

Supporting Your Child's Social Success!

If you're concerned that your son or daughter is having trouble fitting in, you're not alone. Whether your child's at the height of popularity or is socially struggling, anxiety about their social well-being is part and parcel of parenting. In their book, *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* (Ballantine Publishing Group, 2001), Michael Thomsson, PhD and Catherine O'Neill Grace offer ten helpful tips to help your children survive and succeed in their social scene.

- 1. Don't worry so much.** Remember that you gave your child a sociable start in life. Recognize your children's social capabilities. Most kids are ready and able to meet new social challenges as they occur. Consider whether your child has an age-appropriate grasp of the basics for their age but don't place too much pressure on them by setting the social mark too high.
- 2. Recognize the crucial difference between friendship and popularity.** Friendship is more important. Friendships are the key to your child's social success. They're what get kids through hardships and what heighten their triumphs. If too much emphasis is put on popularity, your child could end up feeling inferior.
- 3. Support children's friendships. Many parents are too busy or self-absorbed** – especially at critical times of change, such as a move – to help foster friendship building. Gently encourage your children to explore new friendships. Be a model of hospitality and ease your child's pressure by socializing with friends and neighbours who have similarly-aged children.
- 4. Make your child's friends welcome in your home.** Create a safe place for your children to build relationships and learn to be a gracious host. Connect with your child's friends without butting in, offering compliments and letting them know their friendship is valued.
- 5. Be a good friendship role model and teacher.** If you're a loyal, dedicated friend to others, then some of this amiable charm is likely to rub off on your son or daughter. Encourage your children to support their friends' activities and interests, for example by attending their chums' baseball games, performances, etc.
- 6. Provide a wide range of friendship and group opportunities.** Involve your kids in social gatherings that cross generations and cultural boundaries. This kind of exposure opens their minds to different ways of thinking and heightens your children's conversational skills.
- 7. Make friends with the parents of your child's friends (and enemies)** Don't wait for a conflict to arise before getting to know your children's friends and enemies. Reach out at your children's soccer games, parent-teacher nights, etc. and talk to other parents. This creates a positive base and helps you remain impartial when conflicts between children arise.
- 8. Empathize with your child's social pain, but keep it in perspective.** If your child is the victim of bullying then discuss the matter with his teacher and school authorities immediately. However, predisposed empathy for our children, combined with a tendency to relive our own childhood misfortunes, can create potential for distortion. Most kids heal fast and reconcile with friends more quickly than the adults around them. Recognize the difference between a minor conflict and a major crisis and respond accordingly.
- 9. Know where your child stands in the group.** The 'pecking order' can greatly influence your child's development. If your child is in trouble socially, step in to help. If your child is popular or accepted, help him/her become a positive moral leader.
- 10. Take the long view.** View your child's socialization from a broad perspective. Though a current situation might seem like a major crisis, it's important to have a grasp of the bigger picture. The here and now is just a speck on the map of your child's lifelong development.

Plan Administrator**Western Financial
Group Insurance Solutions**

201-600 Empress Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 0R5
Telephone: (204) 943-0331
1-800-665-8990
Fax: (204) 943-5531

Website

www.WestGUARD.ca



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