

WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

As we grow and develop through our early years, the ways in which we build connections with peers changes. In preschool, for instance, our play is typically more “parallel,” engaging with one another by doing our own thing but beside one another. Gradually we develop interest in interacting and cooperating with each other, negotiating boundaries, and establishing shared rules for working together in an activity. We start to notice roles emerge such as leaders or peacekeepers, and bonds begin to form around personalities that work well together or who share common interests. In the middle years, kids learn some of the nuances involved in friendship making and maintaining, which comes with some emotional bumps and bruises along the way. Learning effective skills for cultivating healthy relationships helps kids slowly develop wisdom around what makes for strong and worthwhile connections while also learning about themselves and their emerging identities.

Regardless of the stage, peer relationships are important for kids. We all have a basic human need for acceptance and belonging. Through friendships we learn empathy, perspective taking, trust, respect, self-worth, how to value differences, how to communicate effectively, and how to help one another out. Some kids need some coaching along the way, to support them in finding their tribe. Others make friends easily, but struggle in keeping them. It can feel tricky to know when and how to get involved as caregivers. Have a look through the skills listed in the infographic and consider what might be helpful to nurture in your child. Remember to first acknowledge the age and stage of development they are at before expecting them to learn skills they aren't yet capable of using. Check in regularly with your child about how things are going with their friends. It is such a big part of their world and can be a platform to grow your own relationship with your child. ●

RESOURCE LINKS:

[Child Mind](#) resource on helping kids foster friendships

[What Parents Can Do](#), [Healthychildren.org](#)

[Kids who need a little help making friends](#), [Childmind.org](#)

