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Welcome to the Parenting Hub!

Friendships and Frenemies: Navigating Peer Relationships



*Parent ConnexT™ is under the Beech Acres Parenting Center umbrella of programs.
Serving children and all the adults in their lives for over 170 years.*

“The only way to have a friend is to be one.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Developing and maintaining friendships are an important part of our social and emotional well-being.

Friendships provide a sense of belonging and contribute to improving our quality of life. Friendships have been shown to help reduce stress as well as help children adjust to changes in their environment.

In this presentation, you will learn about:

- Friendships at different ages and stages
- Supporting your child and helping them navigate everything from making friends to experiencing friendship challenges like frenemies or bullying



Helping our children navigate friendships can be hard...like really hard.

The next few slides are about friendships at different ages, as well as some of the challenges children may face at different stages.

Take a moment to think about your friendships over the years.

- What are your values around friendship and how does that impact your child/children?
- How are you modeling friendship to your child/children?
- How are your friendship experiences similar or different from your child's?

Toddlers and Preschoolers

Children move from solitary play to cooperative play from birth to age 4 in the following stages:

- **Solitary Play (Birth-Age 2):** At this stage, children play alone and aren't interested in playing with others yet.
- **Spectator (Age 2):** Children begin watching others play, but don't engage.
- **Parallel Play (Age 2-4):** Children will play alongside or near others but not WITH others yet.
- **Associate Play (Age 3-4):** Children start to interact during play or do an activity related to what another child near them is doing, but not with them. (For example, playing on the same playground equipment.)
- **Cooperative Play (Age 4+):** Children play together and are interested in the activity and the other children involved.



Young Children



#strengthoffriendship



#strengthofteamwork



#strengthofforgiveness

Set an **Intention** to support your child building on their **strength of Friendship**: Talking and listening, taking turns, cooperating, sorting out disagreements, winning and losing graciously.

How to Help:

- **Mindfully** model & talk about these skills when you interact and play with your child. Have your child introduce themselves to someone new by saying, "Hi my name is __, what is your name?"
- Read children's books about friendship - use them to start discussions around being a good friend.
- Young children can usually make friends anywhere. The playground, school, or an activity (such as sports or clubs) can be ideal environments to practice friendship skills by interacting and playing with other kids.
- **If you can, try hosting structured playdates – be intentional:**
Provide **options** for kids to do together during their play time.
Put away any special toys that are likely to cause arguments before friends come over.
Stay close and **keep an eye on what is going on**. If play is getting too rough or argument is escalating, you'll need to intervene. **Set a time limit**, keeping in mind that at this age, it is best to leave everyone wanting more.

Friendships are intentional, why can't acts of kindness be intentional as well?

A team at Beech Acres Parenting Center asked that question... and created *signed to be kind* pledge and even a Girl Scout Patch!

signed to be kind

Family Name

By signing this pledge, our family commits to being kind to ourselves, our family, our community, and the world!

#signedtobekind

beech acres
PARENTING CENTER

If you are looking for concrete ideas to teach kindness...

1. Go to: <https://beechacres.org/signed-to-be-kind/>
2. Scroll down to sign the pledge as a family.
3. Text 'kind' to 833-558-0781 to receive weekly ideas on how to be kind to yourself, your family, your community & the world.

Bonus: Do you have a Daisy, Brownie or Girl Scout?

<https://beechacres.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Signed-to-be-Kind-Girl-Scouts-Final.pdf>

Adolescents and Friendship

Get ready for some change...

In middle school, as kids drift away from pure play, friendships often shift and evolve. Similarities attract, so friendships form over shared interests.

Acceptance and how they will be perceived by their peers become very important to adolescents.

Their friendships may often seem more important to them than their family.
Adolescents become more independent in managing their friendships.



Adolescents and Friendship

‘You shall know the person by his company.’

- Spanish Proverb

How to Help:

- Talk about what qualities a good friend has and why. Discuss your family values with Intentionality around friendship and how that can help them navigate relationships during this stage of life.
- Remind them there are different types of friends. Distinguish between acquaintances, teammates, casual friends, close friends. Not everyone is going to be a best friend and that’s ok.
- Help them recognize potential new friends.
- Brainstorm new ways to make friends. Join a club, try a new activity, play a sport.
- Review social roles and cues: how to start conversations, listen Mindfully, interact positively, read nonverbal cues.
- Talk about behavior that can damage their friendships such as gossiping and teasing.
- Let your adolescent know they can talk to you by being nonjudgmental when they come to you with friendship problems. – *Try at the start of the conversation... are you venting or asking for advice?* If venting... 🗣️

Teenagers

During the pre-teen and teenage years, friendships evolve from sharing common interests to sharing opinions and emotions. The strength of friendship is more important than the number of friends a teenager has, as true belonging is built on trust, communication, and intimacy.



How to Help:

- Continue to talk to your teen about the qualities of a good friend and that maintaining friendships **takes time and effort** by both parties.
- Emphasize the importance of finding friends who make them **feel seen and appreciated** for who they really are versus trying to fit in.
- Peer pressure: Offer your teen ‘face-saving’ strategies—for example, it is easier for **you to be the bad guy** by refusing to let your teen go to a party with poor supervision than it is for your teen to go and resist pressure to do something they don’t want to do, such as drink alcohol.
- Remember that it is **normal for their friendships to take a more central role in their lives**. It is helping them prepare to go out into the world on their own, and they will need strong relationships with their peers to be successful adults.

7 Ideas to build the Strength of Friendship with Intentionality & Mindfulness:



Being intentional.

- Emphasize from a young age that though friends are important, so is your family and **spending time together as a family.**
- Remind your child that a **good friendship will make you feel good about yourself.**
- Trust your child to **listen to their gut** and to try to solve friendship troubles on their own, when appropriate.
- **Set limits on social media** and encourage face to face interactions with friends when possible – IRL.



Being mindful.

- Be aware of signs of friendship bullying. Friendship groups often have power imbalances, so be aware if one child is always being targeted for teasing, etc., and be **prepared to intervene, whether your child is being bullied, is a bystander, or is being the bully.**
- Kids may be reluctant to admit to bullying issues and be more likely to discuss things if **framed as “friendship problems”.**
- **Listen and Empathize First.** Often, adults jump in prematurely to try to soothe their child’s pain by offering solutions or unsolicited advice. Let your child talk it out, let them know that you hear their point of view and offer a safe space for sharing their emotions. Ask questions to help you get to the underlining issue. Then, invite your child to engage in active problem-solving and offer insight IF your child wants your help.

Friends, Enemies, or Frenemies?

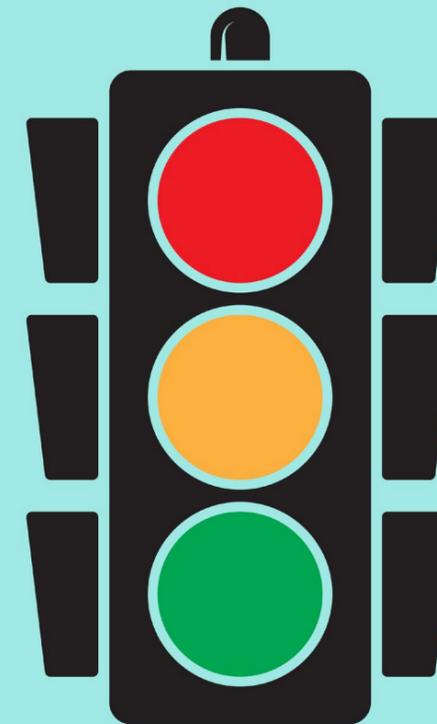


Some peer relationships don't fall neatly under a friends or enemies category. These are people with whom your child may sometimes get along, but not always.

It can be frustrating as a parent, but your child may be resistant to completely end the friendship for any number of reasons.

You can help them navigate these relationships by encouraging them to set and maintain boundaries. Explain that while you may spend some positive time together with this person, it's important not to be lulled into a false sense of security.

Use the analogy of **RED** light, **YELLOW** light, **GREEN** light.



A **red** light person is someone that you know is not a good friend.

A **yellow** light friend is someone that you sometimes get along with, but sometimes don't.

A **green** light friend is someone with whom you consistently have a positive relationship and don't have consistent disagreements or struggles. A **green** light friend is a marble jar filler.



About Bullying...

Bullying is defined as **unwanted, aggressive behavior** among school aged children that involves a real or perceived **power imbalance**. The **behavior is repeated**, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. - **stopbullying.gov**

Types of Bullying:

- **Physical - hurting a person's body or possessions.** Includes hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone's things.
- **Verbal - saying or writing mean things.** Includes teasing, name calling, taunting, threatening to cause harm.
- **Social - hurting someone's reputation or relationships (also called relational bullying).** Includes leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, embarrassing someone publicly.
- **Cyberbullying - Bullying via the internet and social media.**

**1 in 5
12-18 year olds
reported
experiencing
bullying nation
wide.**



Information Source:
<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts>



Bullying Prevention

Intentional Steps you can take to reduce the likelihood that children will become perpetrators or victims of bullying.



- **Teach your child how to:**
 - Care about others
 - Get along with their peers
 - Deal with angry feelings appropriately
 - Be assertive without being aggressive in standing up for themselves
- **Encourage supportive friendships**
- **Nurture a positive home environment**
- **Help foster resilience – your child’s belief that they can cope with and overcome difficulties**
- **Get to know school personnel and other parents**
- **Maintain open communication with your child**

Being Mindful of the Signs of Bullying



Physical Signals

- Comes home with torn, damaged or missing belongings
- Has unexplained cuts and/or bruises.
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Experiences a loss of appetite
- Takes a long and out of the way route to walk to or from school

Mental Well-Being Signals

- Appears sad, moody, tearful, depressed
- Has lost interest in schoolwork or suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem
- Seems afraid of going to school or participating in organized activities with peers
- Finds or makes excuses to avoid going to school

What to do if Your Child is Being Bullied



- 1. Manage your emotions.** Stay calm and assure your child you will see to their safety. Assure your child that it is not their fault. Check in with yourself on how this is impacting you. Is it bringing up old memories? It's best to deal with our emotions first, so we don't muddy the waters with our child's situation. Remember, all situations are unique.
- 2. Gather information** about what happened from your child. Be prepared that they may have some hesitancy to tell you, so proceed gently. Document all incidents.
- 3. Assess the severity of the situation.** Is it something your child can try to deal with first or do you need to become involved? Make sure the situation qualifies as bullying. Often children call a disagreement or not getting along with another child bullying. It's important to not minimize the situation, so validate the feelings first before helping them understand the difference.
- 4. If it is a cyberbullying incident,** take screenshots. Have your child block the perpetrator.
- 5. If the incident occurred at school,** contact the adult in charge of the immediate environment first (i.e., the teacher). If they do not take action, speak to the principal, then the superintendent.



What to do if Your Child is *Being* Bullied



- **Be persistent.** Document any phone calls and meetings as well as action steps that are being taken.
- If **threats have been made** to your child outside of school, you may need to contact the police.
- If the **bullying is severe**, ongoing, and no change is being made to protect your child, remove your child from the unsafe environment.
- **Consider counseling** services for your child to help them process what happened to them and to heal.
- **Spend some extra time** with your child to help them feel loved and supported.



When Your Child *is* The Bully – Sometimes ‘hurt kids hurt kids.’



- **Take it seriously.** Bullying can have long term effects on the **aggressive child** and failure to address the behavior at an early age can lead to **more serious problems later in their life.**
- Reassure your child that you love them and **focus on the behavior as being the problem.** Insist that the behavior change and follow through to make sure it does.
- **Obtain support from other adults,** such as teachers, who interact with your child, to help end the behavior.
- Consider counseling services to help your child develop more **effective coping strategies.**
- Communicate with your child to try to **find out why they are bullying. They may be experiencing feelings of anger, loneliness, or insecurity.**
- Talk to your child about **how it feels to be bullied.**
- **Ask a school counselor or teacher** if your child is struggling in school or having **difficulty making friends.**
- Make sure your child isn't being bullied by someone else. **Often kids who bully are mistreated themselves.**



Raising Kids to be Upstanders

Be Intentional.



- Teach empathy. Kids with **emotional intelligence** can put themselves in someone else's shoes and think *“what would I want others to do if I were being bullied?”*
- Talk about your **Family Values**—state that you value kindness and sticking up for others.
- **Role play situations** they may come across and brainstorm various ways they could deal with them. Having a plan of what they might say in a situation will **bolster their confidence**.
- Talk about the **different ways** to be an **Upstander** and that they can choose the response they are **most comfortable with**, or that they may vary their response depending on the circumstances. **Options include:**
 - **Confronting the bully** about their behavior. (*“That’s not nice. Knock it off.”*)
 - **Supporting the victim** – offer to help, invite them to sit or walk with you.
 - **Distract attention away from the bully** (*“Hey everyone, let’s watch the game.”*)
- Teach them to **ask for help**. Sometimes intervention from an adult is needed and that's okay.
- **Keep talking to your kids about bullying**. It should be an ongoing conversation.

Strength Spotting your family!

Take the complete survey at <https://www.viacharacter.org/>

- What strengths do each member of your family possess?
- What strengths do family members spot in one another?

**You may notice a few character strengths have different names as we made it more kid-friendly...
Social Intelligence = Friendship*



Appreciation of Beauty
I value and respect the unique qualities in everything I see around me.



Bravery
I take on challenges and speak up for what is right.



Creativity
I can think of lots of ways to solve problems and use my imagination.



Curiosity
I explore the world around me with an open mind and ask questions often.



Fairness
I believe everyone should have the same opportunities.



Forgiveness
I believe that everyone deserves a second chance. I can let things go.



Friendship
I get along well with others and my friends can count on me.



Gratitude
I appreciate the good things that happen to me.



Honesty
I am open and truthful.



Hope
I feel positive when I think about the future.



Humility
I let my accomplishments speak for themselves.



Humor
I like bringing a smile to others.



Kindness
I am helpful and nice to others.



Leadership
People value my opinion and look to me for direction.



Love
I value my close relationships with others.



Love of Learning
I get excited about discovering new things.



Perseverance
I work hard to achieve my goals and don't give up.



Perspective
I can see other people's points of view and offer good advice.



Judgment
I am open-minded and think through my decisions.



Prudence
I carefully and thoughtfully approach situations I encounter.



Self-Control
I can stop, wait and manage my emotions.



Sense of Meaning
I am discovering my purpose and place in the world.



Teamwork
I like being part of a team and doing my share.



Zest
I approach daily life with energy and excitement.

Deeper Dive from Beech Acres Parenting Center



Blogs

<https://beechacres.org/lgbtq-youth-and-bullying-how-might-life-be-different/>



<https://beechacres.org/making-friends-can-be-difficult-at-any-age-help-your-child-strengthen-their-social-skills/>



[But Mom, ALL Of My Friends Are On Snapchat!](#)

Related Course – Delivered via Quick Text Messages 5-7 days 😊

<https://arist.app/orgs/beech-acres/courses/a110d6bc-cd97-4786-ad6e-017714108eae>



Connect with us!

Families Report a Positive Change in Just 3 Sessions and it LASTS 3 Months Later		
After 3 Sessions		3 Months Later... Effect is Still Felt
 Satisfaction as a Parent ✓		 Satisfaction as a Parent ✓
 Self-Confidence in their Parenting ✓		 Self-Confidence in their Parenting ✓
 Relationship with their Child ✓		 Relationship with their Child ✓
 Improved Self-Care ✓		 Improved Self-Care ✓
 Overall Score ✓		 Overall Score ✓

General Population
Statistically Significant Changes
Seen at 95% Confidence Interval
and p value <0.001



If you are interested in something more personal, feel free to contact Katie Helmes at khelmes@beechacres.org to set-up a **virtual** session with a Child Development expert.

In just 3 sessions, their approach has been proven to strengthen the parent/child relationship – with the effect lasting at least 3 months later.

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