

# Health Tips for Parents

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## How important are childhood friendships?

Making and maintaining friendships are critical to a child's social and emotional development. Learning to develop good friendships early on can help pave the way for children to maintain positive influences and solid friendships throughout their lives.



**"A friendship is a mutual relationship** formed with affection and commitment between people who consider themselves as equals," according to Fred



Frankel, PhD, director of the UCLA Children's Friendship Program and author of *Friends Forever: How Parents Can Help Their Kids Make and Keep Good Friends*. "Friends teach each other social skills, provide moral support, grow up together, and they shield each other from bullying and teasing."

**Make the connection** In elementary school, children begin selectively choosing their friends. Dr. Frankel suggests that parents help this process by asking their child about his or her playmates at school, actively networking

with other parents, and arranging one-on-one time for the children. "Chemistry between children and shared interests are good starting points for a lasting friendship," he explains. Once a child has singled out another child, they will gradually develop a reciprocal relationship with each other and consider themselves equals. According to Dr. Frankel, parents should not worry about how many friends their child has. "Quality is more important than quantity," he explains. In general, Dr. Frankel believes that one best friend may leave a child isolated and dependent; having a few close friends will help a child feel less lonely as a young adult. Parents should also help their child practice their social cues by encouraging their child to approach another child, share mutual interests and foster lasting connections.

## Set Firm Rules

If a child starts mimicking an acquaintance's offensive behavior, parents should explain their concerns to their child and steer them away from that person before the friendship is formed.

Children who have problems making and keeping friends may benefit from attending friendship classes with a parent to help them learn social skills and set personal goals for making friends.



## The Role of Social Media

"Social media is a great way to maintain and enhance friendships by allowing children to instantly update and keep in touch with each other. But it interferes with face-to-face interaction and can lead to cyber bullying," advises Dr. Frankel. Parents should set firm rules for not meeting friends this way, since social media can attract predators pretending to be someone they are not.

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children's Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.