

# HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD FORM AND MAINTAIN FRIENDSHIPS



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Relationships with friends and family are critical to our social and emotional development. This fact is even more true with children and adolescents, who rely on healthy friendships for support and psychosocial flourishing. We all know the feeling of being rejected or alone; developing skills to rebound from these situations is essential. In this newsletter, we will explore ways you can help your child form and maintain relationships, putting a special focus on the impact of social media.

## About CPLA

The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.

## Interested in Services for Your Child?

CPLA's counseling services are FREE to all students attending one of our partner schools! Reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher. You can also request a CPLA referral form from the school.



# FORMING RELATIONSHIPS BY AGE GROUP

Based on <https://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/navigating-friendships>

## YOUNG CHILDREN ● ● ●

**Young children are naturally self-focused. Increasing their ability to take others' perspectives will help them form relationships. How you talk with young children should be very concrete and skill-based, as children at this age think in very literal ways.**

- Help them perform kind acts: Ask your child what they have done or could do to make a peer happy. Explain the mechanics of a kind action. For example, encourage your child to invite a lonely classmate to sit with them. Breaking down the action into understandable terms makes it more likely that the child will be able to implement it.
- Help them take someone else's perspective. Start a conversation around your child's favorite toy and ask them how another child might like to play with it. Encouraging sharing and explaining the "why" behind it (it helps others, avoids hurt feelings), makes it more likely your child will engage in prosocial activity. It also helps children imagine how others may be feeling and develop empathy.

## MIDDLE SCHOOLERS ● ● ●

**Peer relations become very important to middle schoolers. Wanting to fit in and look cool are part and parcel of being a teenager. While popularity is often desired, having one or two close friends is what's important for their social development.**

- Discuss Popularity - Kids mainly understand popularity as relating to status, such as being "likable", "attractive", or "cool". However, there is another popularity that is based on prosocial actions like being an empathic leader. Distinguishing between these two types of popularity can help teens set out on the right path.
- Encourage your child to develop friendship skills- Empathy, trust, loyalty, and vulnerability are critical for social development. Model this in your own relationships with friends and family.
- Foster self-confidence - Help your child cope with possible peer exclusion and bullying. This could look like explaining that bullies are often hurting themselves and do not have the tools they need to act in a prosocial way. You can also get them connected to a school counselor to cope with the effects.

## Teens ● ● ●

**As kids move into the teenage years, social relationships can become more complicated. Romantic relationships, deepening social ties, and more peer pressure can make this age difficult.**

- Encourage teens to see insecurities as a normal part of development, for both themselves and others. Knowing that others are going through the same issues allows teens to feel less alone and also be more empathetic.
- Continue to deepen your child's identify and values. Knowing this will help your child stand up to bullies and build a strong sense of self for adulthood.



Psychologists have determined that social media can have both positive and negative effects on children's friendships. For more marginalized communities, meeting peers online can help children feel less alone and connect them to much-needed resources. It may also broaden young people's perspectives, opening their eyes to the diversity that can be found in the world. However, social media can also pose a danger to students as their brains are not fully developed until age 25, and this may result in them becoming dependent on social media for social rewards. The problem with this is that social media is often addicting, especially because it offers teens a way to socialize instantaneously. Young people who rely on social media for their socialization may also miss out on learning important in-person conversational skills and body language reading. Experts suggest parents take an active role in their children's social media lives and set limits on how often they use platforms. The goal isn't to eradicate social media or the internet in its entirety, but to lessen the degree to which young people become dependent on it.

## How to encourage healthy social media use

1. Monitor/discuss social media use in your children. Limit the amount of time children spend on social media platforms that rely on likes, establish screen-time rules, and make sure screen time doesn't interfere with sleep. Ask questions about what your child has seen on social media and pose hypothetical questions so that they can be prepared for possible online scenarios.
2. Cultivate healthy screen time habits of your own. Discuss with your children why you use social media and consider doing a "social media fast" with the entire family.
3. Know when social media use becomes problematic. If social media is causing disruption in your child's life to the point where they are no longer able to participate in daily activities or are experiencing psychological harm, please reach out to a mental health professional.
4. Encourage social media literacy. This means teaching kids the difference between real and fake photos and news, the danger of the "like trap", and how to use social media in a responsible way.

**"Social media offers the 'empty calories of social interaction' that appear to help satiate our biological and psychological needs, but do not contain any of the healthy ingredients necessary to reap benefits."**  
- APA Chief Science Officer  
**Mitch Prinstein, PhD**

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2023/02/harms-benefits-social-media-kids>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/social-media-parent-tips>