



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Make a friend. Be a friend!

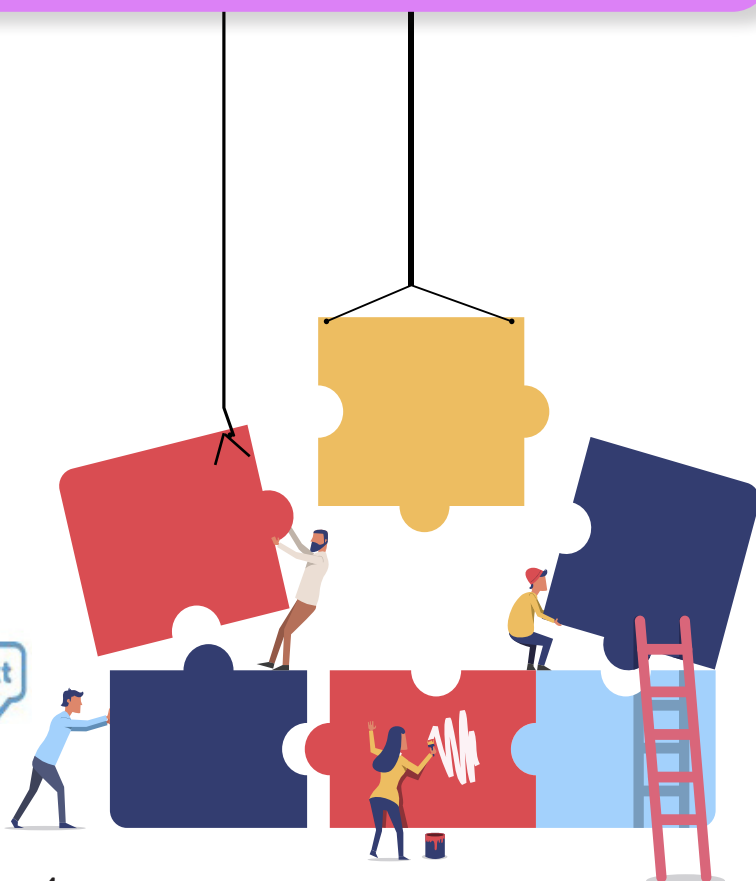
When you have a sense of connectedness, you have people who care about you as individuals and as parents. You feel secure and confident that you have others to share the joy, pain, and uncertainties that come with the parenting role.

Some important things to think about:

- Do you have friends or family members that help you out once in a while?
- Are you a member of any groups or organizations?
- Who can you call for advice or just to talk? How often do you see them?
- What kind of social support do you need?
- Do you find it easy or challenging to make friends? If it is challenging, what specific things represent a barrier for you?
- What helps you feel connected?

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THINGS YOU CAN DO TO BUILD BETTER FRIENDSHIPS

1. Be Honest - Relationships built on false build-ups or phony facades are only as good as their foundation. Superficial relationships often fizzle over time. To achieve a solid friendship, you have to be honest with each other. Being able to offer and receive feedback from someone you trust is a gift that can easily be overlooked.

Setting aside your ego and being willing to let someone know you and ask questions of you is invaluable. Friends are likely to ask the tough questions—“Why do you think you’re attracted to that person?” or, “Do you think you might be feeling jealous or hurt in this situation?” Having a friend who can tell it to you straight will help you know yourself better. Being able to reciprocate further challenges you to live with honesty, directness, and integrity.

There is no way to feel more connected to someone than to open yourself up to them. Plus, keeping an honest dialogue helps others trust and respect you along with building up your own self-respect.

2. Repair mistakes - When you know someone well, you’re familiar with their strengths as well as with their weaknesses. And so, just as you know how to cheer them up, you know exactly how to tear them down. In moments of tension, we can let things slip out that are far more hurtful to our closest friends because they come from us.

No one is perfect. We are all sure to mess up at times, but when we do, we have to set pride aside and repair the situation. Being honest shouldn’t be about being cruel. Finding a balance where you can say what you think without being parental, defining, or judgmental is important for keeping a level of trust between you and a friend.

When you make a mistake, apologize for it. Make sure the friend understands that your intention is not to hurt or punish. Explain where you went wrong and what you mean by saying sorry. And don’t be afraid to be the one who reaches out; we all have either been part of, or known pairs of friends who’ve stopped speaking for months, because neither individual would come forward

to admit fault. Time is precious and not worth wasting, especially when it comes to the people who make us happy.

3. Make Time and Show Appreciation - The familiarity and comfort we feel with another person can sometimes leave us crossing lines or forgetting to show gratitude. As with a spouse, partner, children, or family, we have to find time to make real contact with friends in order for the relationship to flourish. Slipping into a routine can leave us more likely to take friends for granted.

Make sure to express how you feel, and take actions that show how well you know and care for them. Generosity is the key to happiness. A good friend shows interest in who we are and what we struggle with, but it is important not to let the relationship become one-sided or to become self-centered in your focus.

Be sure to engage in acts of kindness and consideration that are focused on your friends. Do the things that they would perceive as caring. Consider their interests and passions when planning a way to say thank you.

4. Alter Your Expectations and Don’t Make Assumptions - In any relationship, we can start to impose certain expectations on others that set us up to feel hurt or disappointed. Don’t be quick to pick apart your friends. Accept that they are human and that they will make mistakes.

We may show our friendship in one way, whether through affection, favors, or gifts, but we shouldn’t necessarily expect the same from them. Don’t assume what your friends are thinking; Check it out instead. And accept that you could be wrong about their viewpoint—every individual possesses their own view and own perceptions of the world. They may, in turn, have a very different way of expressing their feelings or showing that they care.

Things you can do to build better friendships, continued!

5. Choose Compassion Over judgement -

A good rule of thumb when it comes to our relationships is to care more about doing what's right rather than being right. When you get to know a person, you get to know their worst traits, and it's easy to become irritated with those negative aspects of their personality. It is far more preferable to be compassionate. Compassion keeps us vulnerable instead of tough and guarded, or seeing the world through a negative lens.

Compassion, then, is its own reward, as it leaves us feeling good within ourselves regardless of how a friend may be behaving.

Being honest and straightforward without being testy is perhaps the most important quality of a good friend.



Why it Matters

Holding yourself to these five standards will help you develop within yourself and expand your potential to grow meaningful friendships throughout your life. It's no surprise that those people who are most giving of themselves are the most liked. Thus, keeping a realistic, yet compassionate outlook on the world will inherently expand your own world, attracting others along the way. All of these characteristics are contagious: By being the kind of person you respect, you encourage others to do the same.

Think about the things that are important to you or that you have an interest in. Look for activities in the community where you might find likeminded people*:

- Community Classes or workshops
- Community events
- Places of worship
- Volunteering
- School events or kids sporting events
- Support groups
- Gratiot/Isabella Great Start Parent coalition

*Please note: going out to the bar or other such social situations was not listed because when alcohol or other drugs are consumed, it is often very difficult to follow the guidelines above because of impaired judgement. If you find yourself in a situation where your judgement has been impaired and it hurt a friendship, saying something along the lines of that "you know what you did was not right, and alcohol or drugs impaired your judgment in the situation." Also, be sure to give grace if a friend finds themselves in this position with you. If this happens often then seek professional help.

