

# ALL ABOUT BULLYING

## Helping Young Children Build Friendship Skills

When kids are young, parents or caregivers often help them make friends. Parents can set up playdates with kids, watch their interactions and help guide their child's behavior during play. As children enter school, they begin making friends on their own — sometimes that goes well, but other times it doesn't!

Some children have trouble with friendship skills, such as:

- Difficulty knowing how to join in when other kids are playing.
- Trouble being flexible in their play with other kids, like not sharing or letting others choose the game/lead the play.
- Getting upset easily, arguing or acting out (such as hitting, yelling when the game isn't going their way or saying "we're not friends anymore").

It can be tough when children are having difficulty with friendships. If you are concerned about your child's friendship skills, there are ways you can help!

### HELP YOUR CHILD PRACTICE SOCIAL SKILLS

- **Teach them how to join in.** Give them simple things to say, like, "Can I play, too?" or "That looks fun!"
- **Talk about body language.** Help your child notice how others are feeling by looking at their face and body. You can role-play or play guessing games where one person shows a facial expression and the other guesses the feeling. You can also watch other kids together and talk with your child about what they see. For example, "What does her body language tell you?" "Do you think that child is happy or annoyed?" or "Does he look like he wants to keep playing or take a break?" In doing this, you are helping them build perspective-taking skills, which are very important for positive friendships.
- **Stay close during play.** Especially for younger children, stay nearby when your child plays with friends, cousins or siblings. Watch how they act and give them tips for having more fun with their peers. Don't just say what not to do — show them what to do. For example, instead of "Don't let Thomas boss you around," say, "Share your ideas with him, too!"
- **Practice taking turns.** Help your child learn to take turns and balance having their way versus letting others come up with ideas. For example, take turns choosing a meal, a game to play or a show to watch. This can be done informally, or you can set a rotation for each person to get a time or day to choose. This helps kids get used to sharing control when playing with friends.
- **Keep playdates short, structured and fun.** Plan easy, fun activities that all kids will enjoy, where your child can have positive interactions and feel successful.
- **Have a conversation with your child before playdates or other social interactions.** Help them to think ahead and practice skills. You might say, "If Asia makes you upset or mad, remember to take a deep breath and then use your words to tell her how you feel," or "Remember to watch James's body language — if he walks away, he might be tired of wrestling."

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## SIGN UP FOR GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Enroll your child in activities or sports teams so they can meet others. You can then set up hangouts after, like going to the park or getting ice cream.

## CONNECT WITH OTHER PARENTS

- Join group chats/texts or volunteer at school to meet other parents. This can help you set up playdates for your child.

## PLAN PLAYDATES THAT HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED

- Watch how your child acts in different settings. Do they like playing with one friend at a time or in bigger groups? If they prefer one-on-one time, keep it short and plan an activity (like bowling or a short visit to the park).

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT AGGRESSION

- Some children are aggressive with their friends and classmates, meaning they might hit, shove, yell or say mean things. They may get physically rough when they're frustrated, overwhelmed or overstimulated.

They may lash out in anger when they lose a game. Some children engage in relational aggression, which means they use their social power to hurt a peer, saying things like, "I'm not going to play with you anymore," or "Now you're not invited to my birthday party."

You can help reduce your child's aggression by:

- Helping your child slow down or "take a mental pause" so they can think through their behavior before they act.
- Reminding your child that telling others when they're mad, upset or frustrated will help them feel better, and also works better than saying mean things.
- Letting them know when you'll step in. For example, "If you get too rough, we'll take a break to calm down."
- Giving rewards for good behavior. For example, say, "If you stay calm and don't hit or push at the playground, you'll earn a sticker. You're so close to earning that prize!"

With your support, practice and guidance, children can learn how to make and keep good friends!



### GET INVOLVED

Children, caregivers and school staff all play an important part in bullying prevention. To learn more about the different types of bullying and ways you can help, visit [violence.chop.edu/bullying-schools](https://violence.chop.edu/bullying-schools)



### FIND SUPPORT

Many organizations offer free resources to victims of bullying. For more information, visit [violence.chop.edu/bullying-prevention-resources](https://violence.chop.edu/bullying-prevention-resources)



### LEARN MORE

This handout is part of the "All About Bullying" fact sheet series developed by CHOP experts. To access the full suite of educational handouts, visit [violence.chop.edu/violence-prevention-tools#fact-sheets](https://violence.chop.edu/violence-prevention-tools#fact-sheets)