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GraceKids

Help Kids Grow Their Friendships

Friends are vital to children's emotional and social development. Through friendships, kids learn to share, set boundaries, make decisions, and respect others. Having friends also makes children feel supported, which boosts their self-esteem.

With a new school year right around the corner, many children are thinking about reuniting with classmates and friends. But fears about bullies may also exist. No child is immune to mistreatment by peers. Here are some ways to help kids develop love, respect, and kindness toward one another while maintaining a healthy sense of self:

Love each other. Help children make the connection between how Jesus loves and cares for us and how he wants us to love and care for one another. Make the Golden Rule a top priority in your home ("Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you," Matthew 7:12).



Agree to disagree. Children need to hear and learn that it's okay to disagree with others because God made us all different. But it's never okay to hurt someone with our words or actions.

Everyone's important. Help children find the acceptance and recognition they seek by focusing on activities and behavior standards that are positive, fun, and rewarding. Guiding kids toward loving themselves is key to helping them love other people.

When Social Interaction Goes Awry

- A staggering 160,000 children miss school each day because they're afraid of attack, intimidation, or bullying. (NEA)
- 33% of special-needs kids have been targets of bullying. (aboutourkids.org)
- Children whose parents share ideas and talk often with them are 40% less likely to bully other kids, compared to children of parents who don't do those things regularly. (health.com)
- 56% of mothers say they've ended a friendship because they thought someone's child was a bad influence. (cafemom.com)

PowerSource



Ask God:

1. To help your children make positive, lasting friendships.
2. To give your children the confidence to speak up about bullying.
3. To show your family members how to befriend one another.

Parenting Insights

These developmental tips from *Children's Ministry Magazine* show how friendships grow along with children:

Ages 2 to 4

Young children depend on others to help them develop social skills. Use praise to reinforce good behavior, such as sharing. Help children refine their negotiation skills to resolve conflicts. Give them ideas of what to say.

Ages 5 to 8

Kids this age are learning to choose their friends. Their self-image is strongly related to others' opinions of them. To help a bully, emphasize respect and model how to handle conflict without anger.

Ages 9 to 12

Parental authority diminishes, and kids want to be with their friends more. Discuss the qualities of a good friend and the down side of cliques and gangs.

OpenTheBook

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

John 15:13-14

Jesus, our ultimate Friend, sacrificed his life for us. We can follow his example by showing love and devotion to our friends and family members.

Teachable Moments

1. **Stick With Love**—Buy some stickers that have messages about friendship, and let children pass them out to friends. Read 2 John 5-6 and talk about what it means to love our friends.
2. **Everyone’s Invited**—When children feel left out or are excluded from a party, talk about how life isn’t always fair or equal. Read Luke 14:7-14 together and discuss ways to include people and not discriminate.



3. **Time to Reflect**—Let babies and toddlers see themselves and their playmates in mirrors. Say names aloud as children see the reflections so they can begin to attach names to other people.
4. **Keep in Touch**—During summer, help children send postcards to their friends. Even if postcards aren’t from a trip, correspondence will teach kids about nurturing their special relationships.



“So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are **ON THE ROAD**, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.” **Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT**

Learn more about children’s experiences with friendship by asking these discussion starters:

1. What are the most important qualities in a friend, and why?
2. How good of a friend do you think you are? How might you be able to be a better friend to someone?
3. How do you handle conflicts with your friends? What role does forgiveness play in friendships?
4. When you’re being bullied or see someone else being bullied, what’s the best way to handle the situation?

Family Experience: Friends First

Discover the meaning of true friendship with these activities from Group’s *Hands-On Bible*:

- **After You**—Challenge family members to put other people first for a whole day. Say: “See what it’s like to open doors for others, let everyone go in front of you in line, let others be served first, let others choose what to watch or play, and so on.”

At the end of the day, give each family member a piece of paper and a pencil. Say: “Draw a giant number one. Inside it, write what it was like to be last at things.” Read aloud Mark 9:35b. Ask: “What happens when we put others first? Why do you think Jesus wants us to act that way?” Say: “Living like this may have felt a little weird, but that’s what Jesus did for us!” Pray together, and have each person pray for someone else in the family.

- **Tied Together**—As a family, make friendship bracelets. (Easy instructions are available on the Internet.) During the craft time, talk about your friends and what you would or wouldn’t do for them. Read Ruth 1:16 and discuss the friendship between Naomi and Ruth, her daughter-in-law. Ask: “How do you think Naomi felt about Ruth’s loyalty? How can we be loyal to our friends and each other?”

Say: “Knots can remind us of bonds that can’t be broken, like the bond between Ruth and Naomi. Give away your bracelet to thank a friend for always being there for you.” Hang an extra bracelet on a doorknob at home as a reminder that family members are good friends, too.



What's Playing at the Movies

Movie: *Nanny McPhee Returns* (August 20)
Genre: Family comedy/fantasy
Rating: PG (for rude humor, some language, and mild thematic elements)

Cast: Emma Thompson, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Ewan McGregor, Ralph Fiennes

Synopsis: During World War II, an overwhelmed British mom tries to run the family farm, work, and raise three ornery children while her husband is away at war. When two spoiled cousins join the household, launching another type of war, Mom calls on Nanny McPhee to work some magic.

Discussion Questions: What responsibilities do your parents have? How do you make those roles easier or more difficult? Read aloud Colossians 3:20. Why is it tough to always obey parents and authorities? Why does it please God when we obey? How can our family work together better as a unit?



What Music Is Releasing

Artist: Natalie Grant

Album: *Love Revolution*

Artist Info: Grant has won four Dove Awards in a row for female artist of the year. She also founded the Home Foundation, which helps female victims of human slavery and trafficking.

Summary: Grant's eighth album features her strong vocals and gripping, faith-inspired lyrics. About the first single, "Greatness of Our God," Grant says, "While my mind cannot begin to truly comprehend the greatness of God, neither can any of my doubts restrain his greatness. I'm so grateful that in these strange and scary times...God is in control."

Discussion Questions: What are some ways you know God is great? When and why do you doubt God? Read aloud Psalm 77:13-14. Would you ever want to be in control of our world—or of your life? How does it feel to know that God is in control of everything?



What Games Are Out

| Title | Content | Rating & Platform |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Backyard Sports: Sandlot Sluggers</i> | Players team up with a diverse group of neighborhood kids to play this arcade-style game with exaggerated animations. | E; Xbox, Wii, Nintendo DS |
| <i>Puzzle Agent</i> | While helping Nelson Tethers solve brain teasers, players replenish his supply of chewing gum. Some off-color humor. | Not yet rated; WiiWare, iPhone, iPad |
| <i>Despicable Me</i> | Players become Gru, the criminal mastermind from the hit movie, by planning heists with wacky gadgets. | E10+; Wii, Nintendo DS, PSP, PS2 |

GAME RATINGS KEY: EC=Early Childhood, E=Everyone (ages 6+), E10+ (ages 10+), T=Teen (ages 13+)



Culture & Trends

What's happening right now that may affect your children and family:



- To prevent cliques and bullying, some schools, camps, and parents now discourage kids from having one best friend. (msnbc.com)
- Because of the recession, more day-care providers are offering flexible hours, reducing rates, and working out pay arrangements. (about.com)

Quick Stats

- Parents keep their kids sharp in summer with:
 - 68%—Daily learning activities
 - 36%—Reading program
 - 12%—Summer homework
 - 10%—Nothing ("We need a break.") (momconnection.com)
- 22% of 7- to 11-year-olds who play video games have significant finger and wrist pain. Experts recommend frequent breaks and stretches. (ASHT)