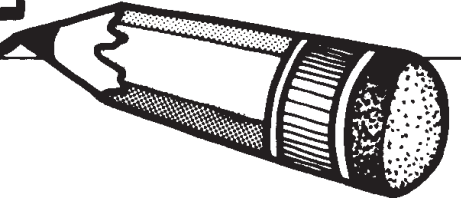
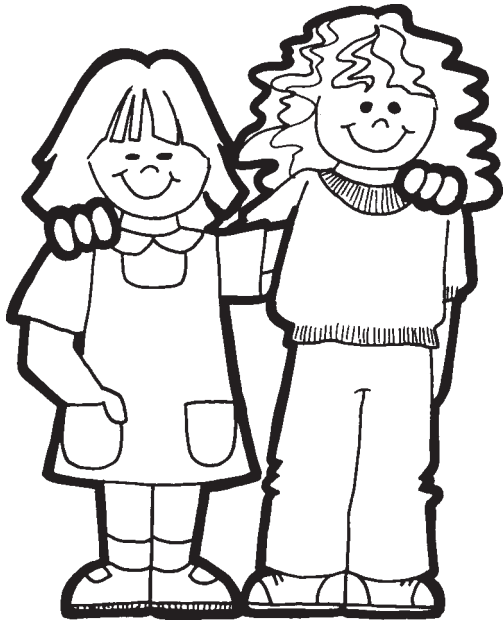


# Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of kindergarten children  
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*



## Friends

“Mom, can Travis come over and play?”

Sometimes you may feel you’ve heard that question one too many times.

However, friends are an important part of a kindergarten’s life. The degree of popularity or isolation children experience can affect their self-esteem and their view of their social skills. Oftentimes, the relationships with friends are similar to those with siblings – best friends one minute, enemies the next.

What about popularity? There’s so much emphasis placed on popularity that having only a few friends may seem like a failure. However, parents sometimes

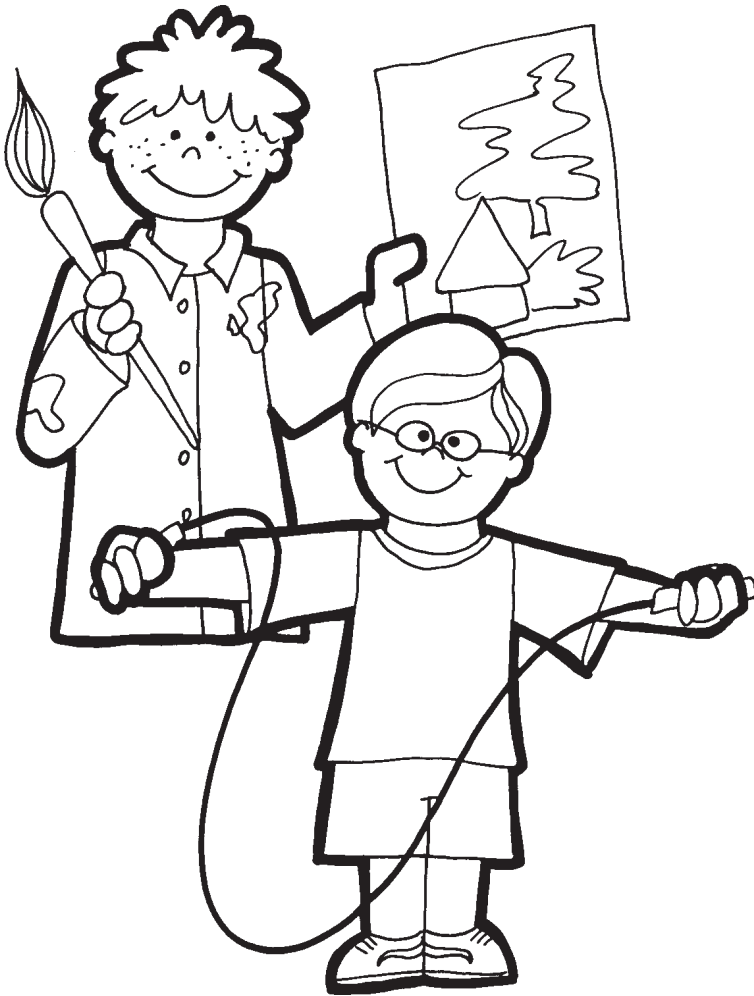
make more of the situation than the child. Don’t confuse quantity with quality. A child with few friends isn’t necessarily lonely or a social outcast since the number of friends varies considerably at this age. Try to respect the level of sociability your child chooses.

Here are some tips for helping your child make friends more easily:

- Do some role playing at home with your child. Together think of questions that lead to conversation and activity with others. Use dolls, puppets and books that relate to friendship topics.
- Encourage your child to bring a friend home after school occasionally, with adult supervision.
- Encourage your child to say hello every day to an unknown schoolmate.
- Teach your child to make eye contact and to smile when talking with others.
- Get together with others who have children near the age of your child. Doing something specific as a group – picnic, park visit, bicycling – will relax the kids and make things easier than sending them out to play while the adults talk.
- Help your child learn good ways to talk to others. Try this game: You say something negative (“That sweater is funny looking.”) and have your child come back with something positive (“I like this sweater my grandma made for me.”). Then switch roles – and have fun with it because kids love to be silly while learning. Not only will your child learn good responses to teasing (still a big part of childhood), but this exercise can also help develop a more positive outlook in general. Ignoring some teasing is a helpful skill to teach.
- Trust your child’s taste in friends. Unless there’s something dangerous going on, tolerate your child’s friends. And if your child doesn’t like your best

friend's child, accept it. You may be disappointed that they don't get along, but it's not fair to insist that youngsters must enjoy each other's company, no matter how convenient for you.

Peers are important. They teach each other facts of life parents never can. They provide emotional support and teach acceptable behavior. It's largely through a child's interaction with peers that some of life's most important attitudes and behaviors are shaped.



## The Power of Play

Children of today are growing up in a rapidly changing world characterized by pressure to succeed in all areas. They have less time and opportunity to play and just be kids than children of previous generations. However, research confirms the importance of play in the development of children.

- **Physical development.** Because play often involves physical activity, it's closely related to the development and refinement of children's gross and fine motor skills and body awareness.

- **Social development.** As social beings people need to belong and feel part of a group. Play provides rich experiences needed to learn social skills, to handle exclusion and dominance, and to share power, space and ideas with others.
- **Cognitive development.** Studies show that play can improve planning skills, problem-solving abilities, academic skills, attitudes and language development.

How do children like to play? Kindergartners begin by building and creating with objects, taking on roles and using props. They'll move on to formal and informal games with their peers (hopscotch, jump rope). Imitative play and freedom to use paints and blank paper instead of coloring books help develop creativity.

Sometimes play seems like chaos. Arguments over which game to play and what rules to follow seem to take up a lot of time. Even though you'd like to step in and organize it all so they have more time to play, it's best not to interfere. Going through this process will help children develop their abilities to reason, to judge what's appropriate, to weigh arguments and to learn how consensus can be reached. Learning all this is much more significant for children's development as social human beings than mastering whatever skills are involved in playing the actual game.

Play teaches many important skills and lessons for life. Build time into your child's schedule for play.

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