

PARENTING MATTERS: FRIENDSHIP

— BIRTH - 2 YEARS OLD —

LIFE LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE...

Play dates that are focused more on parent friends than on the kids. As a new parent, you are looking for others who connect with what you're going through, celebrate your victories, and commiserate your struggles. Mom-friends and dad-friends are hugely important, but don't underestimate the role that socialization plays in your child's life. Introducing them to other kids allows them to learn basic communication, sharing, empathy, and other interpersonal skills.



YOU PARENT THEM WELL WHEN YOU...

KNOW:

The foundations of healthy friendships start at birth. You and the other caregivers in their life help them establish trust, empathy, and connection. In their early years holding them lovingly, snuggling with them, and looking into their eyes help them learn to relate to others. As they grow, they look to the adults in their lives to model how to relate to and interact with the people around them. Know that your child is learning rapidly, so connecting with them and modeling good friendships is crucial.

EXPECT:

Your primary responsibility in this stage is to prove to your child that they are safe and their needs are being met. When babies and toddlers feel safe, they are able to move outside of themselves and develop relationships with others. You can support the growth of social skills by acknowledging your child's needs and emotions, meeting them in a healthy way, connecting with them through physical touch and activities, and interacting with them in a warm and loving way. Expect to spend a lot of time learning your child's ever-changing cues, and adjusting the way you connect with them as they grow.

PREPARE:

Be intentional in who you surround your child with. Invest in getting to know their babysitter, nanny, daycare leader, Sunday school volunteer, preschool teacher, etc. These relationships will pay off in a few ways. First, it benefits your child to see you in healthy relationships with the other adults in their life. Second, it allows you to trust your parental instinct if something seems relationally "off". Third, it gives you a pathway for insight into your child's social-emotional development when you aren't around. Prepare to invest in these relationships for the health of your child and your family.

TALK:

Once you have developed relationships with the influencers in your child's life, ask them questions like, "Do they seem to prefer being alone or interacting with others?", "Are there any relational issues that I should be aware of?", "What child or leader do they play with most regularly?" and other questions that help you better understand your child's early friendships. Connect consistently with these people about themselves and their lives as well, because these friendships are incredibly valuable. Talk to your pediatrician about any issues that arise and ask for advice in helping your child build healthy relationships.

ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

Create Community

The best way for kids to learn how to build friendships is being surrounded by potential friends! Make time for play dates, go to the park, take them to daycare or Sunday school, be purposeful in surrounding them with kids their own ages. As you do this, look for ways to encourage their kindness and redirect their insensitive behaviors. Make sure you also give them space to problem solve and interact independent from you.

Use this as an opportunity to create community for yourself, too. Look for parent friends who you connect with and build friendships. Modeling healthy friendships helps your child understand the importance of these bonds. Parenting is hard, but it's a little easier with a solid, loving, healthy community.

Work on Balance

Socializing is exhausting, especially for young children. While community and friendships are hugely important, make sure you are balancing that time. Spend one on one time with your child reading, snuggling, or doing an activity together. Encourage them to play on their own as well. These skills will differ depending on the child and the age, but they learn to understand themselves and their abilities in a different way when they play independently. Don't burn your child out with too many social situations, allow them time to be on their own (or with you) and process their experiences.

ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Parenting a baby or toddler is overwhelming. There is so much to learn and so many opinions to hear from countless sources. Take some time in this phase to focus on what God has to say through scripture and prayer. Observe how Jesus teaches others with grace and conviction. See how God shows his deep love and his huge power. Abide in the example that God has set and find peace in him as you set boundaries and make big decisions.

RESOURCES...

> Web

How Children Build Friendships by Age – Search *Scholastic.com*: *ages and stages of friendship* *Firstthingsfirst.org*

Why Childhood Friendships Matter – Search *Psychologicalscience.org*: *childhood friendships*

> Books

The Unwritten Rules of Friendships: Simple Strategies to Help Your Child Make Friends by *Natalie Madorsky Elman*

The Friendship Factor: Helping Our Children Navigate Their Social World and Why It Matters for Their Success and Happiness by *Kenneth Rubin*

The Way I Feel by *Janan Cain*

I'm Like You, You're Like Me: A Book About Understanding and

Appreciating Each Other by *Cindy Gainer and Miki Sakamoto*

Bob and Otto by *Robert Bruel*



PARENTING
MATTERS