Making friends

When you meet someone, you don't know whether that person is going to become a good friend, so you have to be a bit careful at first. Friendship is like planting a seed that you've found. You are not quite sure what is going to come up so you have to watch it carefully and nurture (look after) it.

Maybe it won't grow, in spite of your best efforts. Maybe it will only grow into a weak and sickly plant, or it could grow into a horrible weed and you would have to pull it up.

If all the conditions are right and you've really looked after it well then you could end up with a strong, flourishing plant that will continue to grow bigger and better as time passes.

Get the picture?

So what about friendships - how can you make them grow?

What to do

• Hang out with people you would like to have as friends and join in with their plans unless you really disagree.

• If you don't agree with their plans say so in a positive way, "I like this bit but maybe we could..."

• Accept people as they are. You can like other people even if you don't agree with everything they say or do.

• You don't have to know about or have an opinion on everything - in fact it is often better if you don't.

• Be a good listener so that others can tell that you are really interested in what they are saying.
Get to know people well by sharing 'safe' thoughts with them first. What is a safe thought? It might be something about school or TV or your favourite footy team. It isn’t always safe to tell someone you don’t know very personal things about you, like things you might be worried about or afraid of.

- Ask them about themselves.
- Expect things to work out the way you would like in your friendship.
- Be a positive person; talk about the good things in your life. No one wants to be hassled by problems all the time.
- Don’t be a cruel gossip or tell tales… "She said... and I don’t think she likes... and she doesn’t want to be your friend." Sounds familiar?
- If you’re lucky the person you meet may become a regular friend or even, after a long time, a best friend.

Best friends
Up to now your close relationships have been in your family who know you well and care about you.

Having a best friend is great. You get to share your thoughts, dreams, fun times, problems, successes and failures with someone who knows, understands and cares about you and is around your age.

For two people to become best friends, you have to really know and understand each other well. This can only happen over a long time, not just a few days. If you are looking for a best friend don’t be in too much of a hurry to get from someone you know, to regular friend to best friend. Take your time and it will be worth your time.

Never take your best friend for granted. A relationship as important as this needs all the friendship skills plus!

Work on building trust between you.
• Don't talk about your friend with others.

• Be honest. If you feel that your friend is heading for trouble talk about it in a caring way. (I wish you would... Do you think that...?)

• If you're worried about a secret your friend is telling you, you can help her decide who is a trusted adult for her to talk to. Offer to go with her if she would like you to, or tell her you will need to ask advice from an adult you trust, as you care about her and want to help her.

• Don't drag other people into your arguments or you may never be able to sort them out.

• If things don't work out as best friends, stay friendly anyway. Don't go round telling everybody all the confidential stuff your friend had told you or you would be the person no one wants to know!

• Don't try to 'own' your friend or let her 'own' you. Yes, it's great to have a best friend but you need to be friendly to others too. You can share different interests with different friends and still have a best friend. If you shut out everyone else then how awful will it be if you fall out, or if one of you moves somewhere else and neither of you has any other friends to play with?

**Getting into the group**

Maybe you're not a person who makes friends easily. You could be new to the school, the class, that area, the team, the club or whatever. You stand there feeling like everyone is looking at you, or on the other hand you may feel as if you are invisible.

Everyone else is in groups, all chattering away and you feel really left out.

In places where there is an adult in charge he would probably introduce you to the rest of the class but around the street or in the playground you will have to make the effort.
Be prepared

• Watch others who seem to be popular and see what they do.

• Look for a group who seem to have interests which you can share, or know something about.

• Find out about clubs, groups, sports, music, chess, whatever is happening in your school and join any in which you are interested or know something about.

• Make sure you know about or can do a few things that others can do eg skipping, kicking a ball, bowling, throwing and catching, shooting goals, reading about pop-stars, watching TV programs that other kids watch.

• Helping others is a good way to make friends, so if you see someone who is struggling ask if they would like some help - be kind not bossy.

You can go and shrink into a corner and hope that someone may notice you, (if they do they will probably think you are not friendly and want to be left alone) or you can:

Try to make friends

• Stand tall as you move around - practise in the mirror or with your mum or dad for a coach.

• Look for eye contact and smile when someone looks at you.

• Hang around near a group that looks interesting.

• Decide what you want to say before you talk, don’t just babble on.

• Catch the eye of someone in the group and smile. If that person smiles back join in the group.

• Listen to the conversation and when you know what is going on join in.
• Speak in a positive way and don't brag (boast).
• Join in with the group; don't try to take over.
• Look for others who are alone or seem shy and introduce yourself. Ask them about their interests. You may turn out to have a lot in common.
  **Two big no-nos if you want to make friends are:**
• to push in to a group and try to take over,
• or to hang back and not show you are interested.

It's also really bad to be a gossip or tell tales about someone. However, "dobbing" someone in who is bullying or harming others is not telling tales. It is making sure that the rights and safety of others are respected.

*You've got to find that middle line* that shows you are interested but don't take over or spoil their game!

Don't give up trying to make friends if you're not very lucky at first. Just be yourself, smile and be friendly so that others will want to know you.

Others may feel as shy as you do or you may have to find a different group to get friendly with. Keep trying.

Sometimes you may have very different friends like these children.

Being with friends and joining in with them is fun, but sometimes it's good to spend some time reading or thinking by yourself. Favourite books and stories can seem like old friends too. What do you think?

**FRIENDS**

A friend is someone who shares your toys,
Shares your sadness and shares your joys.
Someone to play with, someone who's there
Whenever you need them, when life is unfair.

Friendship is special that's really true.
If you are a friend then you're special too