

What you can learn from how kids make friends

Though it's one of the seasons of life when connections are most helpful, parenthood can be terribly isolating. Making friends as an adult is a skill, and one we simply aren't taught in school. (Can someone ask if we can replace Calculus with Friendship Building? We'd actually use stuff from that class.) And while grown-ups struggle to navigate peer relationships, many young children have a natural talent for it. Here are some tips kids might give us for developing new friendships.

Look at Who Sits Next to You.

Kids don't often go through a rigorous screening process to determine who will be their new best bud. Instead, they often just strike up a conversation with the person behind them in the recess line, or wander into the neighbor's yard and ask to join the basketball game. If you're looking to start your own tribe of friends, start up a conversation with the teacher at toddler music class, the dad who always stands next to you in the preschool pick-up line, or the coworker who takes a lunch break at the same time you do every day.

What do you say to your new friend-to-be? Take a cue from a kindergartener – ask them on a friend date! Only instead of asking if she wants to play on the monkey bars, ask if she'd like to meet up at Starbucks before music class next week, or if he'd like to bring his kids and have a family lunch after story time.



Get Real.

Your preschooler likely has no issues discussing his fear of monsters or his tummy ache with everyone in a hundred mile radius. But somewhere between age 5 and 35, many of us develop some anxiety around sharing our true selves with our peers.

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The most fulfilling relationships, though, only happen when we are willing to share our weirdest, hardest, most embarrassing truths with the people we trust. This isn't to say you should talk about your marriage woes on that first Friend Date! But when another mom from school asks how you're doing, go ahead and confess that you're completely overwhelmed and exhausted by potty training. Or that you're feeling a bit guilty for bribing your kid with ice cream to do his homework for the third time this week. Chances are, she's got a story to share, too.

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Play.

Your child, from her earliest moments, has learned how to interact with the world and the people in it through play. Play is good for adults, too! It can release endorphins – chemicals that help us feel happy and connected to other people. So, while she’s playing peek-a-boo, schedule some time for fun with another grown-up. Here are some ideas: Bowling Double Date with the neighbors Game Night for parents of kids at a sleepover Evening Basketball Block Party Trampoline Park (for your adventure-seeking parents)

No matter how you choose to play, you can take a little of the pressure and formality out of building a new friendship by planning to do something mentally or physically active.

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Show Small Acts of Kindness.

Some of your favorite parenting moments have probably been observing when your child shares a toy that his sibling wants to play with, or comforts a crying peer. Kids know that simple acts of kindness can bring a lot of joy. So grab an extra coffee for your colleague on the way to work, write a thank you note to a parent who regularly hosts play dates, or keep a pint of ice cream stocked for the Friday night sitter. Relationships rely on kindness, and if you take the time to notice and appreciate the people in your circle, you’re well on your way to making them your new best friends.

Making friends as an adult is much harder than it is for children, but it’s just as important for caregivers to have support systems as it is for kids. Don’t overthink it - take a cue from your youngsters and practice taking simple steps toward building friendships. In this case, if you’re acting like a child, you’re getting it right.

Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 1/31/18. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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