

FRIENDSHIPS

What is this developmental skill?

Friendships involve developing trusting, reciprocal relationships with peers based on shared interests, cooperation, kindness, and mutual enjoyment. Friendships provide opportunities to practice social skills while offering emotional support and a sense of belonging.

How does this normally develop?

Young children begin with simple parallel play before learning to share, cooperate, and maintain reciprocal friendships. Through repeated play experiences, children learn trust, loyalty, compromise, forgiveness, and emotional connection with peers.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children who have experienced neglect may struggle to trust others or may desperately seek connection without understanding healthy relationship patterns. Limited early experiences with secure relationships can make forming and maintaining friendships challenging.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Have few or no close friends.
- Become overly clingy with peers.
- Withdraw from social opportunities.
- Frequently lose friendships after conflicts.
- Become controlling during play.
- Attach quickly to unfamiliar people.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers can support friendships by arranging positive peer experiences, modeling healthy relationships, and helping children process social successes and disappointments without shame.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of focusing only on whether the child has friends, consider whether they have learned how safe, trusting relationships are built. Friendships develop from relationship skills that often need intentional support after neglect.