

Children's Stages of Friendships

Children mature at different rates so their stage of friendship might be different to their siblings or other children of their age. Fallings out are natural, as children learn to navigate the world of compromise and build healthy relationships for the future. If you are concerned that your child needs support with their friendships please speak to the class teacher who can offer support.



Age 3-6: Playmates- 'I want it my way'

Children at this age often want friends- but aren't good at being friends. For them, friendships are all about having fun together. Their friends are children who are conveniently nearby, and who do the same things they like to do. They have very limited ability to see other peoples point of view and assume that other children think the same way they do. As a result they get very upset when they find out that a playmate has a different opinion. They'll typically make comments like "he/she doesn't want to be my friend anymore" or "I don't have any friends' when their friend wants to do something different to them.

What can I do? Talk to your child about their playmates perspectives and help them see the other persons point of view. Encourage them to take turns in choosing games or activities when playing at home.



Approximately Age 5- 9: 'What's in it for me?'

At this stage, friendship is selfish. For children at this age a friend is someone who does nice things for them, but they don't really think about what they themselves do to be a good friend. Children at this age want lots of friends. They may even put up with a not-so-nice friend, just so they can call them a friend. They say things like "I'll be your friend if you do this!" or "I won't be your friend if you do that! Children may become distressed at this age if their friend isn't being nice to them.

What can I do? Encourage your child to see how they contribute to the friendship or even how they've contributed to the quarrel. Ask them if they are being kind? Is there anything they could have done for their friend. If friends are consistently falling out encourage them to take a break for a while to give everyone the space they need.



Approximately Age 7-12: : 'It's MY rules!'

Children at this stage understand turn taking and what their friends do for them but they can't really step back and see others perspectives. At this stage, children are very concerned about fairness and sticking to the rules and making up their own rules; they tend to be very jealous and concerned with fitting in with everyone else. They will often form small friendship groups which involve elaborate rules and lots of discussion about who is or isn't included. Children often find they have to ask the group to be friends, or to play with someone, which can lead to others saying no and setting new rules. Learning to negotiate rules is important for children to develop their understanding of social relationships. However, when children aren't able to give or take it can lead to friendship groups being dominated by some children and excluding others.

What can I do? Talk to your child about compromise and taking it in turns to set the rules or the game. Make it clear that friends don't belong to one another but are based on valuing differences between each other. Encourage children to 'allow' everyone to play and that rules about who can play aren't fair. Tell your child that it's ok to have other friends and to move around friendship groups. Good friends are those that care about your happiness and value you as an individual.

