

# Family Times

## NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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### Friends

A young child once said, "A friend is a person who knows us and still likes us." While making friends comes naturally to most children, it usually involves lots of trial and error. Parents can play an important role in helping children make friends easily. Kids who are able to make friends and get along well with others at an early age are learning appropriate ways to behave as adults. As they learn to value and appreciate others, they learn that they should be valued and appreciated by others as well, gaining confidence in themselves.

### Why Are Friends Important?

Having friends provides companionship. Friends spend time together, have fun doing things, share secrets, make positive suggestions to each other, offer to help, care about one another, and can be heard to say "Excuse me," "Thanks," and "Look at this!" By being together, children learn to interact with their peers. They talk more; take more time to work out differences, and compromise more frequently. Both cooperation and conflict occur more readily in friendships, allowing children to practice their negotiation skills.

Children often study with their friends and help each other with homework. Those who start kindergarten with a friend in their class adjust better to school. Those who continue these friendships as the year progresses like school better, and children who make new friends perform better in school. Friendships may protect children from the bad effects of negative events such as family conflict, serious illness, and parents' unemployment. Self-exploration, emotional growth, and moral development occur when they spend time with other kids. But it is also important for children to be able to work, play, or just be alone contentedly some of the time.

### What Do Children Look for in Friends?

Although children won't answer this question in these words, they think about six main points:

- Is this person fun to be with?
- Can I trust this person?
- How well do we get along?
- Can we do things that are important to me?
- Am I happy when I'm with this person?
- Are we similar in some ways?

### What if Children Don't Have Friends?

About ten percent of school-age children have no friends in their classes and are disliked by a majority of their classmates. These children often experience feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and depression. This may lead to dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and mental health problems. About 25 percent of these children drop out of school, compared to eight percent of other





## The Book Nook

*Ira Sleep Over*

by Bernard Waber is a good book to read with your child.

children. A large number of kids who are rejected by other children lack positive interaction skills, such as being cooperative, helpful, or considerate toward others. Those who are aggressive, disruptive, impulsive, or withdrawn are seriously at risk.

## How Can Parents Help?

As a parent, be friendly, caring, and cooperative in your interactions with other adults, letting your children know you value friends. Show you are interested in your children's friends. Know your child's playmates and friends well and always know where your child is.

Think of ways to incorporate new children into existing groups: have friends over, celebrate birthdays with the community, and let children call each other on the phone. Let your children choose their own friends, but encourage positive interactions. Provide opportunities for your kids to interact with others having varying interests, skills, and backgrounds.

For preschoolers whose social skills are developing slowly, spending time with somewhat younger children can have positive results. Although some parents may sometimes feel as if they're being too pushy by adopting such strategies, recently completed research shows that children who were better adjusted socially had parents who were more involved in their children's social activities. Children are not always nice to each other; they test each other through teasing and competition. Remind your children that other kids have feelings. Help your child see how others feel by asking, "How would you feel if . . ."

It takes seven or eight years to develop and refine the wide range of skills needed for making and keeping friends. Start early to provide your child with lots of opportunities to make and keep friends. Children benefit from the support, suggestions, and supervision given by adults.

## What Is True Friendship?

Good friends lift us up. Fair-weather friendships are based on selfishness. True friendship takes time and effort. As Fern Hughes Hunt said, "A true friend is a priceless gem—treasured, loved, and valued as one of life's greatest blessings; for friendship is something you cannot buy. It comes about when two people are honest, kind, and sincere with one another. A true friend can belong to all who seek the best things in life, and everyone can become a friend."

## To Make a Difference

- Be a friend to other adults.
- Know your child's playmates and friends well.
- Always know where your child is.
- Expect some spills and messes.
- Invite other children to your home.
- Encourage your child to join groups and make new friends.
- Respect your child's social style.

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