

# Helping Your Children Become Friends

From  
Christian  
Psychologist  
Tom Prinz

My younger brother and I were never best friends as children. Similarly my wife and her older sister were not very close as they grew up. Perhaps in both cases the age differences were a factor, but both I and my wife remember that our respective parents were not very intentional about helping us become friends with our siblings. Our experiences motivated us to encourage our three children (now young adults) to be supportive of each other.

The Bible contains many examples of siblings being anything but the best of friends. One of the best-known stories is about Cain attacking and killing his brother, Abel. Later in Genesis we learn that Joseph's brothers were so angry with him that they sold him into slavery and then told his father that he was dead! In contrast to these negative examples, there are many Bible passages that encourage us to love, care and pray for one another.

Before providing some specific ways to help your children become best friends, read and talk about the following verses with them:

- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according

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to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

- “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).
- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Here are some practical suggestions that may help foster a healthy and friendly relationship between your children.

- Encourage them to attend each other's sporting events, concerts, school functions, etc.
- Have them attend each other's birthday parties and pick out or make gifts for their siblings.
- If possible, encourage your children to participate in *different* sports or activities, so they don't feel like they are competing with each other.
- Point out their unique strengths and gifts and remind them that all gifts and abilities are important.
- Design projects where they can work together to accomplish a task.
- Take decisive action when they are mean to each other. Punish both parties for fighting, without trying to determine who started it.
- If a child says, “You love (Nancy) more than me!” don't minimize the statement. Accept your child's feelings, listen to the reasons the child feels that way, and reassure the child of your love and care.

## A Challenge to You

1. With your children, read the verses listed above and talk about ways to put each verse into practice in everyday life.
2. Choose one or two of the above suggestions to implement immediately, and then gradually add other ideas.