

Children's Friendship Checklist



How to help your child know if they have made a true friend

Introduction

Friends, acquaintances, 'frenemies', enemies, and bullies ...

Helping your children to know the difference between a positive relationship and a negative one will be one of the most important lessons you teach them.

While we adults know that not all relationships are created equal, it can be tricky for a child or adolescent to understand the concept of a healthy friendship.

Here are some ideas for conversations that you might like to have with your children as they navigate the world of making and keeping friends.

What is a Friend?

- Our friends are a small pool of people who are always "safe."
- You may have a disagreement with a friend, but a friend always supports you and has your best interests at heart.
- A friend is someone who will make sure you have a seat at lunchtime when all the spaces are taken.
- A friend will notice on the days when you aren't quite yourself.
- Friends celebrate with you. They care about you, so sometimes they will cry with you too.
- A friend never asks you to do things you aren't comfortable with, and they want you to succeed no matter what.

What is an Acquaintance?

- An acquaintance is someone you have contact with. You might know their name because you've met them once or twice, but you don't know them very well.
- An acquaintance is someone you can say "hi" to at the shopping centre, but keep walking without stopping to have a long chat.
- An acquaintance is a person you might feel comfortable meeting in a group setting, but usually not by yourself.
- With an acquaintance, you might say "hello," ask surface-level questions about life (school, teachers, the weather), and move on. Acquaintances are usually not people you discuss personal details or serious topics with.

What is an Acquaintance? (cont...).

Parent note: Sometimes sensitive children find it tricky to find an acquaintance to connect with. Kids with reserved temperaments are often reluctant to reach out to people they don't know well, and sometimes feel isolated and alone. It's important to teach your children to not only have acquaintances but to *be* a positive acquaintance, especially to shy or socially isolated peers. A friendly face who will offer kindness and acknowledgment to others, even if they don't know them well, can make a huge difference to another person's day.

What is a 'Frenemy'?

- This made-up word may seem like a joke; but frenemies do exist.
- A frenemy is a person who poses as your friend but really isn't a friend at all.
- A frenemy abandons you in your time of need and talks about you negatively when you aren't around.
- A frenemy might ask you to put yourself in situations that make you uncomfortable.
- A frenemy may make jokes that are sometimes hurtful, and then make the excuse 'I was only joking'.
- A frenemy will often expect you to drop everything to help them but will never do the same for you.
- A frenemy is not safe because they can't be trusted.

Parent note: One of the greatest lessons you can teach your children is how to recognise when someone is not really a friend. It may be obvious to you that your child's 'frenemy' is having a toxic influence on their life but getting your child to accept this can be challenging.

The best way to overcome the impact of a frenemy is to expand your child's social circle. It's good for every child to have friends in different groups. Encourage your son or daughter to grow other friendships by spending time with a new group, inviting different kids over to hang out, or sitting with a new friend in class.

Responding to the influence of a frenemy in this way doesn't mean your child is 'moving on' or won't be friends with their usual group of friends. What it does mean, however, is that they will have options when they are not comfortable with their main group. With a bit of luck, their 'new' friends may become good friends, and contact with them might quietly persuade your child to move away from the frenemy.

"A frenemy is not safe because they can't be trusted."

What is an Enemy?

- Your enemy is not necessarily a bully. They're simply someone that you just don't like, or more perhaps more importantly, don't like you.
- An enemy does not bully you, but instead, just makes you roll your eyes because you don't have anything in common with them.
- An enemy might be someone who was once a friend and who let you down.
- An enemy might be a former friend who has moved on to another group and left you behind.
- An enemy might be someone who broke a promise or shared your secret with others.
- An enemy might be someone you find really annoying, and you might find yourself saying "I can't stand that person."

Parent note: Just as there's a continuum that links "casual friends" to "best friends," there's also a continuum of dislike that starts with "nonfriends," (who may be simply kids that your children don't know or don't have much in common with) to "worst enemies." Children often say they "hate" someone in the heat of the moment, but an enemy relationship involves intense and prolonged loathing. Research¹ has concluded that, at any given time, about one in three children is involved in a mutual-dislike relationship, and about one in four children has at least one mutual-enemy relationship.

It's important to teach our kids they don't have to like everyone, but they do need to treat everyone with respect. One of your roles as a parent will be to guide your children to navigate those they don't get along with.

- Can they avoid them?
- Can they sit on the other side of the room from them?
- Can they kill them with kindness when these kids give them 'the look'?

Helping your children know how to properly interact with people that rub them the wrong way is an important social lesson and one that you will need to model too.



1. Card, N. A. (2010). Antipathetic relationships in child and adolescent development: A meta-analytic review and recommendations for an emerging area of study. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(2), 516.

What is a Bully

- A bully is trying to take something from you: your self-esteem.
- A bully is someone who repeatedly and deliberately sets out to harm and humiliate you with verbal attacks (name-calling and making fun of you) as well as physical ones, such as threatening to hurt you or reveal secrets about you.
- Not every frenemy or enemy is a bully. Someone who you don't like much may not be making your life miserable.
- Bullies create an ongoing situation where you feel threatened or unsafe.
- A bully is not someone who tells you that your pimples are ugly just once. A bully is a person who has a plan to make you feel miserable. They might laugh in your face obnoxiously about your pimples every day for two weeks. In doing that, they may single you out and encourage others to laugh at you too, to the point when you just don't want to go to school anymore.
- Bullies may have been bullied themselves. They may have lost their own sense of value, and are now trying to take it from you.

Parent note: Bullies couldn't exist without victims, and they don't pick on just anyone. Research² shows that children who are singled out for bullying lack assertiveness even in non-threatening situations. Many kids who are targeted by bullies radiate fear long before they ever encounter a bully. These are children who don't stand up for themselves. Bullies like victims who become visibly upset when they are picked on, are highly sensitive to jokes and do not have many friends or allies.

To overcome the impact of a bully, kids need problem-solving skills of their own. While it's natural for grown-ups to want to ride to the rescue, your child will never be able to bounce back from the challenges of the classroom and playground if they have not built resilience.

Helping your child to know the difference between a frenemy, an enemy and a bully is a great start!

2. Mitsopoulou, E., and Giovazolias, T. (2015). Personality traits, empathy and bullying behavior: a meta-analytic approach. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 21, 61–72.



The Kids First Children's Services team and I hope that this resource will prove helpful to you, your children's teachers, and health professionals, as you work together to help them to *'thrive and not just cope'*.



Sonja Walker
Founder
Kids First Children's Services

The qualities of a true friend

A true friend...

Likes you for who you are

Makes you feel good about yourself

Includes you and makes sure there's room for you to join the game

Doesn't treat you differently when other kids are around

Asks you what you want to do or play

Apologises if they accidentally hurt your feelings

Stands up for you even when you're not there to defend yourself

Doesn't have restrictions on how or when you can be with them

You feel comfortable to be yourself when you are with them

Is happy to sit with you, anytime or anywhere

Listens to you when you ask them to stop what they're doing

Makes you feel like you are a valuable person

Is honest and tells you the truth

Makes you smile

You feel great after you have spent time with them

A 'fair weather' friend ...

Only likes parts of you

Makes you feel bad about yourself

Excludes you or doesn't think to make room for you in a game

Treats you differently or ignores you when other kids are around

Will only play with you if you do what they want to do

Doesn't realise or really care if they hurt your feelings

Makes fun of you or lets others make fun of you

Only wants to play with you when it's convenient for them or they are lonely

You change who you are, what you wear or how you talk, to fit in with them

Makes you do or give them something before you can sit or play with them

Does not listen to you when you ask them to stop what they are doing

Makes you feel as if you are not important

Does not tell you the truth

Makes you feel worried and a bit nervous

You feel upset or a bit weird after you have spent time with them

You **DESERVE**, good, true friends who accept you for who you are and make you feel good about yourself!

It's Ok to be polite, but there's no need to spend time with people who hurt your feelings and make you feel bad. You deserve **BETTER!**



Helping your child to make and keep friends

If you are concerned about your child's social and emotional well-being, advice from a professional could provide you and your family with the guidance, reassurance, and professional support you need.

Where to start

Teachers

Your child's teacher is often a good place to begin a conversation about your child's social needs. It may be helpful to find out whether the teacher has observed the struggles that your child is reporting to you or not. Your child's teacher may be able to provide some insights into factors such as play, social relationships, and the behaviours your child is demonstrating in the classroom and playground.

Family Doctor

If you are concerned about the impact that social pressures are having on your child, your family GP may be able to help you to decide if further investigation or treatment would be helpful. Your family doctor is also qualified to establish a Medicare plan for your child if you would like to claim rebates for the support offered by qualified mental health professionals.

Child Psychologists and Counsellors

Mental health professionals with specific knowledge and experience working with children can work with you, your child, and your family to support your child. Some schools offer this support, and paediatric professionals working in private practices, such as [Kids First Children's Services](#), also provide personalised programs to help your son or daughter to overcome their social challenges and the impact of bullying.

Social Skills Support programs

Thankfully there are effective supports for children who struggle to read social cues and understand how to initiate and maintain a friendship. The world-renowned *Social Thinking* protocol is one evidence-based program that helps children and their parents learn strategies to successfully connect with other kids.

Social Stars, for children aged 4 to 6, *Social Detectives* for children aged 7 to 9, and *Social Superheroes* for children aged 10 to 12 use the *Social Thinking* protocol and are offered at Kids First Children's Services in Sydney's northern beaches. Every term, these innovative small group programs are facilitated by members of our experienced child psychology team. NDIS-funded children are welcome. For more information, contact Kids First on [\(02\) 9938 5419](tel:0299385419) or visit our website www.kids-first.com.au



Social Skills Groups at Kids First

[learn more](#)