

Inclusive Developmental and Therapy Center

Making Friends & Social Confidence (Older Children)

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✓ Can I help my child at home?

Yes. To help an older child or teen build genuine, two-way friendships and feel more confident being themselves around other people. This free program breaks it into simple weekly steps built from proven therapy techniques — things any parent can do at home, in everyday moments, at no cost. It doesn't replace a professional assessment where one is needed, but for many children it makes a real difference, and it never does harm.

Go at your own pace — a new, gentle focus each week.

Download the whole program as a printable PDF.

Includes the signs that mean it's worth seeking extra help.

Friendships change a lot as children get older. What used to be simply playing side by side becomes group chats, inside jokes, shifting friendship groups and the quiet worry of not quite fitting in. If your child often comes home saying nobody talked to them, sits alone at break, or has friendships that feel one-sided, it can be heartbreaking to watch — and just as painful for them to live through. This programme is written for that older child, not a toddler.

Everything here is gentle, practical and built to be coached at home over about six weeks. It works alongside — and never replaces — a proper assessment from a speech and language therapist, psychologist or your GP. If you are worried, please still book an assessment; think of this as something warm and useful to do together while you wait, or as steady practice between sessions.

♥ Who this program is for

- ✓ Older children or teens who find it hard to start or keep a conversation going, especially in groups.
- ✓ Children who want friends but struggle to join in — hanging on the edge of a group rather than stepping into it.
- ✓ Those who are being left out, ignored or teased, and coming home hurt or withdrawn.
- ✓ Children stuck in one-sided friendships, where they always do the reaching out or feel used rather than valued.
- ✓ Anyone who feels anxious in social situations or online — group chats, messaging and knowing what to say can feel overwhelming.

⚡ Important — when to get professional help

This is a supportive home program, not a diagnosis or a substitute for an assessment. Please speak to a professional promptly if:

Bullying that is causing real, ongoing distress — this needs the school and, if serious, other professionals involved, not just home practice.

Your child is withdrawing completely — avoiding all friends, refusing school, or shutting themselves away for days.

Any talk of self-harm, not wanting to be here, or that life is not worth living — please seek help urgently from your GP, local crisis line or emergency services. Do not wait.

A sudden loss of social ability or confidence your child clearly had before, which can signal something worth a professional's attention.

Signs of depression or severe anxiety — low mood most days, no interest in things they loved, sleep or appetite changes, or panic in everyday situations.

📍 Getting help where you live

Everything here is free to use **anywhere in the world**. If you'd like a professional to take a closer look, the best next step is someone local to you:

Work with us online, from anywhere. We offer **online sessions and parent coaching** worldwide — book an online consultation and we'll guide you and your child directly.

Talk to your child's **doctor, pediatrician, GP or health visitor** — share what you noticed.

Ask about **free early-childhood or early-intervention services** in your area — many countries offer them for young children (e.g. Early Intervention in the US, NHS referrals in the UK).

Search “**child speech & language therapist near me**”, or ask your doctor for a referral.

Near Multan, Pakistan? You're also warmly welcome in person at our centre — **contact us here**.

☆ **Your step-by-step roadmap**

Move at your child's pace, not the calendar's — the “weeks” are a gentle order, not a race. Repeat any stage as long as it helps.

Week 1 – Starting & keeping a conversation

Getting past “hi” — opening a chat and keeping it flowing without it fizzling out.

Practise a few easy openers together at home, like commenting on something shared (“That test was brutal, how did you find it?”) rather than only asking yes/no questions.

Teach the “ask, then add” habit: ask the other person something, then share a little about yourself so it feels like a real exchange, not an interview.

Role-play short chats over dinner where you deliberately let a topic run out, then coach your child on how to gently change the subject or ask a follow-up.

⚡ **Try** The “tell me more” trick: three little words that keep almost any **this:** conversation going and make the other person feel genuinely listened to.

Week 2 – Joining a group or activity

Stepping into a group that has already started, without feeling like an intruder.

Talk through the “watch, then blend in” approach: hang nearby for a moment, work out what the group is doing or talking about, then join with a small relevant comment.

Pick one low-pressure entry point together — sitting with a friendlier group at lunch, or joining a club where there’s a shared activity to focus on.

Practise a couple of natural join-in lines at home, such as “Can I join you?” or “Mind if I sit here?”, so they feel automatic rather than terrifying in the moment.

⚡ **Try** Join around a shared task — a game, a project, a club — so there’s always **this:** something to do and talk about, which takes the spotlight off just walking up cold.

Week 3 – Being a good friend

The quieter skills that make people want to be around you: listening, showing interest, and giving as well as taking.

Practise really listening — putting the phone down, facing the person, and remembering one thing they said to bring up next time you see them.

Coach genuine curiosity: asking friends about their interests, their day, their worries, rather than only steering talk back to your child's own topics.

Encourage small acts of friendship each week — a supportive message, remembering a birthday, or standing up for someone — and notice together how it strengthens a bond.

 **Try** Remember one small detail a friend mentions and ask about it later (“How **this:** did your football trial go?”) — it quietly tells people they matter to you.

Week 4 – Handling conflict, teasing & being left out

Staying steady when things go wrong — disagreements, teasing, or being excluded.

Build a few calm comebacks for teasing together — a shrug and “Whatever” or agreeing lightly often deflates it far better than getting upset or firing back.

Practise repairing small fallings-out: naming the problem calmly, hearing the other side, and knowing that a genuine “Sorry” can rescue a friendship.

Talk honestly about what to do when left out — trying another group, telling a trusted adult, and remembering that one bad day or group does not define them.

 **Try** The “grey rock” move for teasing: stay boring and unbothered. People **this:** teasing for a reaction usually stop when they don't get one.

Week 5 – Friendships online & group chats

Navigating messaging, group chats and social media kindly and confidently.

Talk through group-chat basics together: it's fine not to reply to everything, tone is easy to misread, and a friendly emoji or short reply keeps you part of things.

Agree what to do with unkind messages or being left off a chat — screenshot, don't retaliate, and tell you or another trusted adult rather than stewing alone.

Practise reading messages twice before sending, and remind your child that anything posted can be shared, so kindness and caution online protect their friendships.

 **Try** When a message stings, wait ten minutes before replying. A short pause **this:** turns a hurt, snappy reply into a calmer one you won't regret.

Week 6 – Growing confidence & finding “your people”

Building lasting confidence by connecting with others who share your child's genuine interests.

Help your child find one interest-based club, team or group — gaming, art, coding, sport, drama, Scouts — where friendships form naturally around a shared passion.

Notice and name their strengths together, so they walk in believing they have something worth offering rather than something to hide.

Set one small, brave social goal a week — saying hi to someone new, inviting a friend over — and celebrate the effort, whatever the outcome.

 **Try** Friendship is far easier alongside “your people”. One club full of kids who **this:** love what your child loves beats trying to win over a crowd who don't.

Tricks that make it work

- ✓ Aim for one or two good friends, not popularity — depth matters far more than numbers, especially at this age.
- ✓ Don't force eye contact if it's uncomfortable; looking near someone's face or glancing away to think is completely normal and still polite.
- ✓ Keep the door open at home. Older children share more when there's no big "chat" — car journeys and side-by-side moments work best.
- ✓ Practise in low-stakes places first: a relative, a friendlier cousin, or an online group before the pressure of the school corridor.
- ✓ Notice effort, not just results — "You said hi even though it felt hard, that took guts" builds more courage than only praising success.

How you'll know it's working

- Your child starts or joins a conversation without being prompted, even a short one.
- They mention a friend by name, arrange to meet up, or seem more settled about who they sit with.
- They handle a knockback — being left out or teased — and bounce back faster than they used to.
- They seem a little more at ease socially: less dread before school or events, and more willing to try.



Is this based on real methods? This programme draws on widely used social skills training (SST) principles — breaking friendship into small, teachable steps, modelling, role-play and real-life practice. Structured, evidence-based programmes such as

PEERS®, developed for adolescents, use a similar approach of coaching concrete social skills with parent involvement. This is a gentle home version of those ideas and is not a clinical treatment; for a diagnosis or tailored support, please see a qualified speech and language therapist, psychologist or your GP.

 **Educational information, not a diagnosis.** Our guidance follows standard, research-based practice (CDC, NHS, ASHA and WHO), is written by our therapy team and **medically reviewed by a GMC-registered doctor**. Every child is different, so we can't promise specific results — always use your own judgement and speak to a qualified professional about your child. **Read our full disclaimer.**