

How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?

OTHER TITLES

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Teaching your children to talk about their feelings

How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?

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YOU TRY HARD to give your child the benefits of a stable and loving home. But the outside world isn't always so friendly. At daycare, at school, in the neighbourhood and on the playground, children come face to face with some pretty tough situations.

What do you do if your child is being bullied or made fun of? How do you respond if your child is left out of the group, and feels rejected? What if your child is the bully, or is being disruptive and getting into trouble at school?

Learning social skills is a major part of every child's development. For some children it's a fairly smooth process, but for others it can be very difficult and even painful. You can't always be with your child to fight the battles for them. But you can help teach your child to get along with others, and to understand why people sometimes behave badly.

Talking about feelings

The only thing worse than feeling lonely and miserable is feeling that way and having no one to talk to. If you're like most adults, it's not easy for you to talk to your child about real feelings. You want your child to have friends and to be happy, so it can be hard to have an honest discussion when your child feels rejected and lonely. It's especially hard when you aren't sure what you can do to help.

But just listening to your child can be a big help. It tells your child that their feelings are important, and that you're willing to share those troubles. When you encourage your child to recognize feelings and talk about them, your child will gain a better understanding of the problems. You can also encourage your child to think about other people's feelings and problems.

Bottled-up emotions

Talking about feelings can help the child who is being a bully or causing problems at school. A child who is feeling angry, afraid or insecure may try to relieve these feelings by acting out when away from home. When children have to hold their feelings inside, these bottled-up feelings can spill over in other ways.

Often children who are angry and hostile need extra love and encouragement. "Acting out" may be their way of getting the attention they need. When you spend extra time with them, praise them when they behave well, and let them know that you love them and believe in them; they'll feel better about themselves. Kids who feel good about themselves find it easier to get along with others, and will be more likely to make healthy choices as they grow older.

If your child's behaviour is often anti-social and disruptive, it may be a sign that they need to talk to a professional counsellor or psychologist. If you aren't sure where to go for help, contact the addiction or mental health office in your area. The staff there will assist you in finding help for your child.

Helping out

It's great to be a leader now and then. Your child will have a better self-image and feel more confident in a group when you give them responsibilities and let them look after things on their own. This may mean taking on chores at home, like feeding the pet, bringing in the mail, watering a plant or helping with the gardening.

Good deeds

When a child reaches out to help another person, they feel a real sense of their own importance as an individual. You can encourage your child to do a kind deed for a senior, a neighbour or someone in the family. Helping others will show your child that they can make a real difference in their family and in the community. Good deeds give children a reason to feel proud of themselves and confident in their own abilities.

Socialize

If your child is afraid of socializing with other children, you may want to arrange special times for them to play with one other child close to their own age. You could take them and one other child on a special outing to a playground. Your love and encouragement will provide a lot of support for your child as they begin to play with other children. Every outing that turns out to be a happy event will help to build your child's confidence.

Dealing with bullies

Bullies come in all shapes and sizes, and all ages. Even very young children may have to deal with friends who are too bossy, and with bullies. You can help by listening carefully to your child and discussing the situation. Encourage them to stand up for themselves when they can, and to tell you if somebody is bullying them.

Bullying can be a serious issue and you may have to intervene to help your child. This is especially true if a group of children is ganging up on one child. You may need to talk to an adult in charge, such as the child's teacher or school principal, or the daycare director.

Bullying is fairly common, but that doesn't make it acceptable behaviour. Children should not feel threatened and afraid when they leave home to go to school or daycare, or to the park. Children who bully others are often very troubled, and it's up to adults to make sure that these children get the help they need. By taking the bullying issue seriously, you'll show your child that you care, and your child will feel more secure.

Feeling confident

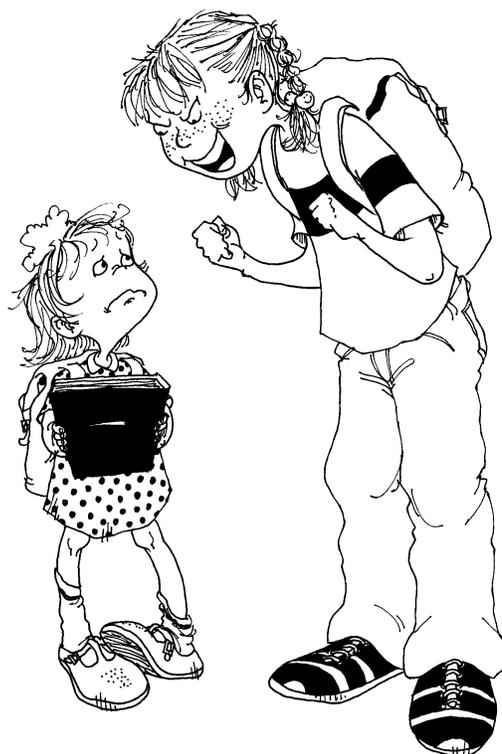
Children who can face the outside world with confidence will be more likely to make healthy choices as they grow older—and less likely to turn to alcohol and other drugs to ease the way in social situations. Your child is never too young

for you to begin teaching them about getting along with others, respecting other people's feelings, appreciating the value of real friends, and understanding their own worth as a unique individual.

For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.



Activity Page

LEARN FROM BOOKS AND STORIES

Your local library has books for children that deal with the problems and the joys of getting along with others. Ask the librarian to recommend books that would be appropriate for your child's age. Look for children's books on the following subjects:

- Friendship
- Bullies
- Getting along
- Bashfulness
- Fear
- Peer pressure



Ask the librarian to recommend stories about heroes. Most heroes overcome many difficulties before reaching their heroic status. Children will identify with the heroes and learn that everyone has troubles and problems, and that the key is to believe in yourself and not be defeated by life's difficulties. Talk about your own heroes and people you know who have overcome obstacles and shown great strength and courage. Discuss the books and stories with your child and encourage them to express their own feelings. Re-read your child's favourite books with them as many times as they want.

"PUT-UPS" INSTEAD OF PUT-DOWNS

Children hear plenty of smart put-downs from TV, friends and siblings. Have your child think of "put-ups" that could be applied to a brother or sister, another family member or a playmate. A "put-up" might be something like this:

- "You are so good at drawing. I love the way you choose colours."
- "You're nice to younger friends. You don't try to have your own way just because you're bigger and older."

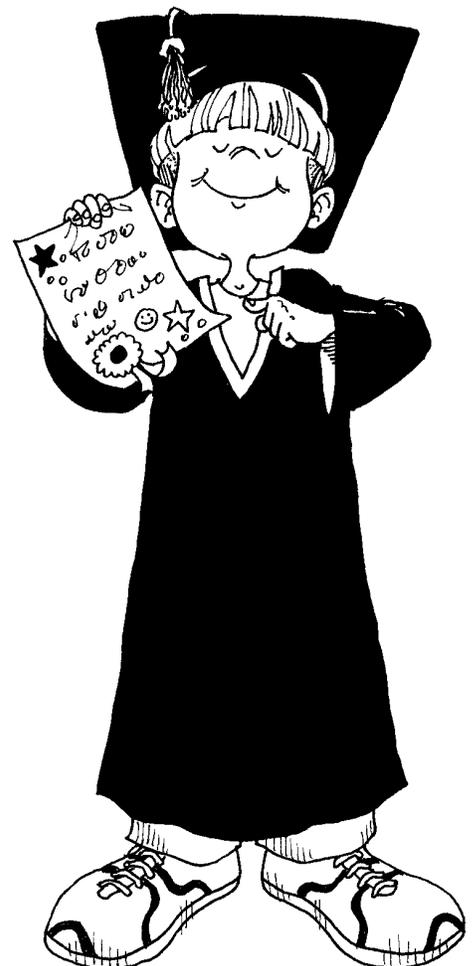
Ask your child to give their "put-up" to the other person verbally, and also to write it down on a piece of paper that can be cut into the shape of a heart, or another shape. (This can be done as an individual or group activity.) Talk with your child about the difference between a "put-down" and a "put-up," and the feelings that are associated with each.

Good deed certificate

Make "Good Deed Certificates" from paper and decorate them. Ask your child to do a good deed for someone and then present them with the certificate with their name on it.

(This can be done for one child or for a group of children.)

Talk with your child about the feelings that go along with good deeds. How does the person who received the good deed feel about it? How does the person who did the good deed feel about it?





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