

My Child Has No Friends, What Should I Do?

By Grant Anderson, Family and Teen Counselor

Parents who see their kids friendless often feel saddened by the loneliness they feel their child is experiencing. While this is sometimes the experience with kids who struggle socially it is not universal with friendless children. There are kids who simply see the world from an isolated perspective, and though they say they don't need friends they may want them. Real friends are vital we all need them and we are designed for a connection with others, so what about those who yearn to have relationships but struggle to make this desire come into fruition. Some children struggle to make friends because of their poor social skills others because of developmental delays in either processing or emotional regulation. So what can a parent do to encourage their child who doesn't seem to make friends?

One of the most important jobs of parents is to support their children. This doesn't mean coddle them or do things for them, what it does mean is provide a means to help them in the learning process. This may mean physically as in transporting them from place to place. It may be emotionally, in helping them process interactions with others, or it may be simply to support them spiritually through an active prayer life for your child. When a child's social skills are not up to the maturity level of their chronological age you can encourage your child by working with them in some simple ways. Help them read facial expression and verbal tones this is an often assumed skill that children don't always have. Games are a good way to help your child learn these skills, guessing games to help them learn what different facial expressions mean. Next, help your child identify how their actions might affect others. This is helping them with the skill of *empathy* this is the ability to change your perspective to how another person is feeling. Also in parenting help them understand the importance of impulse control, this can be productive when a situation is reviewed in advance to help the child think through the importance of controlling their desires. In social situations this will help the child interact in more positive controlled ways with their peers.

As you can see there are no easy answers to tough questions. It takes time and patience with your child. Encouraging your child in activities and opportunities in which they can make connections that lead to friendships is important. Helping them feel comfortable at church can also be a powerful tool in helping your child's growth. Church can be a positive natural way for a child to interact with his peers and find the types of relationships that Proverb 18:24 talk about, "...but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." So as parents we are called to pray and lift up our children to The Lord that he may be their most powerful and important friend letting all other relationships be a reflection of this vital union.

Other Resources

- *Safe People* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
- *Dorie, The Girl Nobody Loved* by Doris Van Stone
- *Spiritual Friendship* by Mindy Caliguire