

# Friendships

**A toolkit to help children with disabilities or developmental difficulties develop  
friendship skills**



Developing and maintaining a friendship can be an exciting time for young people. It can also come with its difficulties as children try to discover the social world around them. Children may not develop a friendship immediately or be able to learn all the social skills straight away, but over time, with your help and repeated exposure to these skills, children and young people can learn to develop meaningful friendships.

This toolkit includes ideas you can talk about with children to help them start to develop friendships, some tips that you can teach children to make developing a friendship easier plus some advice from Sparkling Sibs club.

## Finding a Friend and Joining In

Rather than encouraging children to form a friendship with anyone, try and help them pick out another person who might like doing the same things as them. It might be tempting to let children play alongside other children rather than with other children but by finding someone who likes to do the same thing as them, you are helping their chances of developing a friendship with another child.

Whilst understanding and picking up on social cues may come naturally to some children, other children may need help to make sense of what others are communicating and how to join in. We can help by helping them think about these points:

- **When to join in.** Children in a school yard are much more likely to be playing a game, which can give other children more of an opportunity to join in. However, by storming in to a game mid flow, there is more of a chance that other children will be hostile towards them.
- **Watch and listen** so they can decide if it's something they'd like to join in with. Watching and waiting will also let other children know that they are interested in joining in.
- If they decide that they do want to join in, they could **wait for a pause in the game** to join in or they can try **saying something nice**, for example "Nice shot". You could practice these beforehand.
- You can also practice lines that they can use to join in like "Do you need another person on your team?" or "This looks cool, can I join in?"
- **Reminding children to smile.** Smiling doesn't come naturally to all children, especially when they are worrying about trying to join in. Smiling can make them look more approachable.
- If children have a one to one support in school, perhaps they can help set up an **organised activity at playtime** and invite others to join them i.e. throwing a ball or colouring sessions.
- Having a one to one support shouldn't stop children making friends, it is important for one to one staff to remember that sometimes they may need to take a small step back and allow children to have social interaction with others in order to help them work on their social skills. Sparkle has a range of different clubs; these can give children a chance to play but also to work on their social skills.



For older children, peers are more likely to want to 'hang out' which can make it daunting to approach other children.

- Organised activities such as table tennis, pool/snooker or football/dancing teams are easier ways to get children involved with interactive activities and also find other people who enjoy the same things that they do.
- These might be lunchtime or afterschool clubs. You might need to enquire about these for children and encourage them to attend.
- Sparkle youth club have their own 'girls group', which lets the girls get together and talk about things that they are interested in. Having a shared interest can be really helpful when making friends.



**'Play dates' or one to one time is the best way to develop friendships. Invite one child (that your child would like to invite) and encourage them to plan the time in advance.**

**It might be a good idea to go over some ground rules;**

- Make sure the guest isn't bored
- Don't leave the guest alone to play
- Be loyal to the guest
- A polite way of saying you are bored is "Can we play something else?"
- You and the guest must agree on something to play
- Non-interactive toys are off limits but you can play on a games console if you both agree on a two player game

## Coping with rejection

Children might get rejected and it's important to teach them that this is okay. It might be worth talking about **WHY** children reject them and helping them see that it probably wasn't anything to do with them. Children can say no for many reasons, it could be because;

- they didn't want their game interrupted
- they misunderstood the request
- perhaps the child had got them in trouble before
- they tried to make a friend at the wrong time i.e. when someone was angry

Seeing children get rejected can be hard and instinct may make you want to shield them from further rejection. This is where our own anxieties might influence children and it's important to encourage children to try again after facing rejection.

Here at Sparkle, we have a 'Friendship Stop' outside. Children or young people can stand here to show that they are interested in making a friend.



## Telling tales

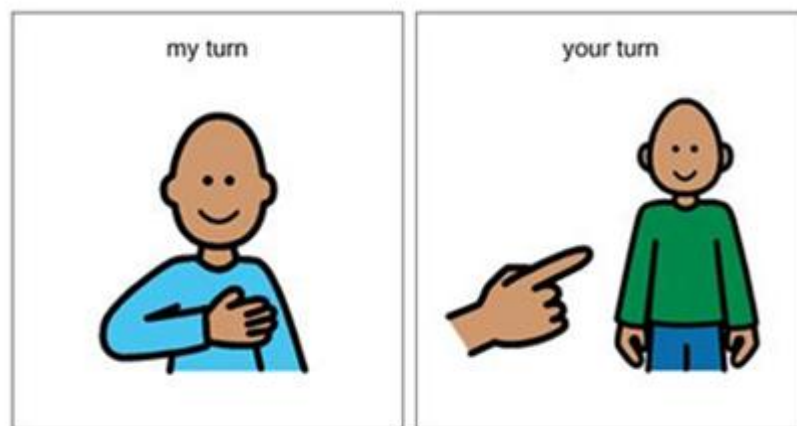
We spend a lot of time teaching children to not break rules and to tell adults when others do so, but there becomes a point when this is a barrier to making friends. Children who tell the teacher every single time someone breaks a rule might start to be avoided by others or thought of as the class tell tale. As adults, we can help children and young people realise what is acceptable to 'let go'. For example, a 14 year old boy who tells his teacher when his friend swears might find that he loses that friend quite quickly. Knowing boundaries is something that comes naturally to many people, and it can depend on our own values, **there is no right or wrong answer**. Some children and young people will find this difficult because they will want to tell someone about the wrong doing. For children who struggle with this, you could give them 5 minutes after school to tell you what they wanted to tell their teacher about their peers.

For some children, you could also discuss giving rules 'levels' of 1-5. For example, anything that is a level 4 or 5 should be told to teachers straight away but 1-3 can be discussed with you later. These levels are determined by you as everyone's values are different.

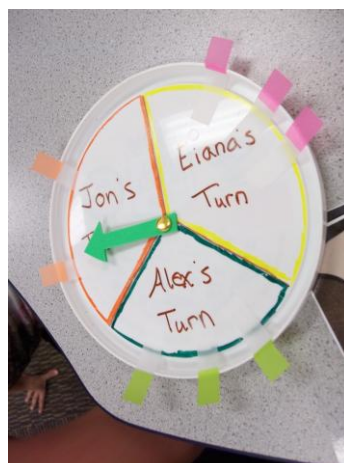


## Turn taking

When making friends, it is helpful if children are able to 'take turns' otherwise it may put other children off playing with them. If you think this is something a child is struggling with, you could **practice turn taking activities at home** such as passing a ball or building blocks. You may need to **verbalise what you are doing** such as "Oh it's your go... and now you've finished, it's my go. Look we're turn taking. Who's go is it now?". You could also point at someone when it is their go as a **visual reminder for children**. To start off, it's easier if activities are kept **simple** between two people with not many distractions in the room. **Try and give children time to respond**, it may be taking them longer to process rather than them not understanding. If your child is managing with two people playing, you can **help them practice by adding another person** so they have to wait a little bit longer.



If a child is struggling with turn taking, you can design a 'turn taking' board. These could be used at home or in school settings. You could create one like the picture below but there are also different ones that you could try. You can use pictures or tags with children's names and take them off the board and move them to bottom after each go. Alternatively, in a game with a specific number of turns, you could give children a specific number of counters and they could put a counter in the box after they have taken a turn.



## Resources and references

- Briggs, N. and Shea, D. (2011). *How to make and keep friends: Tips for kids to overcome 50 common social challenges*. Printed by Create Space Independent Publishing Platform.
- Frankel, F. (2010). *Friends forever: How parents can help their kids make and keep good friends*. John Wiley & Sons, Hobokon, New Jersey.
- Krasney Brown, L. and Brown, M. (2001). *How to be a friend: A guide to making friends and keeping friends*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, London.
- Madorsky Elman and Kennedy-Moore (2003). *The unwritten rules of friendship: simple strategies to help your child make friends*. Little, Brown and Company, London.
- School might find the 'Talk about' series of books helpful. These are written by Alex Kelly and can be found at alexkelly.biz
- [www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk) – This is a website with some resources that might be helpful for schools or for clubs.

**The next page has some resources that you might want to use with children.**

**These include ideas from Sparkling Sibs about good places to make friends and cards to generate discussions around being a good friend.**

## Good times to make friends

At parks



In the school yard



Starting new clubs



Holiday activities



When people are playing outside



## Bad times to make friends

In class



During quiet time



When people are fighting



When someone is sad



When someone is in the toilet





## How to Be a Good Friend



When someone falls over I  
can help them up and ask if  
they are okay.

## How to Be a Good Friend



When someone needs to  
borrow something I can lend  
it to them.

## How to Be a Good Friend



When someone looks lonely I  
can go and play with them.

## How to Be a Good Friend



When someone looks unhappy I  
can go and give them some  
comfort.



## How to Be a Good Friend

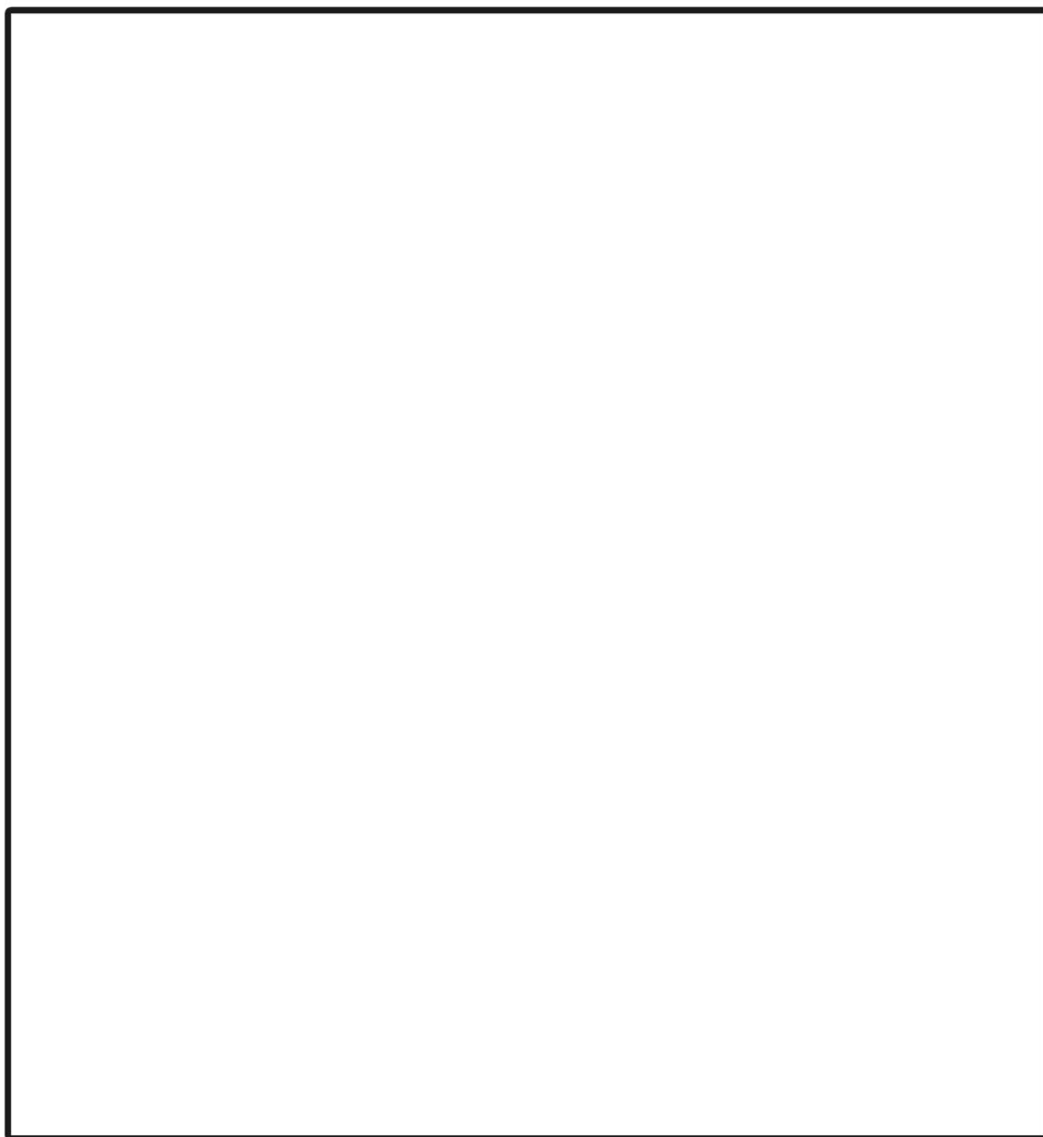


When someone is stuck with their work I can help them.



Here is a blank one which children can draw/write themselves!

## How to Be a Good Friend



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