



**KIDSCAPE**

Help With Bullying

# A Parent's Guide to Friendship

Written **by** parents for parents

# Introduction

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Parenting is hard. Whether you are a parent, grandparent, or carer, helping a child navigate the world of friendships is a tough job. Friendships bring our children joy but can also lead to upset and sleepless nights.

In this guide, we share the experiences and advice of other parents. There is no official guide to parenting, as one of our parents said, **“I’m still waiting for the manual on parenting, it’s still not arrived”**. You may find some of the advice helpful or take a different perspective. Either way, we want you to know you are not alone!

We are all trying to help our children as best as we can. If your child is going through a tough time and you would appreciate further support with these issues, visit [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)



# How can I encourage my child to be a friend to others?

## It starts with strong values...

'I'll sit them down and we'll talk through things....if you see somebody in trouble, go and get help.'

'It's learnt behaviours. It's how we hold ourselves as parents. It's one of the hardest jobs we can do, being parents. What I always say is 'be kind', go and be that helping hand.'


'I want them to be that person I wish I'd had when I was growing up.'

**'Do what's right.'**

'By allowing them to understand what the qualities of a good friend look like and to know that being different is not a bad thing.'

**'Teach our children to be able to show empathy very early on. I believe that children are much more able to take this on than we realise.'**



A close-up photograph of a man and a young boy. The man, on the left, has a beard and is wearing a blue button-down shirt. The boy, on the right, is wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt. Both are smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white frames. A teal triangle is in the top right corner.

How can I encourage my child to be a friend to others?

## **Set clear boundaries...**

‘There’s a fine line...it can go against you if you’re always nice...Sometimes my son would come home upset....he’s nice to people but they’re not nice back.’

How can I encourage my child to be a friend to others?

## It's doing the right thing even when no one else is looking...

'If you see somebody is in trouble, no questions asked, you step in if you can. If you don't want to step in, go and tell someone who can step in, don't turn around and not do anything.'

'You should do something because it's the right thing to do, not because you expect something back.'

'Sometimes children want praise for the things they've done, but you don't need it. You need to be happy in yourself that you've done something good...do it for yourself for the right reasons – that's what I try and instil in them.'

## How can I help my child manage conflict in their relationships?

### Encouragement...

'Encourage them to have self-worth and belief, for them to be able to take a step back and look at the situation, to understand it isn't personal and that they aren't any less because of the way they are being targeted. They need to be empowered also to report it.'

### Listening...

'My child was afraid of telling me because he thought I would try and resolve it. All he wanted me to do was listen...he said, "**Mum...I'm going to sort this. Every time you go in, they have to take me out of lessons and then they have to talk to me then they make me talk to the other child**"...I found I was getting more upset than he was some days. In my eyes it was the end of the world...he felt the situation was improving...he wanted to tell me, so I knew, but he didn't want me to do anything about it. It's very hard as a parent not to step in and get it fixed.'

'**Open discussion and listening for red flags such as possessive behaviour and obsessive behaviour towards or by them. Encouraging a broad friendship pool-within and outside a school so they can back away from situations that become too intense.'**

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## Working together to solve problems...

'You've told me what would you like me to do.'

'I talk to parents every other day about another child who is being bullied in school and nothing is happening. We need to encourage the child to come to us, to be honest with us about what is happening. Work with them...what do you want as a child to happen? If you want us to go to school, we'll go to school. If you want us to talk to the parent, we'll talk to the parent.'



‘They need to trust us if we’ve given our word. I fell into that, I said I wasn’t going to speak to the school, but I did. He calmed down and I had to explain that as a parent I had to make a decision in his best interest. It only happened once; it hasn’t happened again, but I think he’s always going to remember that.’

## Working with school staff...

‘Keep it polite and professional, understand that school staff need to teach too and have other demands on their day, but also that your child is equally important. Ask for safe spaces, a person of trust that your child can approach and be taken seriously.’

‘Flag issues early. Do not take their word that it is all ok if you feel it isn’t.’

**‘I don’t want them to say they take a zero-tolerance approach to bullying as it’s absolute garbage...you can’t stop it. Don’t stand in the front of the assembly and say you take zero tolerance. All I want you to do is stand at the front and say, ‘This is what we will do if there is an issue of bullying’. Tell me what you are going to do. What processes are you putting in place?’**



# How can I help my child make friends?

## Little starters...

‘Giving little starters can help e.g., knowing a little about a current trend can give a child a way in. Watching a popular tv show and talking about it at home can give a child ideas for joining in.’

## Role-playing...

‘Role-playing, support them in a social environment where there will be other children so they can practice with you guiding them.’

## Activities...

‘Small “props” to take to school to encourage conversations. Interesting extracurricular activities that attract children from other schools not their own. Encouraging out of school friendships that act as a comfort if friendships at school are not working.’





## Finding their community...

'They need to understand they're part of something bigger than themselves. Being part of a group, an organisation.'

*'As parents, I see our role as opening up as many opportunities as possible for our children.'*

'Understanding what's in the local area. There's something for everyone.'

'A child with low self-esteem really wants to fit in. Having a hobby, is the best intervention we can give.'



'I'm a big believer in getting them into sport and what they want to do.'



'Music, sports, arts...try all of them until they find something that fits.'



# What are the signs that might tell me my child is struggling with friendship difficulties?

'Change in behaviour at home (saying they are no longer interested in toys/ games they used to love, school refusal/ reluctance, observing playground/ school gate isolation or negative behaviours towards them by other children. Do not rely on what teachers have told you and go with your parental instinct!'

'Exclusion happens in school at a very early stage, and I think adults need to pick up on when a child is looking isolated.'

'That goodbye moment when they're waiting to be collected. That can tell a lot, how they're interacting. I really enjoy seeing him happy, chatting to friends.'

'It usually won't come up until bedtime.'





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## Sunday nights...

'On Sundays I'm very switched on to make sure things are okay.'

'For us it was a Sunday night, tummy aches, not wanting to go back to school... as a parent it gets you.'

'I was that child...every Sunday night stomach cramps. I would have done some homework, had a bath, had dinner, and then by 7 o'clock I would be that child... knowing inside me with my stomach going, I don't want to go to school tomorrow as I know exactly what's going to happen.'



'I'll put them to bed, stroke their head, and say look, 'Are you okay?' 'Are you sure?'. I do that because if they're not that second bit will bring stuff out.'

# How can I support my child if they are an introvert or an extrovert?

'My eldest son is an introvert...we always try and drill home there's nothing you can tell me that will shock me.'



'I've got one child who is an introvert... and the youngest one who is the biggest extrovert in the world, I've got one of each, complete different children, but the one common message I say to both of them 'All I ask you to do is talk to me.'

'They got notepads and stuff they can write in. Now and again we'll do a picture a time, and they'll start drawing something and we'll open up a conversation that way.'

'We got a 'worry monster'. That's been the biggest godsend. She knows she can write something on a bit of paper and put it in there. I'll ask her if she wants me to read them.'



# What message can I give my child about best friends?

'I don't like the term best friend... if you get so attached to one person, you're putting all your hope in that one person. It puts you in a really rocky position.'

'I've always flipped it on its head and said, 'why would you only be a good friend to one person when you could have lots of friends.' Every friend has something to give, the funny friend, the smart friend, everyone has different traits. Having a group of friends mean someone is always going to have your back.'

'There are children who will gravitate to each other. There's not a lot you can do, they are best friends. The younger one has a best friend and that gives him a sense of security.'

'The worry is if they have the one best friend, do they base all their confidence and worth on that best friend. What happens when that best friend evaporates? It's almost like they won't know who they are anymore.'

'If they only want to have play dates with that one person that would be a cause of concern in our household.'

# What can I say to my child if they don't want to be friends with someone anymore?



## You don't have to please everyone all of the time...

'Play with someone else. You don't have to play with 'X' person all the time or play that game all the time.'

'If my child was playing in a way that was annoying their friends, it's a good social lesson... This is how they realise I shouldn't behave this way as they've just walked away, and I don't have anyone to play with. It's part of them learning how to interact in a socially appropriate way.'

'It's a tricky one if the person they don't want to play with doesn't have any other friends. I've always said if you don't want to play with only one child, encourage other children to join you. If there are more children, then this child might gravitate to someone else anyway and you are opening up their friendship circle more.'

'It was only when my son turned around and said, 'I don't know why you're doing that', that it actually stopped. The child might not always realise.'

'Personalities do clash. It's a bit much to assume kids will get on with every other child. You try and resolve it in a way that fits with everyone.'



# How can I help my child with feelings of jealousy or resentment?

## **Empowerment...**

‘What works in our house is empowering the kids. My son would come home and say I must be a really bad person because they don’t want to play with me...pick me for the team...It’s BRINGING HOME TO THEM that the things they are good at, they are still good at, even if someone else doesn’t see it. Not to pin your self-esteem on someone else.’





## Remember the good things...

'It's about demonstrating the good things about your child. I always try and say you can't be good at everything. With sports I always say you can't be the best at everything, they have to give everyone a chance. Sometimes it is hard as they think it's the end of the world and they feel worthless. I get upset and it's hard to be encouraging, have I said the right thing?'

'Sometimes it's how they see us as parents deal with feelings of rejection and jealousy. Being able to brush yourself off and say it's happened, it's not necessarily to do with me.'

## You don't need everyone to be your friend...

'You don't need everyone to love you and be your friend.'



'I try and instil in my kids, being happy to be on their own. If they don't want to be your friend, that's fine... I don't want them to base their worth on what kids say.'

**'So, they didn't want to play with you today, that's fine. It's always a case of picking him up'.**

## Explore feelings...

'Ask them to talk about why they are feeling that way, what does it mean to them to be a part of said specific group and use it to reflect back for the child that they see those qualities and more in themselves, so they don't need said group, but make it their own conclusion rather than being told.'



# How can I manage my own feelings when my child is going through a difficult time?

## **We struggle, it's normal!**

'The children need to understand we're also trying our best, but giving them confidence that we're not overly upset, that we will get over it, it's just feelings, so they feel confident to come back to us with a different issue.'

'Hard as it is, try to remain upbeat and avoid voicing negative thoughts.'

'This is a tricky one! Keep it factual, try and remove emotion from it. Work with your child to set a plan of action so that their feelings, wants, and desires are taken into consideration too.'

'We make a point of saying we struggle, it's perfectly normal.'



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'This is a tricky one! Keep it factual, try and remove emotion from it. Work with your child to set a plan of action so that their feelings, wants, and desires are taken into consideration too.'

**'It's really really hard. I try to be objective and not let things influence what I say, but I know they will.'**

'It gets me down, it's not nice. Nothing can prepare you for hearing 'I don't have any friends. 'I don't' want to go to school.'

'I'm always one researching everything, to look at resources. It definitely helped me.'

'The children need to understand we're also trying our best, but giving them confidence that we're not overly upset, that we will get over it, it's just feelings, so they feel confident to come back to us with a different issue.'

'I wasn't upset you told me; I was upset you were in this position in the first place. I'm upset because you're dealing with this.'



# What's the most important message I can give to my child about friendships?

'Friends can be just for one day or forever. There is value in any positive friendship.'

'I would like my children to see friends as a group of people to have fun with. No more than a group of people to have fun with, one or two people to have fun with. Your family are here for you. Have lots of different friends in your life.'

**'Be your own friend first and then friends will gravitate towards you. I don't want my child to be a fake person to attract friends. People will come to you. The right friends will find you.'**

'The moment it becomes stressful or they're unhappy about something, they don't have to be friends with that person. That's not what friends are for. I see a bit of meanness in some friendship groups, and I don't want them to be involved in that.'



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'That it is an equal partnership. That it has to be a relationship of respect and trust. And that if someone is being disrespectful to you, don't be afraid to walk away, but also understand like in any friendship there also has to be compromise from time to time, just not when it questions your morals and beliefs.'

'Friendships are a two-way process and need work from both sides. Whilst they involve work, they should be rewarding and joyful and if they are starting to not feel this way you need to re-evaluate them.'

# Closing note



With thanks to all parents and carers out there who are doing the best job they can, and to all the wonderful parents and carers who shared their advice with us.

A special shout out to the brilliant **Maria, Rafaela and Dominic.**

Kidscape is a charity that gives hope and help to children and families impacted by bullying. If you have found this guide helpful and would like to become a friend or Kidscape through volunteering your time, fundraising, or donating, please visit **[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)**

If your child is struggling with friendships or with bullying-related issues and you would appreciate further advice and support, please visit **[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)**

