



## Friendships: Supporting Your Child's Social Journey

Friendship is an important and natural part of growing up; it allows children to socialise, learn about others, and build confidence. A good friend can become like family, offering a sense of belonging, comfort, and security beyond the home.

As parents, we often become anxious when our children struggle to make or maintain friendships. We may even feel the urge to step in, arrange playdates, or encourage specific friendships out of fear that our children will feel lonely or left out. While this comes from a place of love, it's important to remember that friendships are a personal journey that children must learn to navigate on their own.

### Allow Your Child to Navigate Friendship Naturally

Part of growing up is discovering who we are and what kind of people we enjoy spending time with. As children grow, their friendships may change, and that's perfectly normal. Changing friendship groups or "besties" is part of learning about compatibility, trust, and shared values.

When parents try to force friendships, children may feel pressured to stay in relationships that aren't healthy or fulfilling. In some cases, this can even lead to dependency on peers who may not have their best interests at heart. Similarly, the child being "pushed" into a friendship might respond with unkindness or exclusion in order to create distance.

### Teach Healthy Independence

While friendship is about connection, loyalty, and belonging, it should not define a child's entire identity. Sometimes, we unintentionally place our child's happiness in the hands of another child, and when that friend disappoints or moves on, our own child is left feeling lost or rejected. It's important to remember that children are still learning emotional maturity. They are not ready to carry the emotional wellbeing of another person, nor should their self-worth depend on the opinions of their peers.

### Be Your Child's Secure Base

You are your child's most important and enduring connection. When a child feels loved, supported, and valued at home, the ups and downs of friendship are less likely to harm their self-esteem. Encourage self-confidence and resilience by:

- **Affirming their worth:** Remind your child that their value comes from who they are, not what others think of them.

- **Promoting independence:** Help them understand that it's okay to be alone sometimes, solitude can be healthy and restorative.
- **Normalising change:** Teach that friendships may drift apart as interests evolve, and that making new friends is part of growing up.

### Encourage Authenticity

Many children today feel pressure to conform or "fit in" with their peers, often hiding their true selves out of fear of being excluded. Some even remain silent in the face of bullying to protect their social standing. Talk openly with your child about the importance of standing up for what they believe in and staying true to who they are. Reassure them that real friends respect differences and value honesty. Teach them that it's okay to disagree, and that being unique is something to be proud of.

### Model Healthy Friendships

Children learn by observing the adults around them. When they see their parents maintaining strong, respectful, and reciprocal friendships, they understand what healthy relationships look like. Make time for your own friends, show kindness and loyalty, and speak positively about others. This helps your child internalise what genuine connection means.

### Practical Ways to Support Your Child's Friendships

If your child is struggling to make or keep friends, here are a few practical things you can do: encourage shared interests by helping your child join clubs, teams, or activities where they can meet peers with similar interests. Provide opportunities like casual gatherings, a movie night, a baking afternoon, or a picnic in the park. Staying connected with family and community can strengthen social skills in a safe setting. Create a welcoming home where your child's friends feel comfortable visiting and give them space to interact independently. Talk about what makes a good friend and how to handle conflict kindly. Lastly, if the friendship difficulties persist or affect your child's well-being, consider speaking with a school counsellor or therapist for professional advice.

### In Closing

Friendship should be a joyful and enriching part of life, not a source of pressure or pain. By nurturing your child's confidence, self-awareness, and emotional security, you help them form healthy, balanced friendships that enhance their happiness and growth.

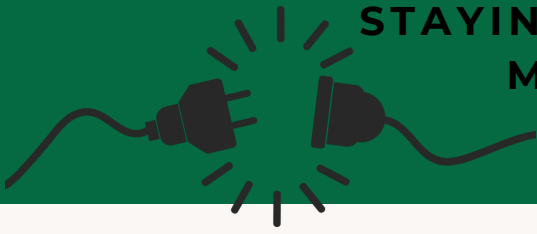
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### References and Additional information

<https://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/how-friendships-shape-your-childs-identity-a-parents-guide-to-peer-relationships/>  
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/behaviour/peers-friends-trends/teen-friendships>  
<https://www.familyeducation.com/kids/development/social/what-do-if-your-childs-friend-bad-influence>  
Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate - Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers. (BOOK)

# STAYING UNPLUGGED OVER THE HOLIDAYS: MUCH-NEEDED FAMILY TIME



As we approach the school holidays, many of us begin planning trips or looking forward to some much-needed time at home. This is a wonderful opportunity to slow down and truly reconnect with your child.

It's often easy to rely on the ever-present "nanny-iPad," but long periods of screen time are not ideal for children's developing brains. Here are some simple ways to encourage balance and meaningful connection during the holidays:

## 1. Create a Holiday Activity Plan

Draw up a plan with suggested activities your child can do instead of spending long hours on phones or in front of the TV. Include a mix of fun, creative, and relaxing ideas that the whole family can enjoy.

## 3. Get Outdoors!

Whether it's at the park, in the bush, or by the beach, spending time outside is essential. Go for a walk, ride bikes, or plan outdoor games. Fresh air and nature are great for everyone's wellbeing, especially growing minds.

## 5. Keep Talking

Open, healthy communication strengthens family bonds. Use mealtimes, car rides, or evening walks to talk and really listen to your children. Showing them that family time is enjoyable and that they are heard helps them feel secure and valued.



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## 2. Prioritise Family Time

Make time for shared activities such as playing board games, going out for dinner, or playing a family sport. These moments build connection, strengthen relationships, and bring joy away from everyday routines.

## 4. Set Healthy Screen Limits

Agree on specific screen-time limits, but allow your child to decide how and when to use that time. You can also create a balanced routine by linking screen time to responsibilities or active time, e.g., "After we tidy up or go for a walk, we can watch a movie together."

## 6. Model Unplugged Behaviour

Children learn by watching what we do. Let them see you relax, read, or simply enjoy being present without devices. This teaches them the importance of self-care, mindfulness, and connecting with loved ones.

## 7. Turn Experiences into Learning Moments

While on holiday, take advantage of your surroundings. Talk to your children about the history of the places you visit or share stories about what those places mean to you. These simple moments build trust and encourage curiosity. Remember, you are your child's first and most important teacher.

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## Reflecting on 2025: A Year of Growth and Collaboration



2025 marked a transformative and productive year for the Green Couch Student Wellness Centre, formerly known as the Counselling Department. The rebranding reflects our renewed commitment to creating a nurturing and inclusive environment where students can grow, heal, and thrive.

Throughout the year, our focus remained on promoting student wellness, strengthening safeguarding practices, and enhancing our physical spaces to better support our learners. Across the year, we facilitated a range of wellness talks across the Foundation, Intermediate, and High School phases. These sessions aimed to foster preventative education, build emotional resilience, and encourage learners to access counselling support proactively.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our staff and parents for their continued partnership with the Green Couch team. Together, we've worked to build a culture of care and understanding where student wellbeing is everyone's responsibility. The collaboration between teachers, parents, and the counselling team has played a vital role in ensuring that every learner feels seen, supported, and valued.

As we look ahead, the Green Couch Student Wellness Centre remains dedicated to a collective focus on wellbeing, where every child can flourish, emotionally, socially, and academically.

In closing, we would like to wish everyone a restful and joyous time over the December school holidays. May this season bring peace, connection, and renewal to all our families.

*Happy  
Holidays*

*from Chaland, Codelia, Francina, Mandi & Lerelle  
Your Green Couch Team*

