

# PEER PROBLEMS

Humans are social beings. We are programmed to respond and relate to others. Early in life, children begin to form friendships with people outside of their family. These relationships are critical to your child's development.

Friendships help children develop emotionally and socially. They provide your child with a unique sense of self and help your child learn about getting along with others. As children progress through school, friendship issues often arise. Your child may feel left out or isolated from their friends. They may have to deal with peer pressure to engage in inappropriate behavior. They may need help finding new friends and social groups. How can you help your child navigate the world of peer problems?

**Respect Your Child's Social Style** – Not every child needs a large group of friends. Some children actually function better with just a few close friends. Some children make friends quickly, while others are shyer and take their time getting to know new individuals.

**Be Empathic** – Let your child know you feel their friendships are important and worth the effort. Avoid dismissing your child's peer problems as minor. Friendship issues can seem overwhelming and earth shattering to even young children. Let your child know you understand how they are feeling and that you are listening.

**Avoid Criticizing Other Kids** – You may not like the friends your child chooses. However, criticizing their friends will make your child feel like they cannot come to you with their problems. Your child wants their friendship. If you have concerns about one of their friend's behaviors, talk to your child honestly and let them know how you feel.

**Prepare for Peer Pressure** – Peer pressure tends to peak in early adolescence. While peer pressure can be positive, many children experience peer pressure to engage in inappropriate and dangerous behaviors. Talk to your children about peer pressure. Let them know it is "ok" to be different from their friends and say no to participating in activities that make them uncomfortable.

**Be Available and Supportive** – If your child is having a problem with a friend, encourage them to talk about it with you. Help your child think of ways to avoid problems in the future. Help them figure out why the problem may have occurred and how they responded to it.

**Know Your Child's Friends** – Know whom your child is choosing as their friends. Find out whom they spend time with at school, who they talk to on the phone, and whom they exchange emails with. Remain involved and interested in their lives. Encourage your child to bring their friends home to meet you and take time to meet the parents of your children's friends.