

How You can help your Child with FASD Make and Keep Friends

It can be hard for children with FASD to get along with others their own age. Children with FASD tend to have the social skills of a child much younger than their peers. To cope with daily life, children with FASD need to use a lot of energy focusing on themselves. And sometimes this leads them to miss the subtle messages and habits of friendship. For example, they may not wait their turn. Or they may stand too close to others and get into their 'personal space'.

It can be very lonely and frustrating when other children don't want to play with them. This makes them in danger of being taken advantage of or bullied by others. For a parent it is hard seeing your child not 'fit in'. Here are some tips on how you can help your child become more aware of how friends act with each other. First, some 'real life' examples...

Example #1

A child with FASD is on the schoolyard all alone. The other children ignore him.

What is happening

This child doesn't know how to ask to be part of the other groups. He finds it hard to just join in. The other children don't make the effort to include him. He needs help knowing and practicing what to say to join a group.

Example #2

When your 10 year-old with FASD comes home from school he wants to play with the 6 year-old down the street and not with his 10 year-old neighbour. He feels more comfortable playing with someone younger. He likes the games played by the 6 year-old more.

What to do

Your child just may not be able to play well with children his own age. Avoid situations where his lower maturity level makes it hard for him, such as in competitive sports.

Example #3

Your 7 year-old son is at the pool and he's trying to join a group of teenage boys who are jumping off the diving board.

What to do

He doesn't understand that the teens don't want him. Help your child become sensitive to body language and facial expressions. Look at pictures of people in books and magazines together and ask them what they think the people are thinking or feeling. Explain how humans 'talk' in many ways not just by using words. Play act together and see if your child can figure out what emotions you are expressing.

FASD Tip # 2

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and use these sheets.

Some Tips for Friendship:

1. Find games and activities that help your child build social skills. Safe and supervised groups such as Scouts, Girl Guides, Air Cadets or swimming or skating lessons are great.
2. Don't expect that your child will have a large group of friends. One or two close friends who have known her for many years will not only be good friends but, care enough about her to help her stay safe.
3. Keep an eye on your child when he plays with others. This way you can explain why things may have gone wrong and, how he might want to act the next time to get along better with his friends. You could also protect a child from children who are too rough or cruel.
4. Children with FASD usually feel best in a place they know and in situations they can predict. Avoid large sleepovers and parties because they can be too confusing and overwhelming to a child with FASD. A sleepover with one friend in her own home would be best. A birthday party with 2 friends over for a short time would be more successful than a large party with many children and a lot of chaos for a long time!
5. Over and over again teach them the social skills of listening, taking turns, not talking when others are and taking an interest in other people by asking them questions. Your child will need help and lessons on all these subtle ways of friendship.
6. Talk to your child's teachers and ask them to make efforts to include your child in activities and groups. And, thank them for their efforts. Your child's teacher will be more likely to help if she sees you notice her extra care.
7. Sometimes children don't notice that they are different. Even though we know they are less mature than their peers, if they are happy the way they are then that's where they are at and that's great.
8. If you see that some children are being cruel to your child, you may need to step in and stop them. Try to do this gently, so that your child is not embarrassed. Then, when there's a chance, talk to the children about how great it is that we're all different, how boring it would be if we were all the same. Ask the other children how they might feel if they were left out or teased.
9. From a very young age, children learn a lot from their friends. All parents need to keep an eye on the friend their children make. Like other parents, you may need to forbid your child from being with certain kids and be happy they are with others.
10. Supervise, supervise and supervise. Keeping a close eye on your child and their play mates so you can step in and help them sort things out at the first sign of overexcitement, stress, exhaustion, misunderstanding or trouble.