

## PARENTING MATTERS: FRIENDSHIP

— KINDERGARTEN & 1ST —

### LIFE LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE...

A birthday party every weekend and a new best friend - or five - every month. You're checking out potential playmates for your kids and potential parent friends for yourself. Your child's friend group is fluid because they are still generally content playing with whoever is close to them. Attention and imagination are keys at this age, so you'll be doing a lot of listening, exploring, and watching.



# YOU PARENT THEM WELL WHEN YOU...

## KNOW:

Before age seven, most children have a hard time understanding the perspectives and feelings of their playmates. They will, however, become more acutely aware of who is always friendly and ready to play, and who is unkind or difficult to work with. Kids in this age group are increasingly able to imagine and create complex fantasies. They will use play and friendships as a means of testing out different leadership roles, jobs, means of communication and relationships.

## EXPECT:

Groups will form, and the idea of best friends will become more prevalent. Friends at this age are usually made by proximity, they will play with whoever is closest to them, or if they want to join a group, they will stand near them. They will start to use friendship as a bargaining tool so expect phrases like, "I will be your best friend if you share that cookie with me". Also expect to see "popular" kids start to emerge and others flock to them.

## PREPARE:

Be on the lookout for opportunities to coach your child through how to be a good friend and how friends treat each other. Invest in knowing who their friends are (even when they change frequently), and get to know the parents and families of these friends. Be intentional in creating these relationships through after school play dates, coaching teams, hosting a barbecue or pool party, volunteering at school events, and making sure you have the contact information of your child's friends.

## TALK:

Check in with your kids consistently. Ask open ended questions like, "who did you sit with at lunch?", "who do you wish you were friends with?", or "are there any friends you would like to invite to our house?". Also be listening for negative encounters they are having and help talk them through how to handle kids who are mean, disrespectful, or making other bad choices. Listen for feelings of admiration, respect, rejection, intimidation, and other interpersonal emotions as they describe their friendships.

# ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

## Be A Positive Model:

Think about the characteristics that you value in good friends. Commit to living out these values in ways that you kids can see. Make time for your friendships and speak kindly and positively about friends. Look for ways to serve your friends and involve your kids as often as possible.

## Create Family Expectations:

Work together to create some expectations for how your family members treat others. Involving your child in this process helps them learn empathy and gain ownership in their relationships. Ask some of the following questions to help direct the conversation:

- How do you like to be treated by your friends?
- What kinds of words should we use or not use?
- How do you respond if a friend doesn't treat you well?
- What is our policy on sharing toys?
- How do you handle your friends being disrespectful?
- What does it look like to show love to our friends?

Once you've clarified some language, type it up or write it down so that your family can be reminded to uphold these expectations.

## ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

### *Proverbs 17:17*

A friend loves at all times. They are there to help when trouble comes.

As kids navigate friendships at this stage, walk alongside them and help them navigate how to love their friends, even when they have disagreements or small arguments erupt. We can also show Christ's love by caring for our friends when they are hurt or sad. Talk through ways your child can love a friend that is going through a hard time, or maybe is just feeling left out and needs some extra care.

## RESOURCES...

### > Web

*Pbs.org*

*Parentingscience.com*

*Verywellfamily.com*

### > Books

**Elephant and Piggie books:** *by Mo Willems*

**Frog and Toad Are Friends:** *by Arnold Lobel*

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

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

**Little Girls Can Be Mean: Four Steps to Bully-proof Girls in the Early  
Grades** *by Michelle Anthony and Reyna Lindert*



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