



FIRST YEAR AT SCHOOL

FRIENDS

Being able to be a friend and to have friends is one of the most important things that children need to learn. As they move into primary school, friends and learning to be part of a group start to matter a lot as children are learning friendship skills for life.

Being a friend

It takes a long time to learn to be a good friend and there are many ups and downs along the way. One of the most helpful things that parents can do is show children how to be a friend by the way they are friends. Children learn much more from what you do than what you say or teach them.

If you are welcoming and friendly, if you show give and take and consideration of other people you will see your children learning to do the same. They also learn from playing with other children and from some guidance from you when things go awry.

Here are some of the skills that children need to be good friends. Many of these skills children will already have, others they are just starting to learn.

- **Welcoming**—being able to approach and respond to other children with a smile and greeting such as ‘Hello’.
- **Assertiveness**—able to say what they would like (and to listen to what the other children want).
- **Consideration**—skills in relating to others—listening, saying ‘excuse me’ when there is a break in the conversation, saying ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’.
- **Changing roles**—being able to sometimes lead and sometimes follow what others want to do, so that they don’t think they have to do one role all the time.
- **Cooperation**—being able to take turns and share. Put special toys away before having friends over if your child is very unhappy about sharing. It takes a long time to learn.

- **Play skills**—willing to take part in games, make suggestions for play.
- **Communicating**—talking to others and listening in a friendly way, saying something to start a conversation.
- **Helping**—being willing to help others.
- **Prediction**—being able to tell how others might be feeling from how they act and what they say; being able to predict that their actions might have an effect on others—try playing some guessing games about this.
- **Managing feelings**—being able to control impulses and to recover fairly quickly from disappointment and hurts. Being able to talk about feelings.
- **Empathy**—responding to others’ disappointment with understanding.

Some things you can do to help your child be a friend:

- Be friendly and welcoming yourself.
- Make opportunities for friendships to develop. Ask other children over to play. One at a time at first helps and, if there is another child in the family, having a friend for them at the same time. Even if the children don’t become good friends it is another person they know at school.
- Keep an eye on the play and help children to listen to each other and negotiate if they need it.

Friendship troubles

You can help when there is a problem between children by helping each child to see how the other feels and to say what they want. Don’t just tell them what to do or not to do. They need to learn how to problem solve for themselves, with your support at first.

Want to know more? Visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/firstyear