children with similar interests, which can foster friendships.

Role play - Practice different conversations with your child to get them comfortable in social situations. If your child is struggling in a particular area - for example, coming off too aggressive - focus on what to say and how to act, using actual situations your child has encountered, if possible.

For more suggestions, please visit Families First's pages [Fostering Children's Friendships in School-Age Children](#) and [Ways to Help Children Make Friends](#).