

The Role of Friendship in Decreasing Bullying

In the *Steps to Respect* program, children learn a variety of friendship-development skills. These skills include:

- How to treat everyone with respect.
- How to make conversation.
- How to join group activities.

Research shows that friendship plays an important role in decreasing bullying. Children who have friends are more protected from the harmful effects of bullying, and they are better able to cope when bullying occurs.

You can help your child practice the important skills that will lead to friendship and an overall decrease in bullying. Start by talking about respect. Ask her to think about how she likes to be treated by others. Together, think of ways that she can treat others with respect. Have her practice using respectful behavior when playing with siblings and friends. Be sure to give examples of how you use the same skills with other adults.

Engaging in conversation is a great way to get know others, so it's a good idea to help your child practice good conversation skills. Together, think of some simple questions he could use to start and maintain a friendly conversation. Open-ended questions, which require more than a yes-or-no answer, work best. Also, help him practice being a good listener by reminding him to look at the person he is talking with.

You can also help your child recall the *Steps to Respect* strategies for respectfully joining a group. Remind her to:

- Stand nearby and watch the activity. (This shows others that she's interested, and it allows her to learn the game rules.)
- Say something positive or ask questions of the group.
- Ask to play or join.
- Say something helpful or find a way to help.
- Ask again to play or join.

Watch for opportunities to help your child use *Steps to Respect* skills. With your help, he can develop lasting, respectful friendships and help prevent bullying at the same time.