

# TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE FRIENDLY

## Overview

**M**ost adults think of children as naturally friendly. We assume that as children grow-up, they will have many friends and that they will enjoy the untold pleasures of childhood companionship. But in today's complex society we can no longer take it for granted that children will easily make friends.

A significant number of children (an estimated 20% to 40%) describe themselves as shy at some time during their childhood, and report that their concern about being judged by others makes it hard for them to make friends. Other children complain that life events beyond their control, such as a family move or a divorce, make it hard for them to make and keep friends. Children who perceive themselves as different from their peers—too short, too tall, too fat, a different religion, and so on—frequently complain that this difference makes it hard for them to make friends, and research supports their claims. Children generally choose friends who have things in common with them, so that a child who is perceived as being different will be less likely to be chosen as a playmate or a companion.

If these or other factors interfere with a child making friends, the results can be very significant to that child's development. Not only will a friendless child be unhappy and have a decreased sense of self-worth, but he or she will also be at risk for emotional and behavioral problems in the future. Studies have found that social isolation is one of the most predictable risk factors for problems in adolescence, including substance abuse, depression, dropping out of high school, and anti-social behavior.

As you teach friendliness and friendship making skills this week, pay attention to those two or three children in your class who are having trouble making friends or being accepted by their classmates. See if you can give them some extra help in learning to make friends. Try and pair them up with children who have things in common with them, and who enjoy similar activities. Even though children won't be ready for true friendships until they are between seven and nine, younger children will benefit from learning and practicing friendship making skills.

# Classroom Discussion

## For Younger Children

1. Who is someone that you think is friendly?
2. What is your favorite thing to do with a friend?
3. Harry moved to a new neighborhood and started going to a new school. What is something that the other children could do to make him feel welcome?
4. What is something you can do to show someone that you like him or her?

## For Older Children

1. What are some of the things that you look for in a friend?
2. What are the qualities that make a person popular? Do you think that this changes as you grow older?
3. Why is it important to be friendly to new students in your school?
4. Why do you think that it is hard for some children to make friends, but easy for others?

## Write Your Own Questions Here

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## A Story About Being Friendly

Once upon a time there was a boy name Richard who had no friends. He watched out his window as other children rode their bicycles together or chased each other around. Richard was sad because he had no one to play with.

Richard's mother asked him, "Why don't you go to the playground and make some friends?" So Richard thought that he would give it a try.

He sat on the swings but no one would push him.

He sat on the see saw but no one was at the other end.

He bounced a ball, but there was no one to play catch with.

He saw the other children playing tag, and kick ball, and talking in small groups. But there was no one to play with Richard.

Then a small squirrel came over to Richard and stared at him. Richard looked so unhappy that it made the squirrel curious.

"Why don't you play with the other children?" the squirrel asked.

"Because they don't want me to play with me," Richard replied. (He was so sad and discouraged, that he didn't even think twice about how a squirrel could talk.)

"How do you know?" said the squirrel.

"Because no one asked me to play," Richard replied.

"Then why don't you ask them if you can play," the squirrel suggested. Richard had never really thought about this.

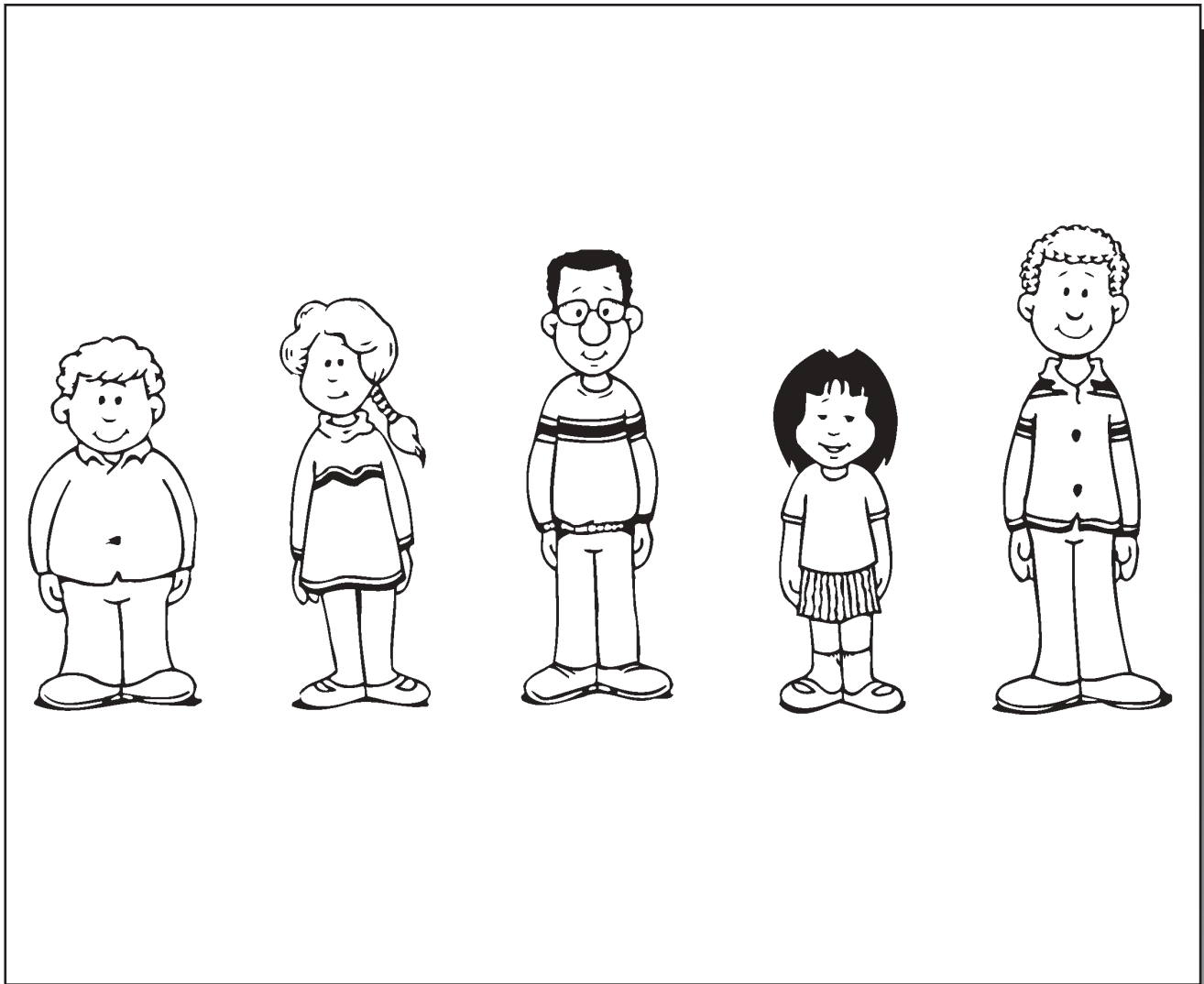
"But what if they say 'no,'" Richard said, looking worried and a little afraid.

“Well then you won’t be any lonelier than you are now,” said the squirrel, “but the better question is ‘What if they say ‘yes, come on and play.’”

*The moral:* **Sometimes it is hard to make friends, but you will never succeed unless you try.**

## You Were Friendly

Making friends is easiest when you find something you like to do with another person. Here is a picture of five children. Draw something in the box below that you would do with each one.



## Learn By Doing

### If You're Friendly You Should Show It

**SUMMARY:** Children sing a familiar song ("If You're Happy and You Know It") substituting in words about making friends.

**AGES:** 3-6.

**GROUP SIZE:** Unlimited.

**OBJECTIVE:** This adaptation of a familiar song reminds the children that they need to express friendliness through gestures and actions.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** None.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** Remind children of the song, "If You're Happy and You Know It," by singing a few verses.

**TIME:** 5-7 minutes.

#### WHAT TO DO:

1. Gather the children in a circle.
2. Teach the children this song (to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It"):

If you're friendly and you show it...(choose one of the following actions for each verse):

...say hello ...give a wave ...make a smile ... ...shake my hand

If you're friendly and you show it, \_\_\_\_\_ (repeat action)

If you're friendly and you show it, everybody's going to know it

If you're friendly and you show it, \_\_\_\_\_ (repeat action).

(Last verse:) If you're friendly and you show it, say "See you soon. Goodbye!"

## Friendly Introductions

**SUMMARY:** Children pass around a pillow (or ball or bean bag). When it is their turn, they must say a 'like' and a 'dislike.' When everyone has had a turn the group has to recall everyone's likes and dislikes.

**AGES:** 4+.

**GROUP SIZE:** 4 to 12 children.

**OBJECTIVE:** To teach children that to get people to talk about themselves is one of the easiest ways to make friends.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** A small pillow to use as a "Talking Pillow".

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** No preparation necessary.

**TIME:** 7-10 minutes.

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Gather the children in a circle.
2. Explain to the children that one of the easiest ways to make friends is to learn about what other people like and dislike.
3. Show children the "Talking Pillow." Explain that whoever holds the talking pillow is the one who speaks. Everyone else will listen.
4. Say, "When you get the pillow you must say something that you like and something that you don't like. Then pass it on to the person on your left and they will do the same thing."
5. Say, "Now I'm going to close my eyes, and throw the pillow. Whoever gets the pillow will go first, but everyone will have a chance to speak."
6. When everyone has had a turn say, "Now let's see if we can remember some of the things that people like and don't like." Pick several children and ask: "What does Cara like and what does she dislike?" Give the children a chance to respond. "What does David like and what does he dislike?"

**VARIATIONS:** You can continue this game at another time with other pairs of questions, such as:

- ◆ Where have you traveled to and where do you want to go next?
- ◆ What is your favorite sport and what sport don't you like?
- ◆ What is your favorite subject in school and what don't you like?

# Projects To Teach Children About Making and Keeping Friends

## Have Children Interview Their Parents About Their Best Friends

Assign children the task of asking one or both parents about who their best friend was when they were a child. You may want to write down several questions for children to ask such as:

- ◆ Why was that person your best friend?
- ◆ What did you like to do?
- ◆ Who were your other friends?
- ◆ Did you every have a time when someone didn't want to be your friend?

## Start a Friendship Club

Start a club at school to help children who are new at school or just to promote friendliness. Perhaps the club could put together a special "welcome package" for new students who come to the school or sponsor activities especially for children who might have trouble making friends.

## Start a Class Phone Chain

Have all of the students in your class write down their names and numbers on a slip of paper. Then draw the names one at a time and write them down on a list. The teacher calls the first person on the list, who then calls the second person on the list, and so on. You can use the phone chain to remind students of a class field trip or a homework assignment that is due. Or just use it for fun, passing a joke along the chain. You will need parental permission for this project, as well as written guidelines. Phone calls on the chain should be limited to 5 minutes.