

12 friendship skills every child needs ©Michael Grose 2009

Kids can be picky about who they play and mix with.

Popularity should not be confused with sociability. A number of studies in recent decades have shown that appearance, personality type and ability impact on a child's popularity at school.

Good-looking, easy-going, talented kids usually win peer popularity polls but that doesn't necessarily guarantee they will have friends.

Those children and young people who develop strong friendships have a definite set of skills that help make them easy to like, easy to relate to and easy to play with.

Here are twelve essential skills that children have identified as being important for making and keeping friends:

- 1. Ability to share possessions and space***
- 2. Keeping confidences and secrets***
- 3. Offering to help***
- 4. Accepting other's mistakes***
- 5. Being positive and enthusiastic***
- 6. Starting a conversation***
- 7. Winning and losing well***
- 8. Listening to others***
- 9. Starting and maintaining a conversation***
- 10. Ignoring someone who is annoying you***
- 11. Cooperating with others***
- 12. Giving and receiving compliments***

Friendships skills are generally developmental. That is, kids grow into these skills given exposure to different situations and with adult help.

In past generations 'exposure to different situations' meant opportunities to play with each other, with siblings and with older and younger friends.

They were reminded by parents about how they should act around others. They were also 'taught' from a very young age.

Arrested development

The NEW CHILD grows up with fewer siblings, fewer opportunities for unstructured play and less freedom to explore friendships than children of even ten years ago.

A parenting style that promotes a high sense of individual entitlement rather than the notion of fitting in appears to be popular at the moment.

These factors can lead to delayed or arrested development in these essential friendship skills, resulting in very unhappy, self-centred children.

Here are some ideas if you think your child experiences developmental delay in any of these essential skills or just needs some help to acquire them:

- 1. Encourage or insist that kids play and work with each other:** Allowing kids the freedom to be kids is part of the message here but parents have to be cunning with the NEW CHILD and construct situations where kids have to get on with each other. For some kids “Go outside and play” is a good place to start!!
- 2. Play with your kids:** Interact with your kids through games and other means so you can help kids learn directly from you how to get on with others.
- 3. Talk about these skills:** If you notice your kids need to develop some of these skills then talk about them, point out when they show them and give them some implementation ideas.

Kids are quite ego-centric and need to develop a sense of ‘other’ so they can successfully negotiate the many social situations that they find themselves in.

As parents we often focus on the development of children’s academic skills and can quite easily neglect the development of these vitally important social skills, which contribute so much to children’s happiness and well-being.