

How to Help Your Child Make Friends

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Introduction

When we think about the difficulties our ADHD children have, what usually comes to mind is their problems with hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsive behavior. These are the things that affect the child's performance in school and conduct at home. However, there is another aspect of the ADHD child that may be in the long run, much more critical and devastating than either academic failure or misbehavior at home. That is the difficulty our children have in developing normal social interactions with friends.

Developing healthy peer relationships is critical for the normal development of a child. Peer relationships have been found to be an important predictor of positive adult adjustment and behavior. Difficulty in finding friends leads to feelings of low self-esteem and these feelings usually continue into adulthood. Children with poor social skills are at risk for delinquency, academic underachievement, and school drop out. Even though the inattentiveness, impulsiveness, and restlessness frequently persist into adult life, these problems are of less importance as the child gets older. Rather, the main difficulty ADHD patients encounter as they reach maturity is their inability to interact appropriately with others.

[Raising Your Spirited Child](#)

by Mary Sheedy Kurchinka

This is an excellent book for parents who want to develop a positive outlook on their hyperactive child. The author gives great advice on how to deal with the difficult aspects of a very emotional active child, as well as how to bring out the best in the child's behavior. Read this book and I guarantee you will get a greater appreciation for your child and have a better time raising him. This book has been around for a while, so it might not be available at your bookstore.

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ADHD children often lack the social skills that are essential to success in life. These children can be socially inept, and their lack of interpersonal skills may cause them a multitude of difficulties. In addition, positive relationships with friends in childhood provide a critical buffer against stress and help to protect against psychological and psychiatric problems. ADHD children lack these positive interactions and thus are at risk for a number of emotional problems.

Probably 60% of ADHD children suffer from peer rejection. ADHD children are less often chosen by peers to be best friends, partners in activities, or seatmates. As the children grow older, their social problems seem to get worse. Their inappropriate behavior leads to further social rejection and exacerbates their inability to relate to others appropriately. Long term these children are more likely to have difficulty finding and maintaining successful careers. This is not surprising since social aptitude can make or break careers and relationships in the adult world.

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Causes of Poor Peer Relationships

ADHD children are frequently disliked or neglected by their peers. It is difficult to determine all the factors that make a child unpopular, but children who frequently display aggressive or negative behavior tend to be rejected by their peers.

Impulsivity and Aggression

ADHD children tend to be more impulsive and aggressive than other children. Teachers observe that the social interactions of ADHD children more often involve fighting and interrupting others. These children are more intense than others and behave inappropriately in social contexts. For example, ADHD children are more likely to yell, run around and talk at unsuitable times. They also tend to want to dominate play, engage in off task behaviors and engage more in teasing and physical jostling of peers. This sets up a process of peer rejection.

The Impossible Child

by Doris Rapp, M. D.

This is one of the best and easiest books around that discusses how to diagnose and treat food and environmental allergies. Dr. Rapp describes the how unsuspected allergies can be the cause of many of the problems that are found in "problem children." You will learn how to identify, prevent, and treat reactions to food and environmental factors that may be the cause of most or all of your child's problems. If you have an ADHD child, then this book is a must read. Who knows? Maybe you don't have an ADHD child.

To find out more about

[The Impossible Child](#)

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Academic Problems

ADHD children often do not do well in school. Poor school performance by itself does not result in social rejection. However, the way the child responds to his academic difficulties can contribute to inappropriate social behavior. Children who cannot engage themselves with classroom work assignments often disrupt and irritate their peers.

Inattention

ADHD children have difficulty with sustained attention. Deficit in attention seems to be related to peer rejection independently of the aggressive, impulsive, and hyperactive behaviors of ADHD children. These children become bored more easily than other children. As a result, they are more likely to become disruptive in the classroom.

ADHD children have difficulty in modulating their behavior and changing their conduct as the situation demands. They have apparent social-cognitive deficits that limit their ability to encode and recall rules of social cues. Children with ADHD pay less attention to others verbally in games and other activities.

Many ADHD children are aware that they are socially inept. Children who are anxious or fearful about peer relations are unlikely to behave in an effective manner. These

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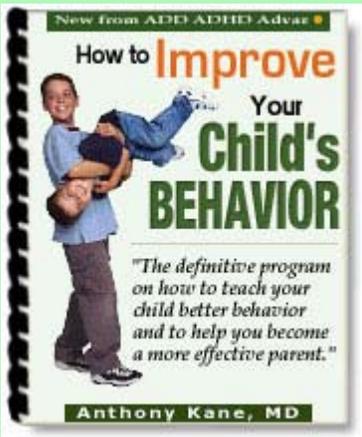
children withdraw from peer interactions and, in this way, limit their ability to gain acceptance and friendship.

Children tend to encounter social rejection when they are perceived to be dissimilar from their peers. Similarity fosters social acceptance. Because ADHD children do not learn social clues as well as other children, they tend to be viewed as different.

The Importance of a Few Good Friends

In the past, most of the ADHD research and treatment programs involving social interactions focused on how to improve the child's general standing among his peers. The results were less than satisfactory. The reason is that once the group views a child as an outcast, this label is hard to overcome. Even if the child changes the behaviors that originally caused this label, a reputation as a social outcast stays with him.

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teach your child
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Fortunately, a study published in the April 2003 issue of the [Journal of Attention Disorders](#), has taken a new look at ADHD and peer relationships. The study focuses on the affects of helping ADHD children develop a single good friend.

The researchers studied 209 5-12 year old children with ADHD who participated in an intensive 8-week summer behavioral treatment program.

The program was set up along the lines of a summer day camp. In addition to the usual components of such a program, like social skills training and behavioral training, the researchers added a "buddy system" to the program. The "buddy system" was implemented to promote the development of friendship skills. The program involved pairing each child with an age and gender matched "buddy". Buddies were also paired based on similarities in behavioral, athletic, and academic competencies and on whether children lived close enough together that play dates could occur outside of camp.

The parents were encouraged to have the child meet with his buddy outside of the time of the program. The goal was to have the children develop and maintain a single good friendship during the length of the program.

Results of the Buddy Program

Some of the results were as expected. Children who were more aggressive did not achieve as close a relationship with their buddy as the other children.

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However, researchers uncovered two other points that are important to us. According to the evaluation by the staff, those children whose parents supported the buddy program by arranging play times outside of the camp setting, tended to form better relationships. More importantly, the children also felt themselves to more successful in making and sustaining the friendship.

Another important finding is that the type of buddy a child had affected his own academic success during the program. The more antisocial behavior a child's buddy displayed, the less likely teachers were to see academic or behavioral improvement in the child. Conversely, when a child's buddy was less antisocial, children were more likely to be regarded by teachers as making academic and behavioral gains.

What Does This Mean to Us?

How can you apply the results of this study? First, even if your ADHD child is suffering because his peers do not like him, you can significantly improve his situation by helping him find one or a few close friends.

[A Symphony in the Brain](#)

by Jim Robbins

This is the best book for the layman around on neurofeedback. If you have an ADHD child this book is a definite must read. This book will open up for you one of the most promising and exciting treatments available today for ADHD. Also, it is probably the best-written scientific book for the general public that I have ever read. This book is not so easy to find. I spent the better part of a day looking for it in Manhattan. Unless you are planning to spend a day running around Manhattan bookstores I suggest you get this book on-line.

Find out more about

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However, there is a point of caution. What type of child becomes your child's close friend may have a significant impact on your academic standing and social behavior. The study showed that a better behaved child will influence your child to behave better. Okay so you knew that already. But, we're scientists. Just because something is blatantly obvious to anyone with any bit of sense doesn't mean that it's obvious to us. So for us this is a major finding. (For more information on this point see [How to Read a Scientific Article](#)).

This just emphasizes how important it is for parents to monitor with whom their children play. You must work hard to keep your child from associating with antisocial peers. This can be critically important in preventing a child from developing antisocial behavior him or herself.

A final noteworthy point is that the success of a child making a close relationship with his buddy was largely related to how supportive the parents were. That means that you as a parent can influence your child and help him to develop a special close friend.

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What to Do Practically

So what can you do to help your child develop a close friendship with another child?

First, you must have your goal clear. You want to help your child develop one or a few close relationships, not gain popularity with his peers in general. It is important to make this distinction, because the first goal is readily achievable. So, you want to focus on helping your child develop friendships with a few well-chosen children.

Picking Your Child's Friends

You should help your child pick appropriate friends. Try to get him away from aggressive children who themselves may be experiencing social rejection. Don't be concerned if the friends your child chooses are younger or older. ADHD children tend to gravitate toward children who are a different age, since these children are usually more accepting of social deficits. The most important factor is that the friends your child chooses should be positive influences.

[Is This Your Child?](#)

By Doris Rapp, M. D.

This is the book that brought the concept of food and environmental allergies to the awareness of the public. Dr. Rapp describes the how unsuspected allergies can be the cause of many of the problems that are found in "problem children." You will learn how to identify, prevent, and treat reactions to food and environmental factors that may be the cause of most or all of your child's problems. If you have an ADHD child, then this book is a must read. Who knows? Maybe you don't have an ADHD child. To find out more about

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Talk to your child's teacher to get a picture of who might be appropriate friends for your child. Tell the teacher about your concerns, and work together on school-based strategies that could help your child make friends. Ask your child who he enjoys spending time with at school, and arrange a get-together. Your child's teacher can help you get in touch with other parents.

When you find a few likely candidates, encourage your child to invite one of them to your house after school or on weekends.

Bribery is wonderful. You can use it to help your child gain a close friend. When you pack your child's lunch, include with it a treat to share with his special friend. This will make it more likely for the other child to view your child as someone he wants to be around.

Structuring Playtime with Friends

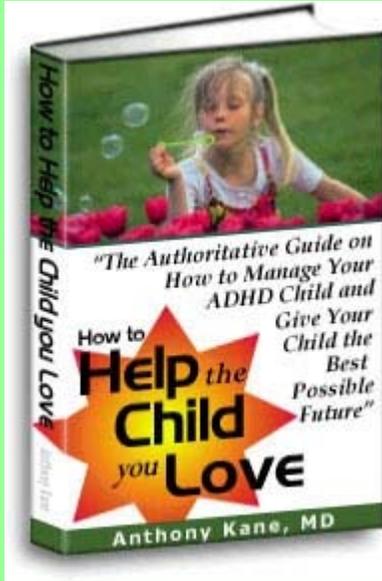
If your child has seriously underdeveloped social skills you should try to structure their playtime together. The children can enjoy a video while sharing a special snack or they can do a craft together. You can choose any activity the children will enjoy. The important thing to remember is that you should be close by to supervise.

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Orient the playtime around games and activities that your child enjoys and is good at. This will make your child more comfortable. Let your child pick the activity, but make suggestions. If the children are involved in an arts and crafts project, make sure there are plenty of materials around. You don't want you child to get into any conflict involving sharing.

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you can for **your child**?



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When you monitor the children, you should look for signs of things getting out of control. These include increasing silliness, rough play, and louder than normal conversation. Also, be alert for the beginnings of aggressive behavior. If you see things are starting to fall apart, you should stop the play by giving a snack. When the children calm down, they can return to the activity or you can try to engage them in a different calmer activity.

Keep the playtime short. One or two hours are plenty when kids are just getting to know each other. This might mean that the new friend will have to leave just as things are really getting fun, but it is better to have the playtime end early than to risk having it deteriorate. Try to arrange regular playtimes with the same friends on a frequent basis.

If your child has a tendency toward aggression, try to monitor aggressive behavior at home. Try to monitor other family members to cut down on the aggressive behavior. You should also try to limit your child's exposure to aggression by cutting down on the amount of television he watches.

Ideas to Help Improve General Popularity

As I said before, your goal is to help your child develop one or a few good friends, not to become socially popular. However, there are a few simple things you can do that will improve your child's overall standing with his peers.

Children are more ready to accept a peer that they view is similar to them. Because ADHD children so not conform well to the accepted social norms, they tend to be viewed as different. You can do to help your child to fit in by making him more similar to his peers.

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Children are into fads. Although things like Pokémon or yo-yos or whatever is currently going around in your town might not thrill you, these fads offer great bonding material and make common ground for forming friendships.

Allowing your child to play with popular toys and watch popular television shows or videos can give him or her a way to communicate with peers. It gives your child something to talk about and when the general discussion turns to those topics, your child will not feel left out.

Grooming and attire count are important. Make sure your child is clean, well groomed and dressed like the other children.

Be the driver. Whether it is carpooling to lessons after school or driving to after school functions if you are the driver, your child automatically will be included.

The basic idea is to do anything you can to make your child look like and act like the other children his age. This may not improve his social standing but it will give him one less reason to be an outsider. Again, making your child popular with the group should not be your focus. However, since these few ideas are easy to execute, they are worth doing.

Need a Book on ADHD?

How about a book on Dyslexia or Oppositional Defiant Disorder?

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Conclusion

Helping children with ADHD build close peer relationships is an important goal to focus on, and is one that often may be overlooked. You, as a parent, have the ability to help your child accomplish this important social goal. You should make every effort to help your child in this area. His psychological health and his happiness, both now and in the future, are very much dependant upon how successful he is at making and maintaining childhood friendships.

It's up to you.

If you have any questions, please contact me. That's why I am here.

Good luck.

Anthony Kane, MD

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