

Social Skills & Making Friends: How Parents Can Help **by Nicole Imbraguglio, Psy.D.**

As the school year quickly approaches, some children may be nervous about making friends at school, especially if they will be starting a new school. The following tips can help your child feel more comfortable and confident in making friends.

1. **Help your child practice introducing themselves to someone they would like to get to know better.** Make sure to include important aspects of introductions like appropriate personal space, making eye contact, and smiling.
2. **Once your child has mastered his or her introduction, move on to chit chat topics.** Help your child brainstorm appropriate chit chat topics that can help start a conversation. Some examples include favorite television shows or activities your child likes to do with other children. Role play with your child, taking turns starting conversations until your child is able to start a conversation comfortably.
3. **Another helpful skill to learn when making friends is identifying emotions through facial expressions and body language.** This is important because it helps us accurately determine how to approach and talk to others. Let your child know that it is equally important to accurately portray how he or she is feeling so others know how to approach and talk to him or her as well. You can practice identifying emotions (make sure to include happy, mad, sad, and scared) with your child by asking him or her to guess how you or other family members are feeling based on facial expressions. Another great way to help your child become more aware of facial expressions is to stand with your child in front of a mirror and practice making various facial expressions with him or her. Help your child "perfect" his or her facial expressions and encourage your child to give you feedback on your facial expressions.