

# How to Handle Social Challenges

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I was painfully shy as kid. I cried every morning when my mom dropped me off at school during the first week of kindergarten. I cried when her face wasn't the first one I saw when school let out for the day. In fact, I was so leery of social interaction that I sat in my teacher's lap that year for school pictures! Thankfully, my parents have helped me through my timidity and I've come a long way from since I was in kindergarten! Here are a few lessons I have taught my own kids to help guide them through different social challenges.

## Help your child make friends

In an age where people are more isolated than ever, I try to help my kids develop a sense of connectedness with their classmates. During the first weeks of school, I would ask my kids who their friends are and try to arrange play dates with those friends. As parents came

along to the play date, I would also befriend the parents. Play dates at the park or at a home helps kids to learn social norms. The more comfortable kids are around friends in contexts outside of school, the more they learn to relate with others. If you have older kids, invite their friends over to your house and feed them a snack before they hang out. There's just something about food that brings people together and strengthens the bonds of friendship!

## Help your child to develop empathy

There are lots of good messages about accepting diversity, embracing differences, and being an upstander (an anti-bullying message). I'm all for teaching our kids to do what is right and to hold kids accountable when they wrong others. However, one valuable lesson to teach our kids is empathy. When we teach our kids to put themselves in the shoes of the other and try to understand their feelings, we teach our kids compassion. Compassion then leads to forgiveness. When kids forgive, they let go of their assumed right to be angry or to hold a grudge. This will help diffuse a variety of difficult situations your kids will face.

## Help your child express their feelings using their words

It is inevitable that your children will have conflicts. Rather than allowing them to express their frustration through anger or violence, teach kids to use "I feel" statements. Model open dialogue with your kids and keep communication positive between family members. The more

they see constructive conversation at home, they more they will use it to diffuse challenging situations with their classmates at school.

Whatever social challenges your kids may be facing, I wish you much patience and grace.

Jaime

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