



Friendship

This toolkit is for parents or carers of a child with additional needs or developmental disability.

Here are some ideas and strategies ***to help promote and support your child to develop skills important to friendships.***



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What can 'Friendship' mean?

Friendship can mean lots of different things to different people! It might mean having someone to share your feelings with, someone who you miss when they're not there, or someone you really enjoy sharing an activity with.

Although things like play and social skills such as turn taking and sharing are different from Friendship, these can help pave the way for children to develop Friendships.

Some children might be happy to play or be by themselves – and this is OK! However, we recognise that this can feel really painful for parents who may feel their child is 'alone'. It might be reassuring to note that this might not be how your child is experiencing being alone.

'Friendship' is a concept that is tricky to measure. There is no right or wrong way to make a friend. For one child it may look like one thing, but something entirely different for another child!

Introducing Yourself

For a child, introducing themselves to an unfamiliar person can feel tricky and evoke feelings of worry. However, encouraging your child to introduce themselves is important and will help with the development of their social skills and ability to form connections.

Here is an example of how your child could introduce themselves:



Hello



My name is ...



What is your name?



Nice to meet you ...

Everybody is different in their own way. Sometimes when children meet others for the first time, they may be asked about some of their unique characteristics. We also acknowledge how difficult this can be as a parent when children are not kind and ask difficult questions. Sometimes other children can be really curious about physical differences such as a scar, a speech impediment or a walking difficulty. It is important to note that there is a difference between others asking questions out of curiosity and asking questions to be mean. It may be useful to encourage your child to use the following 3-step approach if they are asked difficult, but curious questions about one of their unique characteristics.

Question

Hello, how come you are using a wheelchair?



Step 1: Explain

I have a disability which means I have weak muscles.



Step 2: Reassure

I'm not in any pain though and I do some exercises to help.

Step 3: Distract

Do you want to do some colouring together?

Building Friendships

Some children may form friendships with others naturally, but others may find this to be a little trickier. We acknowledge that some parents might also find this process tricky too. Building friendships and relationships is a skill that we learn over time throughout our lives. It is quite a complex social skill, however a parent and a child can help each other through this process.

Here are some ideas on how to support a young person to build friendships.

1

Learning when to join in

It might be useful to help young people identify when is appropriate to join in a game, by prompting watching, waiting, and listening skills. Shared enjoyment from games can foster friendships.

2

Practice using language

You could 'practice' or 'role play' social situations with a young person, such as joining a game. You could come up with some handy phrases like "This game looks fun! Can I join?". Practicing can make things seem less daunting when it actually comes to doing them.

3

Teaching social skills

Eye contact, sharing, turn taking, smiling, and responding to our name are all important non-verbal social skills. If you can practice these with a young person, perhaps with siblings or other family, this will help them to connect and communicate with other children.

4

Attend organised activities

Particularly for older children, organised activities can be a great way for a young person to make and meet up with friends who enjoy the same things as them. This could be football, dancing, swimming, tennis, a music group, a youth club – and lots more!

5

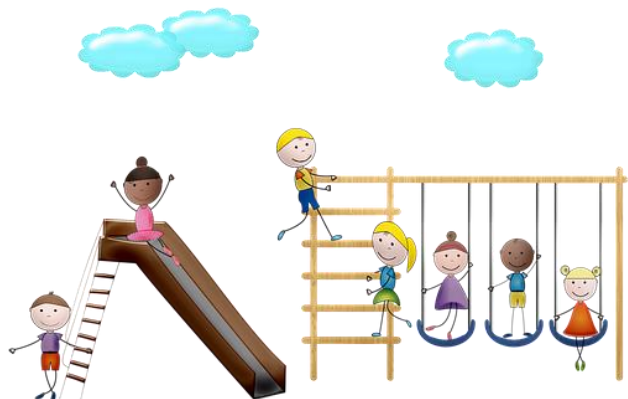
Ask for more support

If your child has one to one or another form of staff support, you could ask if this person would be able to support your child to build relationships with their peers. This person might be able to set up activities and create opportunities for play with other children.

Opportunities for making friends

It can be tricky for a young person to know when would be an appropriate time to attempt to make a friend. This can be quite a nerve-wracking experience, so it might be a good idea to support your child to identify good opportunities vs. harder opportunities.

<i>Good environments</i>	<i>Not so easy environments</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At parks• In the school yard• In clubs• On holiday• When children are playing outside• In birthday parties• During playtimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In class• During quiet time• When people are fighting• When someone is angry• When people are usually alone (for example, like in the toilet or shower)• When someone is upset or frustrated



It can also be helpful to allow your child a space to talk about when things didn't go so well, or to really notice and celebrate when they have had a positive experience.

Coping with ups and downs

Building a friendship may take a long time. Sometimes, other children may not feel like talking or playing. It may be helpful to discuss the reasons for this with your child and offer ideas about what they could do instead. Here are a few examples:

Reasons somebody may not want to interact with your child	What your child could do instead
Experiencing a strong emotion/ feeling e.g. anger, tiredness, sadness etc.	Give them some space and time to calm down and try again a while later
Misunderstanding a request to interact	Make it clearer that they are trying to interact e.g. by repeating or re-wording what they said
Not wanting their activity interrupted or anybody new joining in	Wait patiently until the activity has finished and then try to re-engage with them
They may have had a negative interaction with your child in the past e.g. somebody getting in trouble	Perhaps consider whether an apology may help to re-build their relationship

Seeing children experience disappointment can be hard and instinct may make you want to shield them from further disappointing experiences. This is where our own anxieties might influence children and it's important to encourage children to try again after experiencing disappointment.



Knowing Boundaries

We spend a lot of time teaching children not to break rules and to tell adults when they see others do so, but there comes a point where this can become a barrier to making friends. As adults, we can help children and young people realise when it is appropriate to **tell** i.e. when the situation is not safe and/or your child needs help managing the situation, and when is acceptable to **let go** i.e. when the situation is safe and the child can handle it themselves. Knowing boundaries can depend on our own values, there is no right or wrong answer.

Below are some examples that could help your child understand when to let something go or when to tell an adult.

When to let go...

- People are sitting in the wrong spot
- Someone made a face at me
- Someone cut in line
- He touched my lunch box
- She took one of the blocks I wanted to use

'I am safe, I can handle this on my own'

VS.

When to tell...

- People are fighting
- Someone is sick
- Someone is playing near traffic
- Someone is hurt
- Someone is being bullied

'There is danger, I need help from an adult'

Turn Taking

Turn taking is a valuable skill to learn. It is something that we all learn when we are younger and the skill can help us all in many different aspects of life including friendships.

We can help our children to develop the skill of turn taking by practising with loads of different activities at home:

- Passing the ball
- Building blocks
- Board games
- Blowing bubbles

Give verbal cues such as "It's your go." "Now you've finished it is my turn." "Whose turn is it next?"

Keep turn-taking practise between you and your child initially and increase to another person over time.

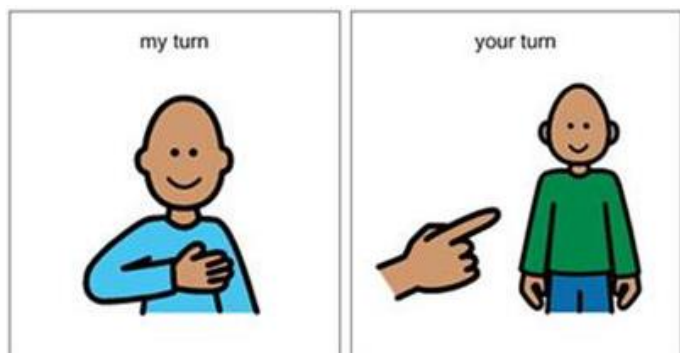
Visual reminders e.g. gestures

Tips for turn-taking

Give your child time to respond

Keep turn-taking practise simple initially.

Visual reminder cards can also be really helpful for the child to understand whose turn it is.



Activity Corner

INTERACTIVE TIME: Now it's over to you... use these visual cards to help your child to understand what makes a good friend with these visual cards. There is also a blank card for them to put their own ideas about what makes a good friend. You can cut these out and use again and again.



Sharing my toys

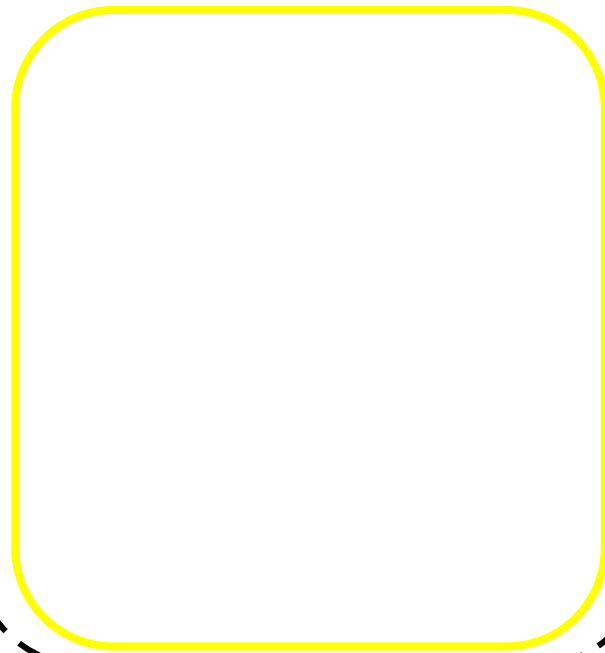


Asking a friend to join your game



Helping a friend who is stuck with their work

Create your own



Useful Resources

Self-help Apps

Self-help apps can be a useful and viable way of support. The NHS have published apps on their digital library, some focussed on helping you relax include:



Useful Websites

The following websites may offer some useful resources and information regarding building resilience, learning disabilities, and mental health support.

- <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/17944275/peer-support-toolkit-final.pdf>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- <https://www.psycom.net/dealing-with-change>

Further Support

Helping Hands Psychology Team: If you require further support please use the contact details overleaf to contact the Helping Hands team in your designated Children's Centre.

GP: If you are concerned about yourself or a member of the family you can access support from your local GP.

Charities: Charity organisations such as Mind Cymru, Samaritans and Young Minds may also be able to provide you with support regarding resilience.

Mind Cymru	02920 395 123
Samaritans	116 125
Young Minds	0808 802 5544

Local Support Groups: Groups are a great way to meet new people and to talk about shared experiences. Here are the links to some we are aware of in the local area:

https://www.facebook.com/SparrowsAln/	http://www.valleydaffodils.co.uk/
https://www.magicparents.co.uk/	http://www.buildingbridgesproject.org.uk/
https://hopegb.co.uk/	http://www.onelife.wales/About-us/
https://www.asdinfo.wales.co.uk/newport-autism-support-group/	

Supporting Siblings: If you are worried about your sibling child please visit: <https://www.sibs.org.uk/> for further information and resources or alternatively please contact the Helping Hands team.

Contact

This toolkit was created by the **Helping Hands Psychology for Children with Additional Needs** team at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB).

Your feedback is important to us! If you would like to tell us what you thought about this self-help toolkit, please get in touch with us by emailing ABB.HelpingHandsTeam@wales.nhs.uk. We would love to hear from you.

Additionally, if you need any help or support with using or accessing these resources, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Helping Hands Psychology Team.

Serennu Children's Centre 01633 748023	Nevill Hall Children's Centre 01873 732713
Caerphilly Children's Centre 02920 867447	

Please contact the team if you would be interested in any of our other toolkits on the following topics –

Understanding and Managing Behaviour

Building Resilience

Supporting Siblings

Friendships

Promoting Sleep

Managing Anxiety