

Inclusive Developmental and Therapy Center

Making Friends & Social Confidence (Ages 8–16)

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✓ Can I help my child at home?

Yes, you really can. Help your older child or teen make friends they actually keep — starting a conversation, joining a group, and feeling confident being themselves around other people. This free program breaks it down into simple weekly steps, built from proven therapy techniques — things any parent can do at home, in everyday moments, at no cost. It doesn't replace a professional assessment where one is needed, but for a lot of children it makes a real difference, and it never does any harm.

Go at your own pace — a new, gentle focus each week.

Download the whole program as a printable PDF to keep.

Includes the signs that mean it's worth getting a bit of extra help.

Friendships get complicated as children grow up. What used to be simply playing side by side turns into group chats, inside jokes, friendship groups that shift week to week, and that quiet ache of not quite fitting in. If your child keeps coming home saying nobody talked to them, or sits alone at break, or has a friendship that only ever seems to flow one way, it's hard to watch — and harder still for them to live. This program is written for that older child, not for a toddler — if yours is still in the early years, the play-based **social skills program for younger children** is the better place to start.

It breaks friendship down the way a therapist would: into small, teachable skills, coached at home over roughly seven weeks. Week by week your child practises opening a conversation, stepping into a group that is already going, being the kind of friend people want around, staying steady when they are teased, handling group chats, finding the people who share their interests, and finally inviting

someone over. It sits alongside the rest of our **free home programs for parents**, so you can run it beside whichever other area your child needs.

The seven weeks at a glance — from the first hello to the first friend through your front door:

- 1 Starting & keeping a chat going
- 2 Joining a group already going
- 3 Being the friend others want around
- 4 Teasing, conflict & being left out
- 5 Group chats & friendships online
- 6 Finding your people
- 7 **Inviting a friend over**

Everything here is gentle and practical, and it's free. It works alongside a proper assessment from a speech and language therapist, psychologist or your doctor — it never replaces one. If you're worried, please still book that assessment. Think of this as something warm to do together while you wait, or as steady practice between sessions.

Who this program is for

- ✓ Older children or teens who find it hard to start a conversation or keep one going, especially in a group.
- ✓ Kids who want friends but hover on the edge of a group instead of stepping into it.
- ✓ Those being left out, ignored or teased, who come home hurt or shut down.

- ✓ Children stuck in one-sided friendships — always the one reaching out, or feeling used rather than valued.
- ✓ Children who are fine one-to-one at home but are never invited anywhere, and never invite anyone back.
- ✓ Anyone who feels anxious socially or online, where group chats and knowing what to say can feel like too much — for some children this sits alongside childhood anxiety, which needs its own support.

Important — when to get professional help

This is a supportive home program — it isn't a diagnosis, and it doesn't replace a proper assessment. Please speak to a professional soon if:

Bullying that's causing real, ongoing distress — this needs the school, and if it's serious other professionals too, not just practice at home.

Your child pulling away completely — dropping all their friends, refusing school, or shutting themselves away for days.

Any talk of self-harm, of not wanting to be here, or that life isn't worth living — please get help urgently from your doctor, a local crisis line or emergency services. Don't wait.

A child who talks freely at home but cannot speak at all at school, or to relatives, for weeks at a time. That is more than shyness — it may be **selective mutism**, and it needs a professional opinion.

Social ability or confidence your child clearly had before that suddenly falls away — worth a professional's eye.

Signs of depression or severe anxiety — low mood most days, no interest in things they used to love, changes in sleep or appetite, or panic in everyday situations.

Getting help where you live

Everything here is free to use **anywhere in the world**. If you'd like a professional to take a closer look, the best next step is someone local to you:

Work with us online, from anywhere. We offer **online sessions and parent coaching** worldwide — book an online consultation and we'll guide you and your child directly.

Talk to your child's **doctor, paediatrician, GP or health visitor** — share what you noticed.

Ask about **free early-childhood or early-intervention services** in your area — many countries offer them for young children (e.g. Early Intervention in the US, NHS referrals in the UK).

Search **“child speech & language therapist near me”**, or ask your doctor for a referral.

Near Multan, Pakistan? You're also warmly welcome in person at our centre — **contact us here.**

☆ **Your step-by-step roadmap**

Move at your child's pace, not the calendar's — the “weeks” are just a gentle order, not a race. Feel free to repeat any stage for as long as it's helping.

Week 1 – Starting & keeping a conversation

Getting past “hi” — opening a chat and keeping it alive instead of watching it fizzle.

Practise a few easy openers together at home. Commenting on something you both know (“That test was brutal — how did you find it?”) works far better than firing off yes/no questions.

Teach the “ask, then add” rhythm: ask the other person something, then offer a little about yourself, so it feels like a real exchange and not an interview.

Role-play short chats over dinner, and deliberately let a topic run dry — then coach your child on how to gently switch it or ask a follow-up.

Practise ending a chat politely too — “I’ve got to go, see you at break” — because knowing how to leave takes a surprising amount of the fear out of starting.

 **Try** The “tell me more” trick: three little words that keep almost any **this:** conversation going and leave the other person feeling genuinely heard.

Week 2 – Joining a group or activity

Stepping into a group that’s already going, without feeling like you’re barging in.

Talk through the “watch, then blend in” approach: hang nearby for a beat, work out what the group’s doing or talking about, then join with a small, relevant comment.

Pick one low-pressure way in together — sitting with a friendlier group at lunch, or joining a club where there’s a shared activity to hide behind.

Rehearse a couple of natural join-in lines at home — “Can I join you?”, “Mind if I sit here?” — until they come out automatically instead of freezing them in the moment.

 **Try** Join around a shared task — a game, a project, a club — so there’s **this:** always something to do and something to talk about, and less spotlight on just walking up cold.

Week 3 – Being a good friend

The quieter skills that make people want you around: listening, showing you care, and giving as well as taking.

Practise really listening — phone down, facing the person, and hanging on to one thing they said to bring up next time.

Coach genuine curiosity: ask friends about their interests, their day, what's worrying them, instead of steering everything back to your child's own topics.

Encourage one small act of friendship a week — a supportive message, remembering a birthday, standing up for someone — and notice together how it deepens a bond.

 **Try** Hold on to one small thing a friend mentions and ask about it later **this:** ("How did your cricket trial go?"). It quietly tells people they matter to you.

Week 4 – Handling conflict, teasing & being left out

Staying steady when things go sideways — disagreements, teasing, or being shut out.

Build a few calm comebacks for teasing together. A shrug and “Whatever”, or agreeing lightly, usually deflates it far faster than getting upset or firing back. If teasing regularly tips over into shouting or hitting back, work on the brake first with our home program for challenging behaviour.

Practise mending small fallings-out: naming the problem calmly, hearing the other side, and trusting that a real “Sorry” can save a friendship.

Talk honestly about being left out — trying another group, telling a trusted adult, and remembering that one bad day, or one group, doesn’t define them.

 **Try** The “grey rock” move for teasing: stay boring and unbothered. People **this:** teasing for a reaction tend to give up when they don’t get one.

Week 5 – Friendships online & group chats

Handling messaging, group chats and social media kindly and with a bit of confidence.

Talk through group-chat basics together: you don't have to reply to everything, tone gets misread easily, and a friendly emoji or short reply is enough to stay in the loop.

Agree what to do about unkind messages or being left off a chat — screenshot it, don't retaliate, and tell you or another trusted adult instead of stewing on it alone.

Practise reading a message twice before sending, and remind your child that anything posted can be passed on — so kindness and a little caution protect their friendships.

 **Try** When a message stings, wait ten minutes before replying. That short **this:** pause turns a hurt, snappy reply into a calmer one they won't regret.

Week 6 – Finding “your people”

Meeting children who already share your child's interests, where friendship starts on easier ground.

Help your child find one interest-based club, team or group — cricket, gaming, art, coding, drama, Quran class, scouts — where friendships form naturally around a shared passion.

Notice and name their strengths together, so they walk in believing they've got something worth offering rather than something to hide.

Set one small, brave social goal each week — saying hi to someone new, sitting somewhere different — and celebrate the courage, whatever comes of it.

 **Try** Friendship comes far easier alongside “your people”. One club full of **this:** children who love what your child loves beats trying to win over a crowd who don't.

Week 7 – Turning a classmate into a real friend

Moving a friendship out of the classroom — inviting someone over and being a good host.

Help your child pick one person they already get on with, and plan something to do rather than time to fill — a game, cricket outside, a film. Nobody has to make conversation for three hours.

Coach the host job beforehand: greet them at the door, offer food, let the guest choose what to do first, and check now and then that they're enjoying it.

Keep the first one short. An hour or two is plenty, and ending while it's still going well is what makes a second one happen.

Ring the other parent yourself if that's what it takes at 8 or 9 — but by 13, coach your child to send the message and make the plan themselves.

 **Try** A friendship usually becomes a real friendship the first time the two of **this:** them meet outside school. One good hour at home does more than a term of break-times.

Little tricks that make it work

- ✓ Aim for one or two good friends, not popularity. At this age depth matters far more than numbers.
- ✓ Don't force eye contact if it's uncomfortable. Looking near someone's face, or glancing away to think, is completely normal and still polite.
- ✓ Don't solve it for them for ever. Arranging things on your child's behalf is fine at 8; by 13 they need to
- ✓ Practise where the stakes are low first — a cousin, a neighbour's child, a relative at a family gathering — before the pressure of the school corridor.
- ✓ Notice the effort, not just the result. "You said hi even though it felt hard — that took guts" grows more courage than praising success alone.
- ✓ Keep the door open at home. Older children open up more when there's no big "chat" — car journeys and

send the message themselves, with you as the safety net.

side-by-side moments do the real work.

How you'll know it's working

- Your child starts or joins a conversation without being nudged, even a short one.
- They mention a friend by name, sort out a meet-up, or seem more settled about who they sit with.
- A friend comes to your house, or your child gets invited to someone else's.
- They take a knock — being left out or teased — and bounce back quicker than they used to.
- They seem a bit more at ease socially: less dread before school or events, and more willing to give things a go.
- If none of this shifts after a couple of months of steady practice, that is useful information too — our **free 2-minute developmental check** asks about the same areas and gives you a written summary to take to a professional.



Is this based on real methods? This program draws on widely used social skills training (SST) principles — breaking friendship into small, teachable steps, modelling, role-play and real-life practice. Structured, evidence-based programmes such as PEERS®, developed for adolescents, use a similar approach of coaching concrete social skills with parent involvement, and treat get-togethers outside school as a core skill rather than an extra. This is a gentle home version of those ideas and is not a clinical treatment; for a diagnosis or tailored support, please see a qualified speech and language therapist, psychologist or your doctor.

✔ **Educational information, not a diagnosis.** Our guidance follows standard, research-based practice (CDC, NHS, ASHA and WHO), is written by our therapy team and **medically reviewed by a GMC-registered doctor**. Every child is different, so we can't promise specific results — always use your own judgement and speak to a qualified professional about your child. **Read our full disclaimer.**

— FAQ

Older Kids: Making Friends: questions parents ask

