parenting ideas

INSIGHTS

Making new friends and staying in touch with old classmates



As a parent there is a great deal you can do to help your child adjust socially at the start of the school year. Here are some tips to help.

Encourage your child to be open to new friendships

An open, friendly attitude is a child or young person's best social asset. Students who open to forming new friendships are more likely to succeed than those who seek solitude, who are critical and who limit themselves to just one or two familiar faces. Encourage your child or young person to seek out new friendships, even though they may feel uncomfortable or strange at first.

Encourage healthy relationships

Do all you can to encourage healthy relationships based on respect and common courtesy. Generally, when a relationship is healthy a child feels safe, valued and able to speak up. Unhealthy relationships, such as cliques, are restrictive, one-sided and are full of gossip and criticism.

Encourage inclusiveness

Studies have shown inclusiveness to be one of the prime social skills shared by socially successful students. Encourage your child or young person to include others in games, conversations, team activities and other group activities. Inclusiveness is not just a wonderful friendship skill, it's strong leadership attribute as well.

Encourage friendships with both genders

If you are in a co-education environment encourage your child to form friendships with both boys and girls. This is particularly valid if your child has siblings of their own gender, or don't have siblings. It's through these early relationships that we gain the confidence to mix with different genders in the later years. Forming friends across genders helps to break down the mystique that sometimes forms, when a child has little contact with the 'other' gender.

Stay in touch with former classmates and school friends

Encourage your child to maintain friendships with former classmates and groups outside of school as this helps to insulate against unfriendly behaviour that they may experience with their close social circle.

Provide social scripts

Your child may benefit from being provided with some social scripts that they can use in common social situations such as meeting a new friend, joining in a game or asking someone else for help. Boys, in particular, can benefit when given the words to use in a variety of different social situations.

Forming new friendships can take time

Meeting new students and forming new friendships can be anxiety-inducing. If this is the case for your child, then it helps to acknowledge their feelings of discomfort, but also remind them that these feelings will pass. As well discuss the fact that feeling comfortable with new friends often takes time, particularly if your child by nature is reserved or slow to warm up in social situations.

Helping kids work through friendships can be tricky for a parent as you don't have a great deal of control over what happens at school. However, with empathy, patience, encouragement and a supportive attitude you can do a great deal to help your child make a smooth social transition.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation,* and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.