

The Importance of Friendships to Children¹

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Friends are vital to a child's healthy development. Research has found that children who lack friends can suffer from emotional and mental difficulties later in life. Friends provide children with more than just fun playmates. Friendships help children learn many social skills, such as how to communicate, cooperate, solve problems, control their emotions, and respond to the emotions of others. Friends also help children develop the ability to think through and negotiate different situations. Having friends even affects a child's school performance, as children tend to have better attitudes about school and learning when they have friends there.

Children, however, need parents who take an active role in preparing them to interact successfully with their peers. One of the most important things parents can do for their children is to develop loving, accepting, and respectful relationships with them. These warm relationships set the stage for all future relationships, help children develop the trust and self-confidence necessary to go out and meet others, and provide a firm foundation on which they can develop social skills.

Parents also teach their children social skills by being a good role model. Children learn from how

their parents interact with other people. As a parent, you cannot make friends for your children, but your love, patience, and support can make it possible for them to meet new people and make friends on their own. Friendships help children grow and to develop the self-confidence and social skills that they'll need as adults.

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1. This document is FAR2001, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published January 2008. Reviewed March 2011. In the interest of time or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Please visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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