



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Will You Be My Friend?

Supporting Young Children's Early Friendships

The first five years are all about building strong social skills. Here are some tips for helping your child build their first friendships!

Social skills grow from day one.

Babies show interest in one another. They'll look at other babies. Young toddlers like playing next to or nearby their peers. By three, children begin playing *with* other children. Sharing and turn-taking develop more slowly, around age four.

Friends are who we know.

Seeing the same kids over and over helps children build early friendships. Often this happens in child care. A play group, regular visits from family, or neighborhood friends are all great too.

Let children make choices about friends.

You can bring two children together, but you can't make them friends. Even young toddlers prefer one person's company to another's.

Manage your expectations about "sharing."

Sharing, or taking turns, is a skill that develops between ages 3 and 4. Help children learn to use words that encourage sharing: "Can I play?" Or "Done yet?" Offer another toy while they wait their turn.



Plan ahead.

If your child has a very favorite toy that they probably won't want to share, let them put it away before the playdate. That way, they won't have to share when it's too difficult.

Conflict is normal.

Adults often feel the need to step in during arguments. But unless there is a safety issue, like hitting, pause for a moment. Most toddlers will figure it out on their own and move on.

Temperament matters.

A child's temperament, or how they experience the world, will influence social skills. Children who take time to warm up may find social situations trickier. The same goes for intense children. Knowing your child helps you prepare them for these moments.

Social skills take a long time to develop.

Children will make friends and lose friends. They will be the leader and the follower. Some children may have many friends, some may have a few — and both will be happy. Parents are partners on this journey. There's a lot you can do to nurture social skills, right from the start!

Have more questions? Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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