

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.

1 Friendship Support Strategies by Age

| Age Range | Key Actions | Conversation Starters | Friendship Maintenance Tips |
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| 4–7 Early Years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrange short, structured playdates - Model greetings, sharing, turn-taking - Read books about friendship - Talk about feelings & empathy | <p>“Who did you play with today?”</p> <p>“How was your friend feeling when that happened?”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post friend names on fridge - Choose one set day/week for a playdate - Help send a small drawing or note |
| 8–11 Middle Childhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage clubs, sports, or group projects - Teach problem-solving & compromise - Facilitate hangouts outside school - Role-play joining games or conversations | <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"> - Sunday check-in: “Who will you connect with this week?” - Add birthdays/events to a calendar - Help plan 1-on-1 friend time |
| 12–14 Tweens & Early Teens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support independence with safe boundaries - Discuss healthy friendship traits - Balance online vs. in-person time - Help navigate peer pressure & conflict | <p>“What do you value most in a friend?”</p> <p>“How do you handle disagreements?”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use phone reminders to reach out - Send ‘just checking in’ texts/DMs - Plan in-person hangouts in advance |
| 14–18 Teens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage ownership of social plans - Talk about supportive friendships vs. toxic behaviors - Discuss managing group dynamics & online drama | <p>“Who really ‘gets’ you when things are hard?”</p> <p>“What helps you handle friendship stress?”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedule regular check-ins or study sessions - Use group chats to stay connected - Celebrate important |

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| | - Support self-advocacy in tough situations | | milestones (games, performances, etc.) |
| 19–23 Young Adults | - Normalize friendship shifts after graduation/moving - Encourage mixing old & new circles - Discuss healthy boundaries, values, and balancing relationships & responsibilities | “Who lifts you up when you’re feeling low?” “How do you keep in touch with friends from home?” | - Plan occasional meet-ups, even virtually - Send ‘thinking of you’ messages - Celebrate transitions and achievements together |
| 24–29 Early Adulthood | - Emphasize proactive effort to maintain long-distance friendships - Support growing through major life changes (jobs, housing, relationships) - Encourage openness to new friendships at work, in the community, or through interests | “How do you make space for friends with a busy schedule?” “What new connections have surprised you lately?” | - Set recurring catch-ups (coffee, walks, calls) - Use shared interests as anchor points - Show vulnerability and ask for support when needed |
| 30+ Adulthood | - Acknowledge evolving friendship dynamics (parenthood, career demands, moves) - Encourage deepening long-term bonds - Value quality over quantity - Recognize the effort in staying connected | “Which friendships have stood the test of time — and why?” “What helps you feel close, even when life gets busy?” | - Build rituals and traditions (annual get-togethers, group chats) - Offer help during life transitions - Schedule friend time with intention |

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.

5 Troubleshooting Friendship Challenges

Even with best intentions, friendships can feel messy or disappointing. Here are age-appropriate ways to work through challenges when connections don't go as planned:

Common Challenges & Tips

- **Feeling Left Out**
 - *Children*: Role-play ways to join in (“Can I play too?”).
 - *Teens*: Talk about group dynamics and reassure that belonging shifts over time.
 - *Adults*: Reach out to one friend individually instead of waiting for group invites.
- **Conflict or Misunderstanding**
 - Use “I” statements: “*I felt hurt when...*” rather than blaming.
 - Suggest cooling-off time before addressing issues.
 - Model apologizing and forgiving without keeping score.
- **Friendship Drift**
 - Normalize that it's natural for some friendships to fade.
 - Encourage gratitude for past connection, while making space for new ones.
 - Offer gentle ways to reconnect (“I miss you — want to catch up?”).
- **Unhealthy Friendships**
 - Teach kids/teens to notice red flags (teasing, pressure, exclusion).
 - Encourage boundaries and self-worth (“You deserve friends who treat you with respect”).
 - For adults, consider if energy spent outweighs energy gained.
- **Difficulty Making New Friends**
 - Practice conversation starters.





- Encourage shared-interest activities (clubs, classes, volunteering).
- Remind that building trust takes time and small steps.

6 Affirmations for Friendship Worries

When feeling down about friendships or doubting your ability to connect, these affirmations can help shift perspective:

For Kids & Teens

- *“I am kind, and kindness attracts friends.”*
- *“It’s okay if friendships change — I will find people who value me.”*
- *“I don’t have to be friends with everyone; the right friends will come.”*

For Young Adults

- *“I am worthy of meaningful, supportive friendships.”*
- *“Friendships take effort and patience — I’m learning as I go.”*
- *“Even if some friendships fade, I can build new ones.”*

For Adults

- *“Quality matters more than quantity — I value the friends who truly care.”*
- *“It’s never too late to make new connections.”*
- *“I bring value, warmth, and care into my friendships.”*
- *“I allow friendships to evolve, and I’m grateful for those who walk with me now.”*

