

## HOW TO HELP CHILDREN WITH FRIENDSHIPS AND CONFLICTS

- TALK with your child about friendships and conflicts. LISTEN for how your child truly feels and help him or her to name those feelings. Annoyed? Hurt? Left out? Scared? Intimidated? REMEMBER that you are hearing one perspective, one side of the story.
- NORMALIZE, NORMALIZE, NORMALIZE! Conflicts and changes in friendships are normal. Help your child understand that friendships sometimes end naturally. Explain that conflicts do not mean a friendship is over. Don't let your child or yourself mistakenly interpret every conflict as bullying, or every experience with rejection as relational aggression.
- TELL your child about your own experiences with friendships and conflicts and how you dealt with them. DO NOT OWN your child's conflicts or react more intensely to events than s/he is. "Check your baggage."\**Rosalind Wiseman*
- MODEL appropriate ways to express feelings, be assertive, and resolve conflicts. ENCOURAGE AND ROLE-PLAY with your child how to talk directly to a friend about a problem.
- EXPLAIN to your child the difference between teasing, bullying, and conflict. TEACH strategies for handling teasing and bullying. DETHRONE teasing and bullying behavior by explaining to your child that the reasons for both lie within the child who is teasing or bullying. HELP your child decrease behaviors and break habits that make him or her an easy target for bullying.
- UNDER-REACT to occasional negative self-talk and overgeneralizations (for example, "No one likes me"; "I have no friends"; "Everyone is mean to me."). SEEK COUNSELING for your child if these comments are pervasive.
- DISTINGUISH for your child the difference between being "nice" and being a doormat. Make sure s/he does not feel compelled to stay in friendships that are routinely hurtful and one-sided, just to "be nice." TALK about forgiveness, too.
- BE AWARE of TV shows, movies, and web sites that reinforce gender-stereotyped messages about friendships and help your child to think critically about these messages. MONITOR phone calls, e-mails, sleepovers, and social media.
- EXPLAIN to your child why it is better to stay out of others' conflicts unless s/he is standing up for someone who is being mistreated or bullied.
- NEVER confront the child who is bullying, and be wary of confronting that child's parent. If bullying is happening at school, allow the school to intervene.
- PROVIDE many opportunities for your child to be involved with kids from different groups so s/he has a wide base for friendships. REALIZE that forbidding your child to be friends with someone will often backfire.
- NOTIFY the school if your child is being bullied at school. Key questions: Is your child scared? Is the behavior toward your child repetitive and cruel?
- RESPECT your child's right to make his or her own mistakes. Children cannot be protected from hurt feelings or conflicts. RESIST the impulse to solve every problem for them.