



4-H School-Age Child Care  
University of California Cooperative Extension

# PARENTSTYLES

## Tips for Busy Parents

### FRIENDSHIP

*Author: Diane Metz, Home & Economist, Solano County*

*Gayle ran to the house to tearfully report to her mother that Jill was no longer her "best friend." It seems Jill had chosen to play with a new neighbor and Gayle felt excluded and unwanted. Rather than get involved with the situation and emotions of the moment, or the other parents, Gayle's mother wisely chose to console her daughter and let time heal the wounds. The next day Gayle and Jill were once again inseparable and "best friends."*

#### Ideas About Friendship

Children's understanding of friendship is very different from that of adults. Children have their own original ideas that change as they grow up. They "know" a lot about friendship. It's just not the same as what adults know. For example, adults may urge a small child to think of another child's feelings and while this concept is important, younger children may not understand this "adult reasoning."

**'Friendship development' can be separated into five stages:**

☆ **Momentary Playmates (ages 3-7):** This is the stage when the child has difficulty distinguishing between a physical action, such as grabbing a toy, and the intention behind the action. Friends are valued for what they have. As one child told us, "He is my friend." Why? "He has a giant Superman doll and a real swing set."

☆ **One Way Assistance (ages 4-9):** At this stage, the child can tell the difference between his viewpoint and those of others. However, he does not understand give and take. Said one child, "She's not my friend anymore." Why? "She wouldn't go with me when I wanted her to."

☆ **Mutual Sharing (ages 9-15):** Not only can the child see the other's point of view, but he can also see friendship from a third person's point of view. Friends share more than secrets, agreements and plans. Friends share feelings, and help each other solve problems. Close friendship is viewed as exclusive, intimate, and rather possessive. "He is my best friend. We can tell each other things we can't tell anyone else."

☆ **Interdependent Friendship (ages 12 and older):** This is the stage where the person sees complex relationships. The child is aware that good friendship means strong emotional and psychological support while allowing the friend other independent relationships, as well. According to one child, "One thing about a good friendship is that it's a real commitment, a risk that you have to take. You have to be able to support and trust and give, but you have to let go, too."

Resource: California Mental Health, Friends Can Be Good Medicine" 1982

### Families and Friendship

Children learn the sense of caring for others by watching parents' examples. In this area of life, as in many others, our actions truly speak louder than our words.

When parents welcome a new neighbor, call on a sick friend or donate clothing that has been outgrown, they are teaching the fine art of friendship.

Why not pledge as a family to look for those times when a little act of kindness would make someone's day a lot brighter? Over dinner some time soon, make a list of what you can do as a family. Can you add to this list?

- ☆ Clean out the toy box. Donate usable items to charity.
- ☆ Shovel the snow from your neighbor's walk.
- ☆ Pick up an extra Sunday paper for a shut-in.
- ☆ Invite a neighbor for dessert.
- ☆ Offer to babysit for a new parent.

Put your plan into action. Everyone will benefit.

