

Play Dates and Peer Groups: Forming Friendships across Childhood

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- High quality friendships serve many important functions in children's lives. The benefits of friendship include:
 - Validation and support
 - Emotional security
 - Context for self-disclosure
 - Help and guidance
 - Reliable allies
 - Companionship and stimulation
- Children with friendship difficulties are at risk for a number of adjustment problems, including:
 - Loneliness
 - Peer victimization
 - School adjustment difficulties
 - Deviant behavior
- The goals and processes involved in forming friendships change with development.
 - Toddler Years
 - Capable of complementary social interactions
 - Form rudimentary friendships
 - Early Childhood (3-7 years)
 - Primary concern is to maximize enjoyment through play
 - Expect friends to share common activities, join in organized play, and be physically nearby
 - Middle Childhood (8-12 years)
 - Primary concern is peer acceptance
 - Expect friends to accept and admire them and be loyal
 - Adolescence (13-17 years)
 - Primary concern is self-understanding
 - Expect friends to understand them and be willing to self-disclose.
- Gender differences in friendships

- Gender segregation is common through the middle childhood years
 - Girls' friendships involve higher levels of intimacy, self-disclosure, and validation. Co-rumination is more frequent in girls' friendships
 - Boys are higher on rough-and-tumble play and overt aggression, more involved in competitive activities, and care more about dominance in the peer group
- Other-gender friendships become more common in adolescence.
- Friendship skills
 - Being an enjoyable and resourceful companion
 - Expressing caring and concern
 - Being a reliable partner
 - Helping a friend in need
 - Managing disagreement
 - Being able to forgive
- Suggestions for supporting children's friendships
 - Respect your child's social style
 - Be a good role model
 - Provide children with opportunities to play with peers
 - Encourage participation in activities and recreational groups
 - Talk to your child about their friendships
 - Teach positive social skills
 - Take a problem-solving approach and encourage positive strategies
 - Get to know your child's friends and their parents
 - Encourage friendships with positive role models
 - Share your confidence that your child can handle social situations
- If you are concerned, contact:
 - Your child's teachers and school counselor
 - The Community Liaison Specialist, Dr. Cynthia Frosch, at the Center for Children and Families (caf091000@utdallas.edu; 972-883-4827)

Additional Reading

Natalie Madorsky Elman and Eileen Kennedy-Moore, *The Unwritten Rules of Friendship*

Fred Frankel, *Good Friends Are Hard to Find*

Patti Kelley Criswell and Angela Martini, *A Smart Girl's Guide to Friendship Troubles*