



“The Friendship Guide: Practical Wisdom for Parents and Kids”



New year, new friend groups— big feelings.

*If your child’s peer drama feels
louder right now, you’re not
alone. In this packet, I’ll share
age-wise guidance parents can
use to support healthy
friendships—what to watch for,
how to respond, and simple lines
to try at home.*

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Raising Good Friends: An Age-by-Age Parent Guide

A psychoeducational toolkit for parents to support children's friendships—from early childhood through the teen years. Includes quick “wisdom” lines, brief scripts, and practical at-home coaching steps.

How to Use This Packet

- **Read the Core Foundations** first for a shared language (kindness, boundaries, repair, and digital health).
- **Jump to your child's age band** for specific guidance. Each section includes:
 - *Psychoeducation*: What's typical at this age and why conflict spikes.
 - *Wisdom bites*: Short truths kids can remember.
 - *Say this*: Simple, non-clinical language for everyday moments.
 - *Coach at home*: Small practices to build skill.
 - *Green/Red flags*: What to look for; when to get extra support.
 - *Try this week*: Two tiny, doable actions.
- Use the **one-page cheatsheets** at the end for quick reference.

Note: This packet is educational and not a substitute for therapy or crisis care. If there's risk of harm, contact emergency services or your local crisis resources (U.S. 988).

Core Foundations (All Ages)

1) Belonging & Safety

a. **Kids choose safe over impressive.** Feeling safe (seen, respected, predictable) matters more than status.

2) Boundaries & Consent

b. **“My body, my time, my stuff.”** Teaching yes/no/maybe early protects friendships later. Boundaries are kind because they make relationships predictable.

3) Repair & Accountability

c. Conflicts are **normal and survivable**. Teach brief repair: **Notice → Own → Offer**.

- *“I interrupted. I’m sorry. Want to try again?”*

4) Skill-building, Not Personality

Friendship skills are **learnable behaviors** (joining, turn-taking, listening, checking in, taking space). Practice in low-stakes moments first.

5) Digital Health (as developmentally appropriate)

- Online behavior counts. Curate inputs, set quiet hours, and teach *ask before posting*.
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Early Childhood (ages 4–7)

What's Typical & Why Conflict Spikes

- Play is concrete and **right-now**; kids are still learning to share space, toys, and attention.
- Big body energy + limited impulse control = bumps. That's development, not "bad behavior."

Friendship Wisdom (for kids)

1. Kind beats loud.

Most kids feel safer and stay longer with friends who are gentle and predictable—not just the biggest voice in the room.

2. One friend is enough.

A steady buddy gives lots of practice with sharing, turn-taking, and repair—more than a big crowd does.

3. "No, thank you" is friendly.

Early consent helps kids protect their own space and hear others' boundaries, which keeps play from turning into power struggles.

4. We can repair and restart.

Short apologies and do-overs teach accountability and let friendships survive normal bumps without shame.

Say This (simple lines)

- *Join play:* "Can I play when you're done with that?"
- *Turn-taking:* "Your turn, my turn." (Use a timer.)
- *Boundary:* "No, thank you—maybe later."
- *Repair:* "I'm sorry. Let's try again."

Coach at Home (micro-practice)

- **Role-play joining:** Wait → Watch → Ask. Use stuffed animals.
- **Two-timer game:** 2 minutes each with a toy; narrate the swap.

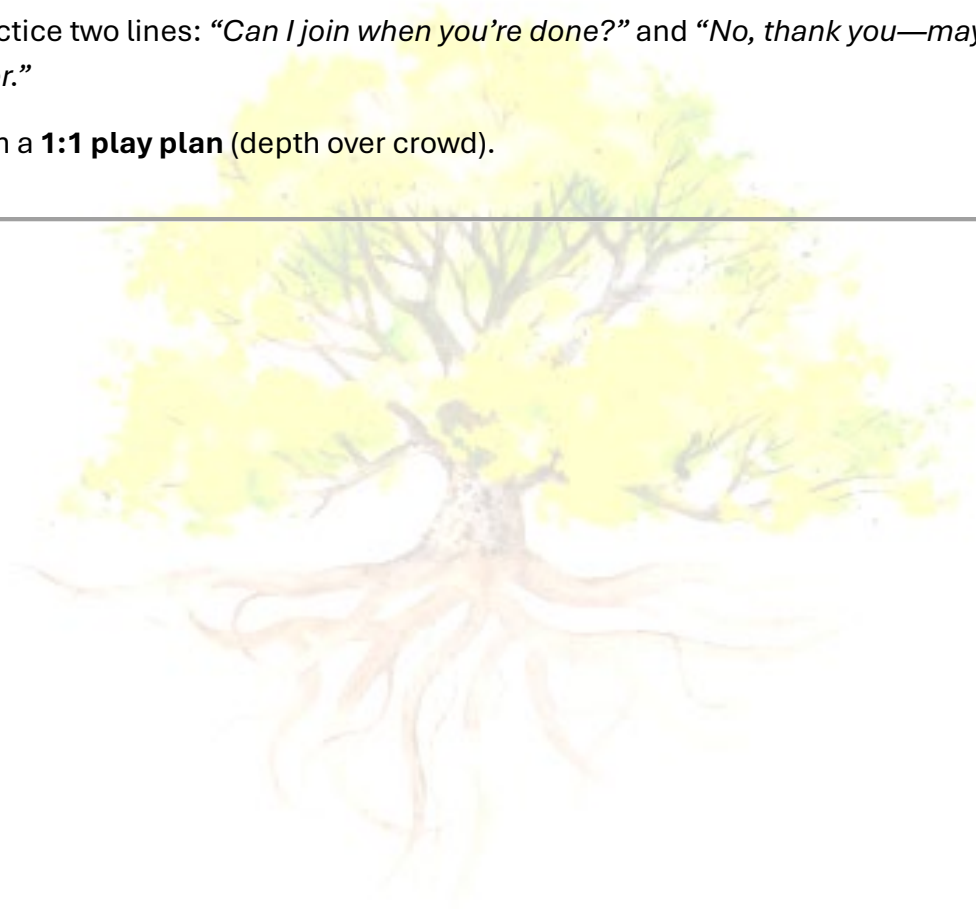
- **Feelings + safety:** “All feelings okay; hands and words stay safe.”

Green / Red Flags to Both Watch for and to Teach

- **Green:** Takes turns, uses kind words, accepts small no’s, recovers after repair.
- **Red (monitor):** Frequent hitting/shoving, refuses any repair, harsh name-calling. If persistent across settings, consider extra support.

Try This Week

- Practice two lines: *“Can I join when you’re done?”* and *“No, thank you—maybe later.”*
- Plan a **1:1 play plan** (depth over crowd).



Middle Childhood (ages 8–12)

What's Typical & Why Conflict Spikes

- Kids notice **status** and fairness; groups form and shift. Lunch/recess and early digital chats amplify dynamics.
- Perspective-taking grows, but emotion regulation is still a work-in-progress.

Friendship Wisdom

1. Popular ≠ headcount

Real popularity isn't how many kids know or follow you; it's how safe, respected, and included people feel when they're with you

2. Choose people who choose you.

*Friendship is two-way; rebalance when it's one-sided.
Chronic 90/10 drains energy; healthy friendships have give-and-take.
Rebalancing can mean asking for change or stepping back.*

3. No harmful secrets; privacy is different.

Teach that any "secret" that could hurt someone, break rules, or feels unsafe should be told to a trusted adult, while privacy means respectful boundaries about personal info shared with consent.

4. Space protects friendship.

Short, planned breaks let kids cool down and reset, preventing blowups and making it easier to re-engage kindly.

5. Repair keeps friends; silence grows drama.

Quick, sincere repair (own it, apologize, offer a fix) stops resentment and rumors from building, while avoiding the issue usually makes tension spread.

Say This (lightweight scripts)

Note: As kids grow, sometimes these are even internal scripts for them to be able to assess the situation.

- *Green flag check:* "I feel like myself with them."
- *Boundary:* "I like you, and I need space right now." Or "That sounds great, but I'm unavailable for the next few weeks. I will call you when I'm free!"

- *Secrets vs. privacy*: “We keep surprises, not secrets that hurt.”
- *Repair*: “I felt ___ when ___. Next time, can we ___?”
- *Digital*: “Ask before you post me.”

Coach at Home

- **Green/Red grid**: List 2 green-flag friends; one red-flag pattern to watch.
- **Cool-off plan**: Agree on words for a pause (e.g., “I’ll text later”).
- **Phone/chat basics**: Ask before posting; no ganging up on one person; 20-minute cool-off rule.

Green / Red Flags

- **Green**: Fairness, keeping promises, balanced talking, includes others.
- **Red (monitor)**: Put-downs, “tests,” hot-cold attention, harmful secrets, group exclusion.

Try This Week

- Send a **check-in text** to a green-flag friend.
 - **Mute** one chat that spikes stress for 24 hours.
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Teens (ages 13–18)

What's Typical & Why Conflict Spikes

- Identity exploration + changing schedules = shifting circles.
- Autonomy rises; **boundaries** and **reciprocity** become central. Digital life magnifies both connection and conflict.

Friendship Wisdom

1. **Clout ≠ character. Choose trust over status.**

Popularity can be performative, but character shows in reliability and how someone treats others when no one is watching.

2. **Boundaries build trust; limits are respect in action.**

Clear limits make friendships predictable and safe, signaling respect for both your time and theirs.

3. **Friendship is two-way; rebalance when it's one-sided.**

If you're always initiating, accommodating, or apologizing, ask for more reciprocity or step back to match effort.

4. **Consent in venting: comfort or ideas?**

Before unloading, ask if the other person has space for what you need to talk about and find out what kind of support the other person wants so neither of you feels overwhelmed or unheard.

5. **Curate digital spaces; muting/leaving is maturity.**

Muting or leaving stressful chats protects mood, sleep, and focus and is a healthy boundary, not rudeness.

Say This (concise)

- *Boundary*: “I care about you—but I’m not available for 2 a.m. drama.”
- *Reciprocity*: “I need our friendship to be more balanced.”
- *Venting consent*: “Do you want comfort or ideas?” “Do you have space for me to vent?”

- *Digital exit:* “I’m stepping back from this chat.” **This also teaches them that, in a world of instants, they do have the right to take their time and think something through before responding or acting.**
- *Safety:* “I care about you, so I’m getting help.”

Coach at Home

- **Non-negotiables list:** Sleep/device/study boundaries; post them.
- **Reciprocity check:** 60/40 is okay; 90/10 for long = drain. Problem-solve options.
- **Feed your feed:** Add 3 uplifting accounts; unfollow 3 draining ones.

Green / Red Flags

- **Green:** Reliability, consent (asks before posting/venting), keeps boundaries, shows up when inconvenient.
- **Red (seek support):** Coercion, humiliation, doxxing/cyberbullying, isolation from other supports, talk of self-harm/substances without openness to help.

Try This Week

- Set **one brave boundary** and send **one gratitude text** to a green-flag friend.

When to Seek Extra Support

- Ongoing bullying, threats, or safety concerns (online/offline)
- Dramatic changes in mood, sleep, appetite, or school avoidance
- Self-harm talk or substance concerns—loop in trusted adults/professionals

How Oak can help: parent coaching sessions, child/teen therapy, brief school collaboration, and (when appropriate) assessment/consultation.

One-Page Cheatsheets (Printables)

Early Childhood (4–7) — Quick Guide

- **Teach:** join, turn-taking, friendly no, quick repair
- **Say:** “Can I join when you’re done?” / “No, thank you—maybe later.”
- **Watch for:** kind words, safe bodies
- **Try this week:** one 1:1 play plan

Middle Childhood (8–12) — Quick Guide

- **Teach:** safety over status, green/red flags, no harmful secrets, cool-off
- **Say:** “I like you, and I need space right now.”
- **Watch for:** fair/inclusive patterns vs. put-downs/tests
- **Try this week:** check-in text to a green-flag friend; mute one stressful chat

Teens (13–18) — Quick Guide

- **Teach:** boundaries, reciprocity, consent in venting, digital curation
- **Say:** “Do you want comfort or ideas?”
- **Watch for:** reliability, respect for limits; escalate for coercion/cyberbullying
- **Try this week:** one brave boundary + one gratitude text

Templates & Conversation Starters

- **Notice → Own → Offer (repair):** “I talked over you. I’m sorry. Want to try that again?”
 - **Feelings → Need:** “I felt left out when plans changed. Next time can we text the update?”
 - **Boundary + Care:** “I care about you, and I’m not okay with name-calling. I’ll come back when we can talk kindly.”
 - **Ask before posting:** “Can I share this photo, or would you rather not?”
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Optional Resources

- Oak Counseling & Consulting
- School counselor or pediatrician
- Local parenting classes or workshops
- Crisis support (U.S. 988) for safety concerns

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