

Friends?

Your baby will soon have to get social to maintain healthy development.

Arundhati Nath tells you how you can get your tot to make new friends



FRANCESCO Guicciardini said, “Since there is nothing so well worth having as friends, never lose a chance to make them.” Friendships are as important for your toddler as they are for you. Kids learn about love, empathy, kindness and caring for another through interaction with other children. Valuable social skills including good behaviour and solving misunderstandings are imparted naturally through a bond of friendship. Here is a checklist on how you can help your kiddo make new friends.

BE A ROLE MODEL

Children often learn behaviour and communication skills from the way their parents behave or communicate. Be a role model for your child. Eileen Kennedy-Moore, professor for *The Great*

Courses audio/video series, *Raising Emotionally and Socially Healthy Kids*, feels that parents can model good friendship skills through good communication in the family, having fun together as a family, and showing that they value spending time with their own friends.

TALK ABOUT FRIENDS

“Start from just talking about friends or listing/brainstorming some qualities of good friends with your children; like being honest, friendly, sharing, kind, talking in a polite manner and respecting each other,” says Kashika Dabra, psychologist and counsellor at Delhi Public School, Gurgaon.

You can also explain clearly by doing a role play of a good friend.

OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES

Eileen feels that the most important way to support children’s friendships is to give them opportunities to make friends. “Get your child involved in activities that can lead to friendships, such as sports or clubs,” Eileen says. Take your child on social visits to your friend’s or neighbour’s homes and get them interested in activities which will make them interact with other kids.

SCHEDULE A PLAY DATE

Do schedule play dates at home with classmates or neighbours whom your child likes. “One-on-one play dates help your child deepen friendships. For new friendships or children who are shy or have trouble getting along with peers, inviting other children over for an

activity and keeping the play date to no more than two hours can help,” Eileen says. Make sure to talk to your tot about how a guest should be treated before he comes over. Make him understand that a host should behave well and a guest should be well looked after.

BE AN OBSERVER

“Parents should let children get to know each other instead of trying to make an official introduction,” says Aarti C Rajratnam, parenting expert and co-author of *Parenting: Innocence to InnerSense*. She feels that children need skills to relate to the peer group and that can come only when they meet each other regularly, in a non-competitive environment and have opportunities for age appropriate play. Parents should be silently supporting the children without intervening much.

MEET THE PARENTS

Always try to make friends with the parents of your child’s friends. “We made sure that our children interacted

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regularly. We would visit each other houses or meet down in the garden and let our children be. Gradually they started interacting and had lots of opportunity of free play and unstructured interaction,” says Neha Chopra, mum to Noor.

TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

Research suggests that when parents talk more about feelings as they come up in books, movies, or real life, children become better at imagining other people’s perspectives.

“Teach social skills directly by guiding your child to think through a situation or practicing through role play; this works better than just lecturing,” Eileen says. Discuss questions like: “How do you think you should respond to that?”

DO NOT COMPARE

Never compare a child’s ability to his or friend’s. This can not only result in low self esteem in the child, but can also have an adverse effect on friendship by giving rise to feelings of jealousy and hatred.

BE PATIENT

Parents must be patient and have reasonable expectations about their child’s social skills. Kashika feels that children develop the ability to become more mutual, reciprocal and empathic over time. “Most two-year-olds will not share easily. Many preschoolers (and school age kids) don’t play well in groups, but do well in pairs.” she says. ■

