



Developing and Maintaining Friendships During Social Distancing

For children, learning how to form and maintain successful friendships is a skill that will be used and built upon for the rest of their lives. While social distancing limits opportunities for kids to connect, caregivers can still nurture the development of this important skill.

Encourage Social Connection through Virtual Platforms

While your child may not be able to see or play with peers in person right now, you can still help them to connect with friends via video chat, text, or playing online games. Have a conversation with your child in advance to help them prepare for a successful social experience:

- Determine when and how your child will be able to connect with peers online and help them make a plan to do so. Will they need help getting a username or reaching out to a friend’s parent?
- Review house rules around screen time and what games and sites they will be allowed to access. Children may need to be granted more time than usual to allow for virtual play dates.
- Talk with your child about what it means to be a good friend online. How can they take turns picking the game? How do we make sure we are not interrupting or taking over the conversation?

Reinforcing Friendly Behaviors

Virtual play dates may create more opportunities for caregivers to provide live social coaching. Remind your child about good friendship skills and offer lots of praise when you see them in the moment. Examples include:

Skill	How to Praise
Taking Turns	<i>“Great job waiting so patiently for your turn!”</i>
Waiting to Speak	<i>“I like how you waited for her to finish talking before responding.”</i>
Helping a Friend	<i>“Wow, that was very nice of you to help him figure out how that works.”</i>
Being Flexible	<i>“That was very friendly to agree to play what she wanted.”</i>
Asking Permission	<i>“Nice job asking to go first.”</i>
Problem Solving	<i>“I really like the way you two worked that out in such a calm way!”</i>

Group Activities: Group activities such as sports teams, music classes or art clubs provide opportunities to learn to work together and develop new friendships, and many are being offered virtually right now. What are some group activities your child might enjoy?