

# A Friendly Smile

**W**e have all experienced the warmth of a broad friendly smile. Even if the one that is smiling at us is a total stranger, it warms our heart and makes our day easier. As Jennifer Russell's song says, "Friendliness is the best cure for loneliness." At the beginning of the school year, especially in an international school environment, there are many new faces and many lonely hearts. This presents a good opportunity for us to talk to children about the virtues of friendliness and help them learn different ways to show it to others.

While some children may naturally be friendly and outgoing, many need some help from time to time to make and keep friends. Developing a friendly attitude is a good starting point for our children and ourselves. This means that we think of everyone as friends we have or have not met yet, we truly care for their feelings and have a desire to make them feel wanted and welcome. Children adopt their parents' attitudes toward others. Our friendly greeting to our neighbors, cleaners and others in our surroundings is observed and absorbed by our children. They also enjoy going with parents to welcome a new comer to the neighborhood or care for those who are lonely and in need. Traveling and opening our home to friends from different cultures, economic and educational backgrounds helps children feel comfortable with and embrace diversity of appearances, customs and behaviors. These all cultivate a friendly attitude in our children towards others.

A friendly attitude alone, however, is not always enough. When children start a new school, the number of new faces may be too overwhelming. Though they may have the desire to make friends, they may not know how to break into

the already established groups or simply break the ice. Teaching simple skills will help increase their confidence and courage to take the first step. Parents can role play with young children simple sentences at home so they feel comfortable in introducing themselves to people they want to meet. E.g.: "Hi my name is Mary.", "What is your name?", "Let's be friends...", "Do you want to sit with me?", "Would you like to play



together?" or "I like your .... (doll/ car or other toys they are playing with.) Would you like to play with my...?" are all good starting points to make friends.

You can also do simple fun activities to highlight the importance of a friendly face. For example, a parent asks the following questions. He or she may model the answer for the child

- Can you show me a frown?
- Can you show me an uninterested face?
- Can you show me a shy face?
- Can you show me an unfriendly face!?
- When you meet someone new, how do you like their face to be?
- What does a friendly face look like?
- What is a friendly word to say to a child who is standing in a corner not involved?

We can also help our child break the

ice in a new school by inviting the class for a beginning of the year party complete with many fun cooperative games. By the end of the party, everyone has bonded together.

Once children make a good friend in their new environment, they may have to be reminded that good friendship does not have to be exclusive. This is not an issue in very young children. When asked who her best friend is, for example, a

pre-school child often names a number of her friends. However, in the later years of primary school, the concepts of exclusivity and one-to-one friendships creep in and cause much heartache for the "third friend." In these cases, it is helpful to encourage the child to have the attitude of "We can all be friends." If others have shown unfriendly behavior and excluded him from their games, help him learn to express his hurt feelings peacefully and to call others to friendliness by saying for example, "I feel sad when you do not play with

me. Let's talk about it and find a game we can all enjoy together," or "Let's all play together in unity."

Composing or reading friendship stories, including some from your own childhood, especially those where you may have encountered and resolved difficulties, can also assist children to better understand how to make friends and persevere in showing friendliness. And of course use other joyful activities too such as playing or singing children's songs on friendliness in the car or at home. Red Grammer's CDs Hooray for the World and Can You Sound Like Me? and Children's Virtues Us Songs CDs for Pre School and School age children by The Virtues Development Project offer joyful songs to listen to and dance with.

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