

Making Friends

Our Staff Writer

Imam Ali (AS): “Try to find honest, faithful and trustworthy friends for yourselves, for otherwise you will have to make friends with bad, dishonest people.” This Hadith is sufficient for every person of sound mind to realize the importance of having good people for friends. As we know, this world’s life has its problems for everybody, for dealing with them one needs the benevolent help, support and consultation of worthy friends. The ability to find good friends should be imparted to children by parents, since this way they will be better able to choose reliable, properly raised persons as friends in their future lives, and how to protect the ties of friendship in proper ways and for proper purposes. Parts of the article which is written by Joanne Barker may hopefully be of benefit to concerned parents.

Where you stand in relation to your child’s friendships is one of the more awkward questions of parenthood. There’s no doubt that friendship is a critical childhood passage. Kids learn how to share, compromise, and work through misunderstandings with their friends. Yet the ups and downs of friendships can be hard for parents to watch. How do you know when your child needs you, and when you need to back off? Here are seven tips from experts in child development:

1. Teach Friendship Skills

Kids want to play with kids who can have fun without taking over and bossing everyone around. Seeing you reach out to friends is your child’s first lesson in how to do that. You can teach empathy by having your children help you do things like bringing food to a sick neighbor, or making a birthday card for a grandparent,

suggests Newman, who is author of *The Case for the Only Child: Your Essential Guide*. Children's experience at home tends to extend out into the wider world.

2. Tune in to Your Child's Friendship Style

Involving your child and forcing your child are two different things. You could unknowingly limit your child if you assume he relates to friends the same way you do. Let your child show you what kind of social interactions work best for him. If your child loves group situations, great. But if groups upset your child, see if he does better playing with one or two children at a time.

3. Open Your Home to Your Child's Friends

If your child is young, invite her friends over for a play date. Be sure to have a couple of activities in mind. Activities might include a box of dress-up clothes or a plan to make cookies, depending on your child's interests. Even when your child is old enough to plan her own activities, encourage her to have friends over. Make your home a welcoming place for your child's' friends. This can make things easier as she, and her friendships, mature. It will also give you the chance to get to know your child's friends.

4. Help Your Child Work through Friendship Troubles

Misunderstandings are common to friendships. Your child may need help working through emotions from time to time. In a study of 267 kids between 9 and 11 years old, the way a child perceived his friends' behavior determined whether he got angry, sad, or felt OK about the situation. Kids who felt angry were more likely to want to end the friendship. This is not to say you should step in and work everything out for your child. You might, however, point out that there are two

sides to every story. Or you could say, "Why don't you wait a day or two and invite your friend back over?" suggests Newman.

5. Let Your Child Choose Friends That Fit

Friendships can expand your child's view of the world. That might mean, for instance, that he hangs out with a child from a family whose religion is different from your own. Unless your child is in danger, it is a good idea to give your children room to make their own friends. If you feel a friendship is putting your child at risk, however, step in. You may talk with the school to find out more about your child's friend. You may share your concerns with your child and tell him you need to be around any time he is together with this friend. Or you may tell him not to spend time with that kid, period. Just be aware that ultimatums are hard to enforce, so say this only if you really mean it.

6. Keep an Eye Out for Teasing or Bullying

Teasing is often a part of childhood play, but as kids grow up, it can become more harmful. Teasing can easily cross the line into bullying. It is normal for very young children to occasionally hit or shove each other. You can help your child understand how her words or actions might hurt another child's feelings. Let your child know that in your family, people do not treat others like that. Nor do they let themselves be treated badly by others. Of course, it is difficult to know how and when to intervene. You might want to first talk to your child and ask how he is feeling, just be careful what words you use. If your child was hit or threatened, however, it is fine to contact the other child's parents. Be nice and try to get them on your side. Together, you may be able to help the children resolve their differences and remain friends.

7. Offer Alternatives to Popularity

Not being part of the popular crowd can feel like rejection on a grand scale. Starting around age 9 or 10, kids become sensitive to what others think of them. Unfortunately, you cannot change your child's popularity status. You can, however, listen to her concerns and talk about your childhood misadventures. A good group of friends can make problems like teasing and not being "in" less painful. As a parent, helping your child make friends, without trying *too* hard is a difficult balancing act, and well worth the effort.

Good friends are those who share with their companions both happiness and sadness. If we share our feelings with the wrongdoers whose actions are worthless and based on corruption, then we are following the same ways and standards as they are doing, and we will end up being as corrupt as they are, and then we are in a big trouble. Instead of making friends with the misguided ones we should befriend the righteous, yet treat the rest in a gracious and just manner. Staying at sufficient distance is necessary; yet treating everybody in a noble and kind manner is required.

Allah, the Exalted says in the Holy Qur'an: *"On a day when the sky will split open along with its clouds and the angels will be sent right on down. True control will belong to the Mercy giving on that day. It will be a harsh day for disbelievers, a day when the wrongdoer will gnaw away at his hands. He will say: "It's too bad for me! If I had only taken a pathway alongside the Messenger!"* Surah al-Furqan, 25:27-29)

It is wise to choose moderation in dealing with friends. Excessive love and confidence in friends are unacceptable; since it happens that a friend may change

into an enemy and use the secrets that he had shown, as weapons. Allah, the Exalted says in the Holy Qur'an: *"And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression."* Surah al-Maeda, 5:2)

May, Allah guide all of us through the right way.