


PARENT TIPS: Friendship Drama & Conflict Resolution



The way children think about friendship is different than adults. When it comes to social behavior, it is important to understand where your child is at developmentally, before dealing with any conflicts.

Friendship drama & conflict resolution is one of the most common issues we see students dealing with. As parents, it can be difficult to navigate the many ups & downs of these relationships.

FRIENDSHIP STAGES



Generally 3-6 years: At this stage friendships are typically formed from momentary playmates based on having fun with those nearby. While they may have preferences for certain people, their playmates may change on a day to day basis depending on the type of activity occurring. Kids in this developmental stage struggle with perspective taking, so they often get into disagreements when anyone has a different opinion.



Generally 5-9 years: At this stage children have friendships that extend beyond the current activity, but they are still generally self-centered. Consequently, friendships at this stage are usually based on what the friend can do for them, such as a friendship initiated by one child doing something nice for the other child. Friends become an important social currency at this stage, so their friendship may become a bargaining chip i.e. "I won't be your friend if you do that!"



Generally 7-12 years: At this stage the student begins to be able to understand different perspectives. Friendships at this stage are more concerned with reciprocity, fairness, and the rules i.e. I did something for you so now you should do something for me. Children can also become very concerned with fitting in and may become jealous. They may judge themselves and others harshly, and a lot of drama can be caused based on who is hanging out with whom.



Generally 8-15: In this stage, friendships become more reciprocal and caring. Friendships are often based on confiding thoughts and feelings, and working through problems. They are better at compromising and really care about the other person's happiness. With girls especially you may see them become extremely attached to one or two other people.



Generally 12+: In this last stage of friendship, kids get less possessive and are more content with their friends having other relationships. They are able to appreciate differences between themselves and their friends. Friendships at this stage are based on support, trust, and continued closeness despite separations.

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

TEACH THEM TO SPEAK ASSERTIVELY

You can't pick your student's friends or fight their battles for them, but you can teach them how to speak up for themselves in a respectful way when they have been hurt.

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expect your child to act respectful towards everyone, but don't expect them to be friends with everyone. Some parents worry because their child is more introverted and appear to have less friends. Our attention often goes to the loud outspoken children, but just because your child is quiet does not mean that they have a friendship problem. Check in with them to see how they feel about their social situation. Some kids are happier doing things on their own and that is okay.

DON'T GET OVERINVOLVED IN THE DRAMA

When students are rejected socially, parents often feel rejected as well. In elementary school, this is often the first time parents see their child experiencing social pain. However, when parents become really involved it can actually make the social struggle worse for the student. Realize that it is normal for your student to go through social ups and downs, even though it can be really difficult to watch.

DON'T INTERVIEW FOR PAIN

Along that same line of thought don't go searching for social slights or pain, as this can stir up feelings for the student. Parents should definitely be a source of comfort and guidance for their students when the students come to them, but don't seek out these issues.

BEHAVE HOW YOU WANT THEM TO BEHAVE

Your student looks up to you! Let them see you talking to lots of different people and refraining from gossip. You are your student's primary role model.

TALK ABOUT FRIENDSHIP IN AN OPEN WAY

Discuss the interactions you witness in your student's friendship group—but listen more than speak. Ask your student questions about what they think about people and situations. Be careful not to criticize friends, which can make students become defensive. If you do have critiques make sure they are about an action and not a person, i.e. "I was sad to see Emily's birthday cards get handed out in front of the whole class when not everyone was invited"

TEACH THEM TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM INDEPENDENTLY

This strategy is far more effective than trying to solve the problem yourself by intervening with the other student's parents or the school. Guide your student to solve their own problem by using the tools for conflict resolution below and by asking them questions like "What did you try?" "What else can you try?" This teaches students that they have the ability to handle their own problems, boosts their self-esteem, and helps them develop critical social skills.

SOURCE: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/parenting/raising-girls/friends-social-life/helping-elementary-schoolers-deal-with-social-conflict/>

RESOURCES

- My Last Best Friend by Bowe
- The One and Only Ivan by Applegate
- Growing Up with a Bucket Full of Happiness: 3 Rules of a Happier Life by McCloud
- Quiet Kids: Help Your Introverted Child Succeed in an Extroverted World by Fonseca

- Enemy Pie by Munson & King
- I Just Don't Like the Sound of No! My Story About Disagreeing the Right Way! by Cook & Weerd
- How to be a Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them by Brown

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STEPS



S
Say the problem without blame



T
Think of safe and respectful solutions



E
Explore the consequences of each solution



P
Pick the best one

Blame language such as "you always," "you never," "you made me," or insults pushes the responsibility for the problem totally onto the other person. This can make people defensive and makes it difficult to get to the root of the issue. Help your student practice taking responsibility for their actions by not encouraging them not to use blame language and by not using it yourself.

The first solution a child will come up with is often not respectful ie "they could just let me watch the TV rather than hogging it!" They may need help coming up with several options and taking the perspective of how others might feel with each solution.

There are usually many different ways for children to solve a social problem. Try teaching them the wheel below and then when an issue arises they can try out various solutions to see which works best for their particular problem



It is really difficult to solve any problem when you are worked up! Teach your child to take break and do deep belly breaths or count to ten before trying to solve big problems.

"I feel ___ when you ___"
These I-Messages take the blame off the other person and focus on your emotions.