

*Children's literature is a valuable tool to help children learn about making and keeping friends.*

## Teaching Friendship through Literature

When a child has difficulty organizing his sentences and their language is sometimes awkward, their parent may wonder, will they make friends?

It is important for all children to have healthy friendships. Children with disabilities have more difficulty making friends because friendship depends very much on the exchange of language. Problems expressing thoughts or understanding what others are saying makes it difficult for friendships to develop.

If a child is unable to read nonverbal cues or body language (such as a smile), it might lead him to think they are being laughed at. Instruction in the making and keeping of friends is necessary or else children with learning difficulties will find they do not fit in.

Without early intervention, social problems affect attitudes towards school that can lead to failure. Children feel alone and friendless. Their voices are often not heard until they cry out in pain and anger. As parents you can help to turn the tears into laughter. You can teach your child about friendship.

Children's literature provides a bridge for rich conversation about friendship.

It is an opportunity for your child to talk about his experiences and to become an active listener who is engaged in the story. They are able to compare what they know to what is happening in the book.



### Setting the stage

Before you begin to read a story about friendship, talk about what friendship is. Parent guidance during this sharing time will support and encourage your child to be thoughtful and reflective.

Ask the child:

- What does it sound like?
- What does friendship look like?
- How does it feel?
- What are friendship words?



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Published  
April 2021

The child's response might be:

Friendship sounds like:

- Hi
- Want to play a game?
- Laughter

Friendship looks like:

- A wave hello
- A high five
- A smile
- Playing a game together
- Sharing a snack

Friendship feels:

- Warm
- Cozy
- Like a pair of slippers
- Safe

Friendship words:

- Loving
- Caring
- Trusting
- Friendly

### **Introducing the story**

Look at the cover of the book and read the title to your child. Ask, "What do you think this book is about?" After your child responds, say, "This is a book about making a new friend." Talk about prior experiences by asking if your child can think of a time when they made a new friend.

### **Reading the story**

Read a story and ask questions about how the characters might be feeling. Ask your child if they have had a similar experience and how it felt. The answers to direct questions are in the text, but by asking your child to reflect on personal experiences and make connections to what has occurred in the story, you are promoting a deeper level of comprehension.

### **Evaluate how a child responds**

Identify the steps to making friends from the story. Practice role-playing together and invite other family members to join in. Plan to follow these steps at school. You can apply this model to other stories.

There are many books about friendship. Remember to preview the cover and title of the book and have a pre-reading discussion that makes a bridge to experiences your child has already had.

As you read the story, ask questions about how the characters might be feeling. Encourage your child to predict what might happen next. Continue to use personal experiences to make connections between your child and the story. If applicable, talk about what might have happened differently to show friendship. Finally, identify the steps that told the story of friendship. Act them out. Try it out. Have fun!

Look for books that promote the spirit of generosity and follow the same procedure for setting the stage for friendship. Identify what generosity looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Talk about vocabulary words that define generosity, such as being caring and supportive. Make connections to literature that shows generosity. Practicing the spirit of generosity further promotes friendship.

Parents may also include making faces at each other and guessing each other's mood. Watching people in different social situations in the neighborhood (such as waiting in line at the grocery store, with wait staff in a restaurant, etc.) and reading body language will also provide a way to talk about how we show our feelings without language.

Excellent resources are the school, local librarian, and teachers. Children's literature is a valuable tool for making and keeping friends. Encourage and help organize play dates to structure positive social interactions to put the pieces together.

### **Resources**

**Scholastic**

Literature for children of all ages.  
800-724-6527