

Inclusive Developmental and Therapy Center

Making Friends: Social Skills at Home

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Watching your child stand at the edge of the group, or struggle to join in, can tug at your heart. Making friends comes easily to some children and takes far more practice for others — and that is okay. Social skills are learned, one small playful step at a time, and home is the safest place to begin.

This program gives you gentle, play-based ways to help your child connect. You are your child's first playmate and best teacher. It supports their social growth but does not replace an assessment if you have concerns about how your child relates to others.

♥ Who this program is for

- ✓ Children who find it hard to join in or play with others
- ✓ Little ones who struggle to share or take turns
- ✓ Children who play alongside others but not yet with them
- ✓ Families who want simple, playful ways to build connection
- ✓ Parents keen to help a shy or unsure child feel more confident

⚡ 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:

Little or no interest in other people, together with a loss of skills your child once had

Extreme distress or panic simply from being around other children

No eye contact, pointing or shared attention by the ages you would expect it

Your child seems unable to connect even one to one with familiar, loving adults

Social difficulties that are clearly getting worse rather than slowly improving

☆ 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 – Play together first

Build connection through one-to-one play.

Set aside short bursts of child-led play where you simply follow their lead. Get face to face and copy what your child does to spark shared attention. Keep it fun and pressure-free — connection matters more than any “right” way to play.

⚡ **Try this:** Join your child's play before you expect them to join anyone else's.

Week 2 – Taking turns

Practise the back-and-forth of friendship.

Play simple turn-taking games like rolling a ball back and forth. Use clear words: “My turn... your turn,” so the rhythm is easy to feel. Start with two turns each and slowly build up as it gets easier.

⚡ **Try this:** Turn-taking is the heartbeat of friendship. A rolling ball teaches it beautifully.

Week 3 – Show how it looks

Model friendly social moves.

Gently model waving, saying hello and asking “Can I play?” in everyday moments.

Use toys or puppets to act out sharing and being kind.

Point out friendly behaviour in others: “Look, she shared her toy.”

⚡ **Try this:** Children copy what they see. Be the friendly behaviour you hope to grow.

Week 4 – Practise sharing

Make sharing feel safe and positive.

Practise short sharing games where toys come straight back, so it feels safe.

Warmly praise every attempt to share, however small.

Keep a few special toys aside, as expecting a child to share everything is unfair.

⚡ **Try this:** Sharing feels safer when your child learns the toy always comes back.

Week 5 – Out into the world

Generalise skills with other children.

Arrange one short, calm playdate with a single friend rather than a big group.

Stay nearby to gently guide turn-taking and help if things wobble.

Keep it short and end on a happy note, so play stays a lovely thing.

 **Try this:** Practise at home, then take it out gently. One friend beats a crowd every time.

Tricks that make it work

- ✓ Start with one calm playmate, not a busy, noisy group.
- ✓ Praise the trying, not only the success.
- ✓ Never force sharing or affection; guide it gently instead.
- ✓ Keep first playdates short and finish while it is still going well.
- ✓ Use puppets, stories and pretend play to rehearse social moments.
- ✓ Be your child's teammate — stay close and step in kindly when needed.

How you'll know it's working

- Your child takes more turns in a game before losing interest.
- They share a little more willingly than before.
- They start to watch, copy or join other children rather than stay apart.
- Playing with others feels a bit easier and happier for your child.



Is this based on real methods? This program uses widely recommended play-based social learning: modelling friendly behaviour, turn-taking games, and practising skills at home before helping a child generalise them to other children and settings.