

Father Times

Fathers and Children's Relationships

Issue 8

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

Taking Time for Friends

Think about the people that you most remember. Consider who has made the most difference in your life. Is it a Nobel Prize winner? An actor or actress who wins an Academy Award? Or is there someone else? Consider for a moment the mother, the father, the teacher, the coach, the grandparents, the pastor, the friends — the people who pass through our lives and the lives of our children.

It is generally not the people who receive headlines or applause that make the most difference in our lives. It is our family and friends and those we connect with and care about that matter most to us.

How do we raise young children so that they become people who care for others and have good friendships? A child's social development, or how they grow in developing relationships with others, is an important factor in their growth and happiness.

Take time to pay attention to your child's relationships and what you can do to make them happy and positive.



Once Upon A Time . . .

Secrets of Friendship Success

James thoughtfully ran his fingers over his daughter's brand-new pack of 8-color crayons, then to the small blunt scissors and down along the soft angles of the white school glue bottle. The school supplies were all neatly laid out next to the shiny new backpack. On the floor next to the door stood a tiny pair of bright pink, barely-been-worn sneakers, ready to leap out the door at the sound of the first bell.

"Kindergarten, well, that was a long time ago," reminisced James, "a very long time ago indeed."

"What would it be like now?" he wondered to himself.

He noticed there was no rug among the supplies like the one he'd had in school as a boy. It was a little braided rug his grandma had given him to nap on at rest time. Everyone had

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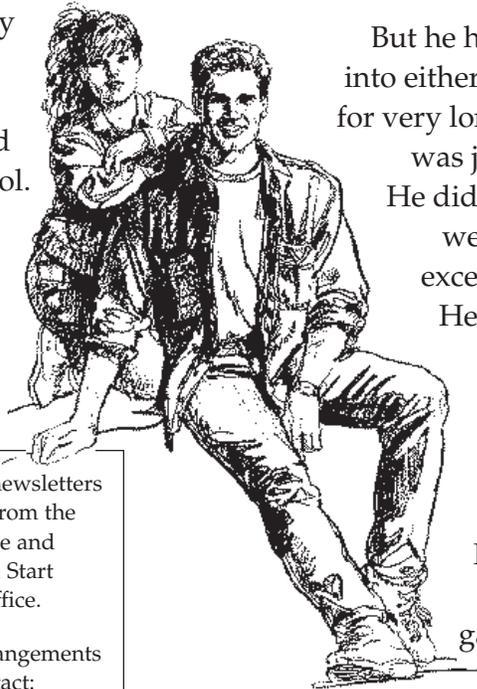
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Secrets of Friendship Success

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something to rest on. It was a “requirement,” his teacher used to say. He wasn’t sure what that meant back then, but it carried the power of a very long and important word. Just the way Ms. Jackson said it, he knew it was a word to be obeyed and not questioned. There wasn’t really much he would have questioned in kindergarten, except, why did he feel that he didn’t fit in?

James settled back in his chair as a worried look crept across his face. This was it. Not only was he melancholy to think that his baby girl had grown up so quickly, he was worried about her starting school. James remembered all too well his early school days because he was not one of the



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“popular” kids who was always picked first for the team or as a partner. He wasn’t one of the bad boys either whose names were heard time and again from Ms. Jackson or one of the children who was being taunted at the time. He was not what would be considered by today’s terms “accepted” or “rejected.”

Once in a while James felt accepted when his dad would allow him to bring a cool show-and-tell item that only he knew how to work. And, admittedly, every once in a while he would tease someone until they told him to stop it.

But he had not fit into either category for very long. James was just there. He did his work well but not exceptionally. He talked to others when they talked to him. He joined in the games and gave his ideas when that was the assignment.

What James dreaded most was free play time. He would walk from the table games to the area where the toy cars were raced in circles on the floor, to the book corner, to the blocks and back again, looking for an invitation to join in with a group. That invitation rarely came. When a child would look up and see him standing near him, James would lower his eyes and wait. The other child would return to his play, assuming that James didn’t want to join in.

James was basically ignored and received little attention. He was liked by everyone, known to few and mostly regarded as part of the landscape. The children were all there to play and learn, not to host a little boy who was unsure about how to join in without being asked.

James thought back and realized he would gladly do anything to save his daughter from that sort of anguish. How had he managed? What had happened to him since that time? Now he had wonderful friends to share his daily joys and struggles.

James remembered how his second grade teacher, Mr. B., would tell the class to:

- look in the eyes of the other person
- tell them something they wanted to hear

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My Child's Relationship Skills

Children need both personal skills and social skills to create good relationships with others. Ask yourself where your child is on each skill and what you might do to assist if needed.

Personal Skills – My child:

- is usually in a positive mood.
- is not excessively dependent on teachers or other adults.
- usually engages in activities willingly.
- usually copes with rebuffs adequately.
- demonstrates the capacity to empathize.
- has positive relationships with one or two peers.
- displays capacity for humor.
- has positive feelings about himself/herself.
- can manage feelings of stress or anger.
- is able to control impulses and behave appropriately.

Social Skills – My child usually:

- approaches others positively.
- understands expectations for working with others (sharing, etc.).
- expresses wishes and preferences clearly.
- is not easily intimidated by bullies.
- can sense the feelings of others.
- expresses frustration and anger appropriately without harming others or property.
- takes turns fairly.
- is able to make decisions and plan.
- negotiates and compromises with others.
- shows acceptance for peers of other ethnic groups.
- is accepted fairly easily into ongoing activities or groups.
- interacts nonverbally with other children with smiles, waves, nods, etc.
- tries to solve problems with peers.

- ask them for what you need from them
- tell them something nice again

He had tried it sometimes and found some pretty good success with that advice. It was a confidence builder. A few years later he learned to play the trombone. He played it well and soon collected a group of

other musicians who were gifted too. They spent hours perfecting their talent in each others' basements, porches and garages. Some of these guys were still his best friends to this day.

Small successes. Common interests. James realized that his teacher and others had helped give him the tools he needed to later grow out of his shyness and find good friendships.

James wiped his eyes and vowed that tomorrow, as he was walking his kindergartner to school for the first time, he would begin to share the secrets of "friendship success." Maybe he could save his daughter from some of the trials of feeling like she is on the outside looking in or, like him, years later, looking back at lost time.

Fathers and Children's Relationships

It's important for children to have opportunities that develop their social skills. According to William W. Hartup, child development specialist from the University of Minnesota, the best indicator of how well your child will adapt as an adult is not school grades or IQ — it is the quality of their peer friendships. A child's ability to get along with others is possibly the most important factor in how he or she will succeed as an adult.

Hartup notes that friendships provide four basic functions for humans. They furnish:

- (1) Emotional resources — such as having fun and dealing with difficult situations;
- (2) Cognitive resources — for solving problems and learning;
- (3) Social opportunities — including learning to communicate, cooperate and gain entry in a group; and
- (4) Relationship models — to learn important skills for later relationships like dating and marriage. To assist children in developing their relationships, follow these tips.

With Babies

- Infants respond to faces and are calmed by being held. They can make eye contact and smile. Spend time with your infant getting to know her better. Take turns cooing

at each other. Use words to express what you think the baby might be feeling. Invite the baby to take in the world at her own pace.

- Be sure the baby has one or two primary caregivers whom she can trust to take care of her every need. Be one of those two! The lessons that babies learn early about trust and relationships will be carried with them throughout life.
- As the baby grows, encourage her to help herself whenever possible. Model sharing by sharing with her.
- By 18 months, children learn to tease and anticipate what will happen next. Your baby needs you to set limits and consistently but gently enforce them.

With Siblings

- Acknowledge brothers' and sisters' feelings about each other. Stop all hurtful actions. Help children use feeling words such as "You sound really angry" or "You wish she would ask before playing with your teddy bear."
- Resist the urge to compare. Describe what you see, feel or need done rather than criticizing or comparing siblings to each other.
- Treat children uniquely, not equally. Think about your own siblings. Would you appreciate matching birthday gifts, or would you rather have something chosen especially for you? Give each child the time and attention she needs when she needs it.
- Don't let anyone lock a child into a role — not parents, siblings or the child. Help the child see himself in a whole new light by describing his successful attempts.
- Help children solve problems without taking sides.
- Learn to accept normal bickering. When your children need help getting beyond it, don't blow up — offer real help. Acknowledge their anger, reflect each child's point of view, describe the problem, let them know you trust them to work out a fair solution and leave the room. If the situation looks dangerous, stay close and help the children work it out peacefully with problem solving.
- Children with problems do not need to be viewed as problem children. Accept the child's frustration. Appreciate what they have accomplished. Focus on a solution.

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With Friends

- Introduce your baby and child to others. Teach your child from toddlerhood how to gain access into a group by modeling how you do it yourself and inviting him in too.
- Show your child how to act positively with other children. Young children who have a difficult time with being too bossy or aggressive do well playing with slightly older children. Those children who tend to be quiet or hold back do well playing with slightly younger children while they learn social skills.
- Children need time to learn social skills from their parents but, by about age three, they need to practice with playmates their own age.
- Notice when children are being appropriate with friends, and talk about that. When trouble strikes, make corrections as positively as possible.
- Schedule play dates for short amounts of time to begin with. Help your child to plan some possible choices of activities for the play date before the other child arrives. Start with one friend at a time. Crowds are overwhelming to children who aren't used to them.

Fathering Facts

On Fathers and Friendship

Happiness in life so often comes from interacting with others in loving ways and building good relationships. Career success also depends on being able to cooperate and get along with others. Fathers and father figures can do much to help children develop good relationships and provide a model for them to follow. What do the facts say about a father's relationship with their children? Here are some key findings:

- Fathers who know the parents of the friends that their children select and play with have kids that are less likely to become involved in risk behaviors and more likely to avoid aggressive or antisocial behaviors.
- Children with fathers who are engaged with them in activities that provide social interaction, such as youth clubs, sports activities or religious groups, tend to have more friends and better relationships with their friends.
- Fathers who practice "parental coaching" when social challenges arise help their children by guiding them through a problem, teaching conflict resolution strategies, and following up to see how children have responded.
- If fathers engage in a "permissive" parenting style by giving in to children's desires and setting few or no limits, children are more likely to be aggressive, impulsive, or non-conforming in their social relationships. Children may take things that are not theirs or think little about the effects of their actions on others.
- Fathers who engage in a "power assertive" (authoritarian) parenting style by giving orders without explanation or using threats and physical punishment tend to have children who are more aggressive or sometimes shy and withdrawn in social situations. Children who withdraw may think they are powerless and social interaction is unpleasant, while those who are aggressive may have learned that acting aggressively will bring results.
- Monitoring the quality of a child's friendships and peer interactions is associated with having children who experience more satisfying and successful relationships with friends.

Activities for Fathers and Children – Friendship Time

This section provides a variety of activities you can do to spend time with your children and build a good relationship together. Have fun as you and your child enjoy some friendship time!

- ❑ Sing a song or recite a rhyme while doing the actions with a puppet. Your baby may enjoy watching this new way of sharing a song. This helps to teach social interaction.
- ❑ Gently tie a bright piece of yarn to your infant's arm. Watch how she focuses on it. Try it on the other arm. How about her ankle? What does she do when she catches a glimpse of it? Children learn to interact in fun ways through this activity.
- ❑ Find safe toys your baby can bat, kick, mouth and grab.

By six months you will be seeing a lot of this type of play. Props are important for interacting with children.

- ❑ Pretend you are a customer in a restaurant. Have your child come to you, take your order and bring your meal. Try this type of pretend play also when visiting the dentist, going to the store, or talking to a teacher. This type of play is good for young children.
- ❑ Make a puzzle by cutting an empty cereal box into puzzle piece shapes. Use a cookie sheet or cake pan lid for a frame if you need one. Take turns putting the pieces together.
- ❑ Clean out the family "junk" drawer, garage or attic together. Try to figure out what an item is or at least who it belongs to. The kids can play delivery person to put each (safe) item where

it belongs — or into the trash if needed!

- ❑ Working together, cut pictures of animals, fish, sea creatures, birds, etc. out of magazines. Mount them on construction paper if you want the pictures to last. Draw three signs. Draw waves on one and label it "In the Water." Draw "land" on the second one and label it "On the Land." The third one can include clouds and be labeled "In the Air." Talk about each picture as you decide which sign to place it under.
- ❑ Do someone a favor. Tell your child what you did, how it helped and how it made you feel. Next time, let your child help you help someone else. This teaches caring.
- ❑ Children can learn a lot about comparison, size, visual discrimination and prediction by playing with simple items. Save cardboard tubes and cut them in many lengths. Children love to line them up in order of height.
- ❑ Collect many sizes of plastic containers and their screw on lids. Can your child figure out which one goes on which



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container? Observe him. How does he figure it out? How does an older child solve the problem? Have him put the lids in order from smallest to largest. This activity helps with problem solving.

- ❑ Incorporate your child into doing chores. This gives the child more time with you, teaches her skills, and makes her feel like a needed person in the family.
- ❑ Cut the green tops off of carrots, leaving a little of the orange end. Place these in a shallow dish of water. Check them each day. In a few days, you will see small fern-like leaves appear. Care for the carrot tops by checking the water.
- ❑ Make a bottle garden from a large glass jug with a cork. These tiny ecosystems are fun to plant and watch. Add small plastic animals to create a forest or jungle scene. Be sure to start with a layer of pebbles for drainage. Pour sterilized compost into the jar through a cardboard tube. Fashion gardening tools from a spoon and fork taped to chopsticks to make them long enough to do the work. Use small, slow-growing plants, water well, cork and display in indirect sunlight.

Ten Friendship Tips for Dads and Kids

Dad — you set the example!

Here are ten tips on how to help your child make and keep friends:

1. Have your child list ten activities they'd like to do with you and invite a friend. Do one such activity a week for ten weeks. Focus on one or two specific friends to invite each time.
2. Teach your son or daughter to make eye contact, say hello, and offer a suggestion about playing together.
3. When your child gets upset with a sibling or friend, let them calm down and then ask why they became upset. Ask them to think about how they might have responded differently. Practice two or three different responses with them.
4. Start a neighborhood game of tag or hide-and-seek. Invite your children and others to participate and join the game.
5. Ask your child who they'd like to invite over to play. Help your child make the invitation and plan two or three activities to do with his or her friend.
6. Get your child involved in an organized social activity such as a youth club (4-H, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.), sport (soccer, etc.), or other group.
7. Organize a small group of fathers for a weekend outing with your kids to watch a ball game, go fishing or hiking, or have a picnic.
8. Play family games such as board games, charades, hide-and-seek, or other activities. Help your child learn to participate and take turns.
9. Talk to your children about how they feel about their friendships or interactions with others. Focus on small, positive interactions and successes.
10. Read stories or books to your child that highlight children's friendships. Ask your child what he or she thinks and what ideas the story teaches about being a friend.

Story Time

Books for Dads and Kids

I Love You the Purplest
by Barbara M. Joosse,
Mary Whyte, Illustrator

Feathers for Lunch
by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt, 1990)

More, More, More Said the Baby
by Vera B. Williams
(Greenwillow, 1990)

Hand Rhymes
by Marc Brown (Dutton, 1985)

Make Way for Ducklings
by Robert McCloskey
(Viking, 1941)

Drummer Hoff
by Barbara and Ed Emberley
(Prentice-Hall, 1967)

Waiting for Jennifer
by Kathryn Osebold Galbraith
& Irene Trivas (1987)

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner
by Amy Schwartz & Franklin
Watts (1988)

Fathering Resources

Further Information on Relationships

1, 2, 3. . .The Toddler Years
by Irene Van der Zande, 1999.
Santa Cruz, CA: Santa Cruz
Toddler Care Center.

Guidance of Young Children
by M. Marion, 1995. Englewood
Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

*Kids Are Worth It! Giving Your
Child the Gift of Inner Discipline*
by Barbara Coloroso, 1995.
Toronto: Somerville House
Publishing.

*Raising Self-Reliant Children
in a Self-Indulgent World*
by H. Stephen Glenn &
Jane Nelsen, 1989. Roseville,
CA: Prima Publishing.

Raising Your Spirited Child
by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, 1998.
New York, NY: HarperCollins.

*Touchpoints: Your Child's
Emotional and Behavioral
Development*
by T. Berry Brazelton, 1992.
Reading, MA: Perseus Books.

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