MindPeace

FRIENDSHIP MATTERS SERIES

When Friends Disagree

Coaching kids through friendship conflict

For families · All ages



Hurt feelings and being left out are a normal part of friendship, and one rough day doesn't end a friendship. With coaching, conflict builds empathy, confidence and resilience. The goal: help kids handle it themselves, not fix it for them.

Six ways to coach through conflict

1 Listen first

Hear the whole story, then ask: "Do you want me to just listen, or help you think it through?"

2 See both sides

Ask what the friend might have been thinking. Separate what they know from what they assume.

3 Speak up

Rehearse calm, direct words about how it felt and what they need.

4 Pause first

Teach a calm-down break, then explore whether your child played a part.

5 Make it right

Own their share and apologize, without taking blame for more than their part.

6 Match help to age

Give younger kids concrete ideas. Let teens try first; step in if they ask or keep struggling.

Words to practice together

- "When you said ___, I felt ___. Next time, could you ___?"
- "I didn't like that. Please stop."
- "I'm sorry I didn't speak up. That wasn't fair to you."

Be their sounding board

- Being left out, a best friend drifting away, or seeing photos of a get-together you weren't invited to all feel very real. Treat those feelings as valid.
- Reflect back what you hear and stay a step behind them, instead of jumping ahead to solutions.
- A story from your own school years can help, though some teens find it less relevant. Follow your child's lead.
- Teens say what they most want from adults is to feel heard and accepted. That kind of support is protective all on its own.

When you offer help, try asking:

- "Would some support from me help with this?"
- "Is there something we can do at home to help with the stress?"
- "Want to think through how you might handle it tomorrow?"
- "Would it help to bring in another trusted adult?"

If the answer is "no thanks," that's okay. They may just need you nearby while they ride it out.

When it's time to step in

Most friendship drama is everyday kid stuff, but watch for bullying: repeated aggression with a power imbalance, where a child feels there's no way out. Threats, harassment, repeated humiliation, pressure to do something unsafe, or ongoing distress and withdrawal call for adult help. Reach out to your school counselor or a mental health professional. If you're ever worried about safety, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 24/7). In an emergency, call **911**.

Sources

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