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COMM-2110 Intro to Communication

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### **Creative Project Rationale: How Parents Can Help Their Children Make Friends**

Forming friendships is one of the most important parts of socialization in today's society. For my end-of-semester project, I wanted to do research about how friendships are formed and what we can do to form better friendships. In class, we talked about how friendships are organic and they grow gradually. There are also lots of different types of friends, from work friends to best friends, friends can range a lot in closeness and situation. The more casual friendships, like work friends and school friends, tend to grow because of the ease of maintenance- when people spend a lot of time in the same place with the same people, they tend to choose a few of their peers to be friends with to make their experience in that place more enjoyable. The more close friendships almost always grow from previously existing casual relationships. These friends, sometimes called "best friends" or the "inner circle" involve a higher level of effort to maintain, higher emotional intimacy, more diverse activities done together, last longer, and are more fulfilling.

In doing my research in this project, I found that the best way to learn how friendships are built is to watch how most people learn how to make friends, which is to say, watch how youth and adolescents figure it out- seeing what works and what doesn't. I found five articles that each talk about different strategies of researchers used to try to get people to make friends. Two

of them focused on young adults, two focused on adolescents, and one on elementary-school aged kids.

Put concisely, I chose to do my project about friendships because it is a topic that is incredibly relatable to me. Right now as an adult, I have a healthy close circle of friends, whom I love dearly and platonically. But that wasn't always the case growing up. When I was a child, I was enamored with the idea of having one BFF, or Best Friend Forever. I think that what I was really craving was a close friendship, however, life didn't really work out that way. I seemed to cycle out all of my friends in three years or less, depending on who was in my class and where I lived. For me at least, it seemed to take a while to figure out that friendships, like all relationships, take work, and what exactly that looks like.

Because I had a hard time learning how to have close friendships with people, I was interested to learn what kinds of lessons I could've learned as a kid that I ended up learning as an adult. What are some things that my parents could have taught me that would've helped me be more confident about my friendships or helped them grow stronger? How could I have been more outgoing or more likely to meet people like me? It is all of these questions that I am hoping to answer in this project, for my past self and for future generations.

My target audience for this project are the parents of the next generation. However, it is mostly for the benefit of the next generation themselves. I am hoping to make it easier for kids who are growing up right now or in the future to establish good connections as children so they can have healthy relationships as adults. Especially in this new age of children having more and more access to electronics, it is important for them to learn proper socialization and relationship building skills.

(how it is pulled from the research 2-3 pg) There are three main strategies that were most effective for adults to help their children make friends, effective for any stage of growing up: having honest conversations, teaching good communication skills, and putting them in good environments for building friendships.

Talking to your kids seems like such a simple thing, but it helps exponentially when it comes to helping kids make friends, in a variety of ways. Practice with everyday conversations help people practice having emotional intimacy. They can practice sharing their emotions with others and listening to how others feel. (Mueller 2022) They can also practice exercising trust and confidentiality- which means knowing what things are appropriate to share in what settings, knowing how to handle sensitive topics, being mindful about the effect their words have on others, and judging when and with whom it is appropriate to share their own sensitive information. This not only helps improve school culture, it also helps them have better friendships in their lives. (Schumacher 2014) By talking to your kids, you can also help them practise making judgments about other people- not to say that they should be judging people about what they do or how they act, but that they should be able to judge who is going to be a positive influence in their life and who is going to be a negative influence. You can be your kid's first friend, giving them a good reference point to the basics of how friendships work. You can also learn a lot about your kid by talking to them without judgement- such as what kind of hobbies or activities they're interested in, and what the other kids surrounding them are like. It's especially important to have regular conversations with your kids because doing so is the number one way to get them to tell you if they experience bullying or toxic behavior from their peers.

The next strategy is a bit trickier than just having conversations with your kid, but it goes hand in hand with it. Teaching your kids good communication skills is helpful for friend making

especially in the early stages of childhood. A few things you can teach them include listening and comprehension- which is great for making their friends feel heard and validated; and the rule of reciprocity, otherwise known as the “Golden Rule”: if something does something nice for you, do something nice back, or inversely, only do to others what you would like done back to you. (Searcy 1994) These two skills are among the foundation of every good friendship, along with many others that you can teach and practice. Good communication skills is something that we continually learn throughout life, even as we grow into adulthood. Some skills that are not often mentioned but still super helpful for adolescents and even adults to learn include starting conversations with new people and the skill of hosting events/ guests. (Gardner 2015) Many skills come with practice, such as learning to speak respectfully, even when you disagree, speaking your truth / standing up for yourself, and trusting others. (Schumacher 2014) Good communication has been proven to improve confidence about talking to new people (Gardner 2015) and improves the quality of friendships throughout life. (Stuermer 2018)

The last strategy I’d like to discuss is putting your kids in the best environment for them to get along with their peers and make friends. Especially for younger children with less autonomy, it is very important to put them in spaces around other kids to help them socialize, whether that be school, or daycare, or playgrounds, or a program of some sort. (Searcy 1994) People of any age are always more likely to connect to others that are similar to themselves, and that especially holds true for children. For example, girls are much more likely to be friends with other girls, and the same goes for people with similar cultural background. For preteens and up, the best friendships grow from people who have similar interests, so it is best to make an effort to put your kid in clubs or activities that they are genuinely interested in, or try to connect them

to other kids with similar interests. (Stuermer 2018) If you're talking to your kid regularly, finding out what they're interested in shouldn't be too difficult.

The last thing to remember is that friendships take time to grow. Every friendship goes through some variation of these stages: Peers, Acquaintances, Situational Friends, Normal Friends, Close Friends, and Falling Out. (Wrench 2020) The longer your child can be around their friends and interact with them, the better and more fulfilling those friendships will turn out.

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