

Helping your child make friends

Every parent wants their child to enjoy close, lasting and genuine friendships. Friendships can enhance our children's confidence and social skills.

Many children start to show an interest in other children as early as 8 months. All pre-school children are at the beginning of learning how to get on with others and form friendships. At this age children are happiest in consistent and sustained relationships with other children. Playing with friends is an important way for children to learn social rules such as sharing, resolving conflicts and taking turns. It's also fun!

The easiest way to help your child develop friendships is to schedule play-dates with other mums who have children the same age as yours or with a child that your child has shown an interest in. Watch your child in toddler groups to see which children they gravitate towards on a regular basis. Play-dates are a great opportunity for the parents to get to know each other as well as allowing the children to develop a friendship.

When organising play dates here are a few things to consider;

- **Small is good.** Don't invite too many people or the children could feel overwhelmed. Keep it to just one or two, that way the children will have more chance of developing a friendship.
- **Fun and games.** Orient the play date around games and activities your child enjoys. Encourage co-operative play so the children can interact, even if they are too young to talk. Sandpits, train sets and Lego are all great for co-operative play. Keep arguments to a minimum by ensuring there are plenty of each toy. If you are meeting in your home and your child has a particular toy they don't want to share, or that is of value – put it away.
- **Short and sweet.** Make sure that you arrange a play date that suits the children and doesn't interrupt their sleep routine. Keep it short and if the children are getting on well extend the time, half an hour to an hour works well. Be prepared to cut the time if things aren't going as well as you had hoped.
 - **Get involved if you need to.** If your child remains uninterested in the other child then consider getting involved in the play yourself, not just sitting back chatting. Be careful not to force the relationship

though. Young children will happily play alongside one another (parallel play) until they get to know each other better.

- **Forget toys altogether.** Sometimes children have the best time when there are no toys around. Perhaps you could go for an ice cream or out for a nature walk, toddlers love to collect things – anything! This way they won't fight over toys, but they can get excited together about the shared experience. Play some funny songs or children's music and watch them jump up and down. If you've got a shred of musical talent, tinkle the ivories or strum the guitar as they sing a song. Perhaps you could make 'shakers' for them to play along with the music.

Remember!

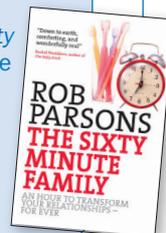
- Talk to the other parent about what you will do if any problems arise between your children. That way there will be no awkwardness between the two of you. This will allow for further play-dates even if one has to end abruptly.
- Try not to intervene too quickly, even young children are capable of sorting out problems. But if things get aggressive, intervene! Explain to the child that the negative behaviour is not acceptable, separate the children if necessary or introduce a new activity. Be clear and consistent.

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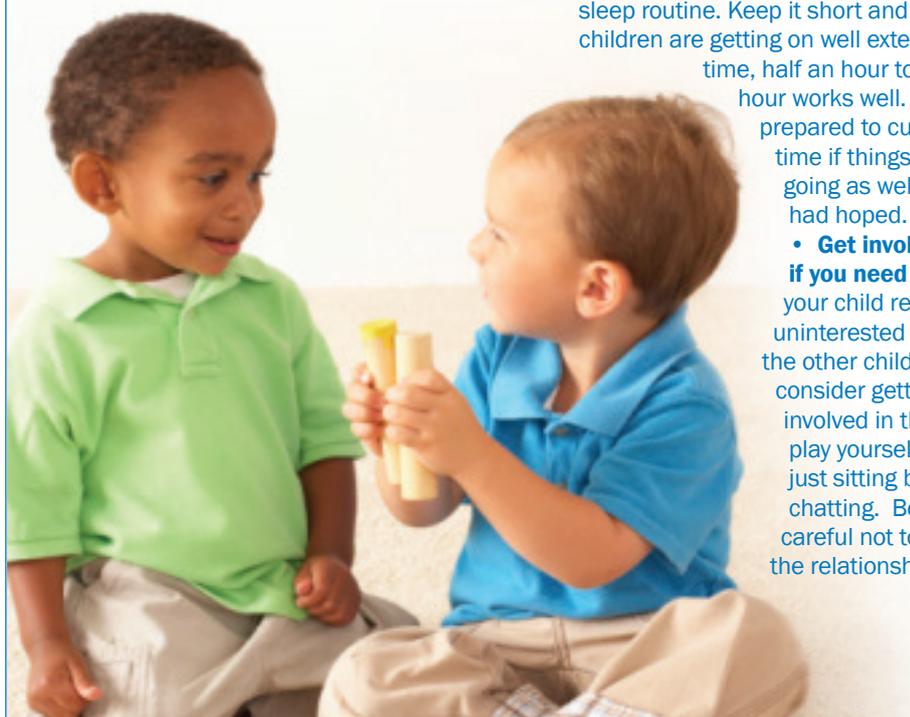
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