

## Supporting Healthy Friendships Across the Ages

### *Parent / Caregiver Guide to Promote + Maintain Friendships / Ages 4–30+*

*Friendship remains a critical pillar for well-being at every life stage. The skills and approaches adapt as we grow — whether you’re guiding a child or reflecting on your own relationships.*

### Friendship Support Strategies by Age

Age Range	Key Actions	Conversation Starters	Friendship Maintenance Tips
4–7 Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arrange short, structured playdates</li> <li>- Model greetings, sharing, turn-taking</li> <li>- Read books about friendship</li> <li>- Talk about feelings &amp; empathy</li> </ul>	<p>“Who did you play with today?”</p> <p>“How was your friend feeling when that happened?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post friend names on fridge</li> <li>- Choose one set day/week for a playdate</li> <li>- Help send a small drawing or note</li> </ul>
8–11 Middle Childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage clubs, sports, or group projects</li> <li>- Teach problem-solving &amp; compromise</li> <li>- Facilitate hangouts outside school</li> <li>- Role-play joining games or conversations</li> </ul>	<p>“What’s something fun you talked about with friends today?”</p> <p>“Who haven’t you seen in a while?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sunday check-in: “Who will you connect with this week?”</li> <li>- Add birthdays/events to a calendar</li> <li>- Help plan 1-on-1 friend time</li> </ul>
12–14 Tweens & Early Teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support independence with safe boundaries</li> <li>- Discuss healthy friendship traits</li> <li>- Balance online vs. in-person time</li> <li>- Help navigate peer pressure &amp; conflict</li> </ul>	<p>“What do you value most in a friend?”</p> <p>“How do you handle disagreements?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use phone reminders to reach out</li> <li>- Send ‘just checking in’ texts/DMs</li> <li>- Plan in-person hangouts in advance</li> </ul>

14–18 Teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage ownership of social plans</li> <li>- Talk about supportive friendships vs. toxic behaviors</li> <li>- Discuss managing group dynamics &amp; online drama</li> <li>- Support self-advocacy in tough situations</li> </ul>	<p>“Who really ‘gets’ you when things are hard?”</p> <p>“What helps you handle friendship stress?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schedule regular check-ins or study sessions</li> <li>- Use group chats to stay connected</li> <li>- Celebrate important milestones (games, performances, etc.)</li> </ul>
19–23 Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normalize friendship shifts after graduation/moving</li> <li>- Encourage mixing old &amp; new circles</li> <li>- Discuss healthy boundaries, values, and balancing relationships &amp; responsibilities</li> </ul>	<p>“Who lifts you up when you’re feeling low?”</p> <p>“How do you keep in touch with friends from home?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan occasional meet-ups, even virtually</li> <li>- Send ‘thinking of you’ messages</li> <li>- Celebrate transitions and achievements together</li> </ul>
24–29 Early Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasize proactive effort to maintain long-distance friendships</li> <li>- Support growing through major life changes (jobs, housing, relationships)</li> <li>- Encourage openness to new friendships at work, in the community, or through interests</li> </ul>	<p>“How do you make space for friends with a busy schedule?”</p> <p>“What new connections have surprised you lately?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set recurring catch-ups (coffee, walks, calls)</li> <li>- Use shared interests as anchor points</li> <li>- Show vulnerability and ask for support when needed</li> </ul>
30+ Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledge evolving friendship dynamics (parenthood, career demands, moves)</li> <li>- Encourage deepening long-term bonds</li> <li>- Value quality over quantity</li> <li>- Recognize the effort in staying connected</li> </ul>	<p>“Which friendships have stood the test of time — and why?”</p> <p>“What helps you feel close, even when life gets busy?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build rituals and traditions (annual get-togethers, group chats)</li> <li>- Offer help during life transitions</li> <li>- Schedule friend time with intention</li> </ul>



## 2 Open-Ended Questions for Connection

- *“Who do you feel really understands you these days?”*
- *“What’s something you appreciate about your friends?”*
- *“How do you handle disagreements or distance in friendships now?”*
- *“Are there friendships you’d like to rekindle or strengthen?”*
- *“What helps you stay close with people who live far away?”*

## 3 Friendship Reminders & Routines

- Visual reminders: Post important friends’ names, birthdays, or shared memories somewhere visible (fridge, phone calendar, email reminders).
- Scheduled check-ins: Build in regular calls, texts, or messages — especially during big life transitions.
- Celebrate milestones: Don’t skip marking moves, new jobs, or challenges overcome together.
- Be open to new: Friendships can grow in every phase of life — through parenting, community, hobbies, or work.

## 4 Lasting Friendship Skills: For All Ages

1. 💬 Ask open-ended questions and listen deeply.
2. 📅 Create regular routines for connection.
3. 🗣️ Model healthy friendships and boundaries at every age.
4. ❤️ Normalize change — friendships evolve; some grow closer, others drift, and new ones will form.
5. 🎉 Celebrate effort and presence — it’s showing up that counts.

