



*No one, and especially not a child, is meant to connect with other people entirely from a distance, through glass doors, or via technology. But that is what we must do until the pandemic is over. Here are some tangible ideas based on the science of friendship to help your child nurture relationships right now. All of them are also applicable to adults!*

- **Find friendship where you can.** Some social time is better than none. Students who are learning remotely might need to socialize more with siblings and relatives or kids next door than with classmates. (And adults who are working remotely should build some socializing into each day—plan to eat lunch at the same time as roommates or family members sharing your space, schedule calls with distant friends and don’t cancel.)
- **Focus on existing friendships.** In a new school? Look for someone you already know who’s in a similar situation and compare notes (e.g., a 14-year-old at a new high school should stay in touch with friends from 8<sup>th</sup> grade who are also in new schools).
- **To get to know new people, set up shared virtual activities or one-on-one conversations.** New friendships often begin with shared interests or activities and with getting-to-know-you conversations. Those things are still possible virtually. Accept that they may feel awkward and try them anyway. Parents of new students might ask schools to help them find other children who share their child’s interests and then reach out to those children’s parents to organize.
- **One is enough.** Quality not quantity is what matters most in friendship, especially in a time like this. Focus on staying in touch with a handful of people or deepening just one or two friendships. Many people have noticed that our social circles are getting smaller. That’s okay.
- **Embrace technology.** It is what we have. Parents should loosen restrictions on online socializing if you haven’t already and take comfort in the fact that rigorous new research shows that concerns over the effects of digital technology on adolescent well-being have been overstated. Videogames are a highly social form of activity for most kids and should be treated as such (within reason). What matters is not so much time online as content and context. What are kids doing and with whom? (As for adults, use the technology that feels most comfortable to you. Hate Zoom? Set up a group text for sharing jokes and checking in. And see below.)
- **Pick up the phone.** The volume of phone calls has risen dramatically for a reason. A nice long chat over the phone—something we had been getting away from—can be far more satisfying than a Zoom call. Children might need to be encouraged as it’s not what they are used to.

- **Go outside.** There is very little we can do inside that we cannot do outside. Be creative. Be consistent. Bundle up when it gets cold, make sure you have umbrellas handy if it's raining, but go outside anyway. Organize outdoor events for children of all ages.
- **Make family time social time.** Our energy level for creative family activities was high early on in this crisis and many of us have run out of steam. Don't give up, especially when it's cold out. Family dinners, game nights, movie nights, and so on were always a good idea. They are even more so now.
- **Create a pod.** Friendship right now is like navigating consent in a romantic relationship. Find a handful of friends (your children's and your own) whose level of risk tolerance matches yours and make plans to get together in whatever way works for you. Be honest and respectful of other people's choices and feelings.
- **Be reliable, positive and helpful.** The science of friendship shows that good, healthy relationships share three important characteristics: they are long-lasting, positive and cooperative. That translates into being a steady presence in someone's life, being appreciative of them and making them feel good, and looking to be helpful and reciprocate when someone helps you. All of this is still possible, even from afar, and for people of all ages. However, you connect, remember to be a good friend.
- **Remember what you're missing.** One silver lining of the pandemic is that it has reminded us just how critical friendship is. When this is all over, we should prioritize friends and now is a great time for parents to talk to their children about what friendship is and why it matters.