



## How to help children make new friends

Students learn lessons each day. While many of these lessons pertain to their coursework, kids pick up much more than book smarts from school, where kids first learn to cultivate friendships and build lasting relationships.

In addition to a new curriculum, new teachers and new schedules, kids also might make new friends once a school year begins. While some familiar faces carry through from grade to grade, chances are youngsters will meet new students who will soon become good friends. While many kids find it easy to make new friends, others might need some assistance so they can make the most of opportunities to socialize and form friendships that might last a lifetime.

\* Offer opportunities for socialization. Children should be given the opportunity to explore friendships outside of the classroom where peer pressure might not be so prevalent. Establish a carpool or invite a classmate over for a play date. Unstructured time to play or get to know each other is a great way to

establish friendships. Invite new children over each time to see which friendships are the strongest, but make sure you are not pushing a friendship on your child.

\* Discover common interests. One of the quickest ways to build friendships is through common interests, says Kirk Martin, a behavioral therapist and author. Encourage your child to join a club or sports group where he or she can meet other kids with similar interests. Sometimes finding reasons to talk other children is the most difficult step to making new friends. Sharing a common interest removes this barrier.

\* Teach proper manners. Children who are polite, well-mannered and know how to follow direction are better equipped to attract friends. Children who misbehave may be shunned by other kids and their parents who do not want the hassle of an unruly youngster coming over to play. Respectful children who are honest, trustworthy and capable of sustaining eye contact and making small talk may find it easy to make friends.

\* Take the friendship lead. As parents, you can improve your child's chances of making friends by getting friendly with their classmates' parents. You do not have to become bosom buddies with everyone, but making connections with fellow parents can reinforce the value of friendship to your children. Socializing as families also presents other opportunities to get together and solidify relationships.

\* Boost confidence levels. As a parent you can talk to your children about their strengths and positive attributes. Emphasizing kids' best traits will increase their self-esteem, and that sense of self-worth can make it easier for them to make friends. A child who is shy and insecure may retreat when meeting new people, but a child who can proudly stand behind his or her accomplishments may attract friends easily.

School is about more than just hitting the books. It's also a prime opportunity for kids to develop their personal skills and make new friends.

## Tips for quick weeknight meals

Enjoying a meal together on a weeknight is a goal for many families. But adults often find themselves pressed for time on weeknights, and that time crunch can make it difficult to enjoy a homecooked meal.

But time is not the only thing getting in the way of family meals. Be it after school activities, long commutes or late hours at the office, many things can make it difficult for a family to sit down and enjoy a meal together. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse notes that family dinners are one of the most effective ways for parents to engage in the lives of their children. Studies have also shown that families who eat together tend to eat healthier, as parents can more effectively monitor their kids' diets, including whether or not their youngsters are getting enough fruits and vegetables, when they are dining together.

While it may not be feasible for parents and kids to scale back their busy schedules, there are steps parents can take to make weeknight meal preparation quicker. By shortening the time it takes to make meals on weeknights, families might be able to sit down to dinner together more often.

\* Plan ahead. The most effective way to make more time for family meals is to plan ahead. Planning meals on the fly encourages everyone to fend for themselves, making it difficult for families to enjoy nutritious meals they can eat together. Plan for the coming week's meals on the weekend, when you can survey your pantry and make a trip to the grocery store if need be. Planning ahead also allows you to prepare certain parts of a meal in advance, which will save you time on busy weeknights.

\* Make cold meals. Dinner does not have to be served hot, and cold meals often take less time to prepare. Consider serving salad or sandwiches on those nights when you are especially pressed for time. When serving sandwiches, serve them on whole grain bread to add some nutritional value to the meal.

\* Turn breakfast into dinner. There are no laws regarding what qualifies as dinner and what does not, so families without much time on their hands on a weeknight can turn breakfast into dinner. Eggs are both quick and easy to prepare, and they can be served alongside toast and grapefruit. When making omelets for dinner, add some spinach or



**Cold dinners, including salads, are an option for time-strapped families who still want to enjoy meals together on weeknights.**

another vegetable to make the meal more nutritious.

\* Lean on seafood more often. Seafood can be healthy and delicious, but that's not the only reason it's an ally to time-strapped families. Seafood should not take much time to cook, as even those dishes that take more time than simpler dishes like sauteed shrimp will still take less than 30 minutes to complete. That's significantly less time than meals in which beef, pork or poultry is the main entree.

\* Leftovers aren't just for lunch. Leftovers are often relegated to lunch, but extras from a meal cooked over the weekend can be used as a quick go-to meal on a hectic weeknight. If the family enjoyed the meal the first time around, there's no reason they won't enjoy it again. When eating leftovers for dinner, make sure the leftovers are fresh, but try to avoid serving leftovers the night after they were initially cooked.

Enjoy meals as a family is a great way for families to eat healthy and stay engaged in one another's lives. And even families with hectic schedules can employ a few tricks to make dining together more convenient.

## How parents can get involved at school

Research indicates that children whose parents get involved with their education are more likely to earn better grades and less likely to have behavior problems in the classroom.

The concept of parents working in conjunction with schools is nothing new. A 1987 study by Paul G. Fehrmann and colleagues documented the importance of parental involvement on their child's grades. Published in the Journal of Education Research, the study found that when parents stayed directly involved in their child's studies throughout high school, the child's grades improved.

There are many different reasons for parents to get involved with their child's school and the community. Helping their children succeed is just one of them. The choice is just how to go about connecting with the school. Here are a few ideas.

**Work with the teacher**

Teachers are increasingly facing obstacles with regards to time and funding. Many must preside over large classes and are responsible for outfitting their classrooms with certain supplies. This presents ideal opportunities for parents to step up and pitch in.

Volunteering in your child's classroom is a good way for you to help his or her teacher and get a

firsthand account of what your child is doing in class. You may be asked to prepare and package homework assignments or put together materials for craft projects. Some teachers welcome parents who come in to read books to the class or even give spelling tests. Think about chaperoning a field trip or helping with the set-up and clean-up of class parties. If you keep an open dialogue with the teacher through phone calls or e-mail, you may be presented with plenty of opportunities to get involved.

**Attend meetings**

Parent-teacher associations or organizations are often instrumental in helping a school to run smoothly. They are the people behind fundraisers and special activities outside of the classroom. The PTA is also privy to information on upcoming events before the rest of the school community.

Attending monthly meetings can keep you up to speed on the goings-on at your child's school. It will also ensure your voice is heard with regards to school policy. Showing your face at meetings will also give you the opportunity to meet other parents.

**Attend special events**

Not every parent can serve on the PTA or be present in the daily activities

of the classroom. However, you can show your support by attending special events hosted by the school – such as fundraisers or field-day activities.

Volunteer your time with the setup of teacher-appreciation lunches and bake sales, serve as a tour guide for the school when new parents are invited, build sets or make costumes for a school play, or take pictures of events and create a collage to be put on display in the school.

**Volunteer your skills**

Some schools can benefit from the specialized skills of parents. Ask if you can come in and talk about your job or hobby and demonstrate it to the class. Individuals who have technology skills can volunteer to install computer software or to run networking throughout the school. If you have a background in print layout, find out if you can help design and publish the school newsletter or yearbooks.

Anytime a parent volunteers his or her time, that means less funding has to go to hiring an outside vendor for the job, saving the school money it sorely needs.

Being involved in your child's school sets a positive example for your kids and provides their school with some much-needed assistance.

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