



Building parent-school partnerships

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Social skills for children

School brings different types of learning, including social interactions and how to make friends. Parents can lay the foundations at home by teaching their kids these 7 important social skills.

Children who are able to form friendships when they start school are happier at school and also learn better.

More significantly, *positive friendships have long-term implications for social and indirectly academic success.*

Friendships skills are generally developmental, but they don't develop in isolation. Kids acquire these skills when they play with their siblings and interact with children and adults outside their family.

Today's children grow up with fewer siblings, fewer opportunities for unstructured play and less freedom to explore friendships than children of even ten years ago.

Parents can help kids develop important social competencies by teaching them sociable behaviours at home, being good role models and providing opportunities for kids to play with each other in a variety of situations.

Here are 7 important social skills to help children to develop:

1 Ask for what you want

Help children ask for what they want. It means they don't throw tantrums, whinge,

and sulk or expect parents to guess what's on their minds. While we need to be patient with toddlers, we need also to give older children the chance and opportunity to ask for what they want. Sometimes we need to ignore shrugs and grunts and expect them to articulate their wishes. This is the basis of civil behaviour, as well as a basic human skill.

2 Good manners

Teach kids good manners, in particular the three 'power words'. These words are very persuasive because they have a way of breaking down barriers and people's defences. These three words are: your name; please; thanks. These terms are the basis of good manners, and, when used, will increase the likelihood of getting what you want.

3 Sharing

Sharing is a basic social skill. Developmentally, very young children like to keep their possessions themselves. As they get older and move into Pre School and beyond the notion of sharing becomes a pre-requisite for playing with and forming relationships with others. Other children like

to play and be with those who share their time, possessions and space with them. Sharing is the start of empathy as it shows sensitivity to other people's feelings.

4 Holding a conversation

Holding conversations with others is a lifetime friendship skill. Conversations require self-disclosure, which can be challenging for some children. Good conversationalists give of themselves, but also take an interest in the person they are talking to. Many children forget that good conversations are two-way events, and tend to focus solely on themselves.

Children within conversations need to learn to ask good or interesting questions; to take turns when speaking and to show you are listening by making eye contact and not interrupting.

5 Winning and losing well

Kids need to learn to win without rubbing others noses in it, and lose gracefully without throwing tantrums and making excuses.

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Wanting to win is natural, but they need to do so in a way that they maintain a relationship with other players so they will play again. Losing may make kids feel bad, but kids need to control their negative feelings so that others will play with them again.

6 Approaching and joining a group

The ability to approach strangers in social situations is valuable skill that opens up many doors, both friendship-wise and business-wise. These skills can be learned and practised during childhood, so that it becomes second nature in adulthood.

7 Handling fights and disagreements

Disagreements happen in families and among friends. The key is to make sure disagreements don't lead to the breakdown of friendships. It's important to get across to kids that having an argument or disagreement doesn't mean that a friendship is over. Strong friendships, like strong family relationships, withstand disagreements. In fact, they only serve to strengthen friendships.

The results of a number of studies indicate that children can be taught friendships skills. The strategies are simple and revolve around teaching children a range of friendly behaviours such as: talking with others while playing, showing an interest in others, smiling, offering help and encouragement when needed, a willingness to share and learning how to enter a game or social situation.

As parents we often focus on the development of children's academic skills and quite easily neglect the development of important social skills, which contribute so much to children's happiness and wellbeing.

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