EP04: The Friendship Game

Here’s what you’ll find in this guide:

• ‘The Friendship Game’ Episode Notes
• Great Resources!
• Deeper Thinking Activity

As discussed in some of the previous episodes, children with autism often prefer to spend time alone and may have a difficult time making friends. They may lack some social and play skills to be able to participate in group activities, or know how to approach one of their peers so they can play together.

• Social skills include things such as:
  • Saying hello
  • Introducing oneself
  • Asking for help, turn taking
  • Sharing, and
  • Last but not least friendships.

These are just a few examples. Social skills also include being able to understand and do these behaviors when it’s appropriate such as being quiet in a library vs. loud cheering at a baseball game.

As mentioned, friendships are part of having social skills, but they don’t just happen. We have to put in a little bit of work to make friends. Friendships begin by finding things that all the children in the group enjoy so there is something they have in common. Such as watching a favorite TV show together. Remember that what is fun for one child (playing on an iPad) may not be for another (prefers to play board games).

Friends are people who we like, and like us back. A friendship means you look for the other person to:

• Talk to (e.g., Have you played with Bluebee pals yet?! I like Leo Lion the best! He’s my favorite. Who’s your favorite?)
• Play together (let’s play Connect Four! I bet I can win this time)
• Spend time with each other (Do you want to come to my birthday party this weekend?)
Tips to give children about their autistic peers:

- Take the time to include your autistic friend in group activities. Remember, that they may not know how to ask but may really want to play.
- Don't ignore him/her. Encourage them to try new things even though they may be afraid. Many times children with autism don't like change because it makes them feel unsure.
- Be patient. It may take your autistic friend more time to answer back or participate. It doesn't mean they don't want to.
- Be respectful. Accept their differences the way we would do with any of our friends.
- Stand up for your friend with autism if you see someone bullying them. Let a teacher know if it's something you can't handle.
- Although friends don't have to have everything in common, having something in common can help to give us something to talk about and select an activity together.
- A great way of getting to know one another is by playing an ice breaker game - see activity in the link: http://bit.ly/my-fave-things

Another example of modeling the skill includes watching two friends play a game of Uno. “First watch how we play, and then you try.”
- Say “hi” when you see them, even if you're in a rush. It's nice when people say hello to us.
- Children with autism may need a prompt. It's a type of help that gives the child with autism the right answer. For example, if you asked how are you? And they didn't ask you “how are you?” back, you can say “why don't you ask me how I am?” They may also need help when playing a game. For example, when it's their turn you can prompt them by saying “it's your turn” so they know. You don't need to give them more help than what they need though. Remember, help doesn't mean doing things for them.
- Make sure to let your friend know when they've done something good; for example “high five” or “great job!” Everyone enjoys compliments!

Modeling Examples:

Model the appropriate skill so your friend with autism can learn by watching what to do. Many of us learn by watching others.

- Introducing yourself and then asking their name so they can greet you back. You can ask things such as, what’s your favorite class? What kind of music do you like? etc. This gives the child with autism an opportunity to start talking and ask those same questions back. Not only are you showing them how to have a conversation, but you will also be having a conversation!
Resources

Friendship Program Ideas

The Friendship Kit
Learn the steps one mom took to create a successful buddy program and lasting friendships for her son. Program was featured in People Magazine.

I’m Determined Project
http://www.imdetermined.org/
The I’m Determined project focuses on providing direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice self-determined behavior skills. This project facilitates youth, especially those with disabilities to undertake a measure of control in their lives, helping to set and steer the course rather than remaining the silent passenger.

Do-Si-Do with Autism Friendship Kit
Author and autistic Sarah Stup’s friendship kit based on her “Taylor the Turtle” children’s book.

Friends Like You. Friends Like Me.
http://bit.ly/you-me-friends
An educational initiative to educate children about autism and provide tools to facilitate friendships.

Books on Autism and Friendship

The Autism Acceptance Book
Activity book, conversation starter and educational tool to teach children about how things might feel for those with autism.

Lucy’s Amazing Friend
A children’s story about autism and friendship.

Are You My Friend?
http://www.raymondandsheila.com/
Making a new friend sounds like a great idea but it can also be kinda scary. Includes a guide for parents to help their kids with friendship skills and social and emotional learning.

Middle School Confidential
http://www.middleschoolconfidential.com/
Graphic novels on common stumbling blocks on the road to high school and beyond.

Middle School: The Stuff Nobody Tells You
Haley Moss, a young woman with Aspergers, helps others make friends and avoid the pitfalls of middle school.

Buddy Bench

Christian’s Buddy Bench Website
http://buddybench.org/
“The Buddy bench is a simple idea to eliminate loneliness and foster friendship on the playground. Let’s spread the message of inclusion and kindness!”
How do you make someone feel comfortable and initiate a friendship?

Objectives:

1. Students will learn social skills of welcoming others.
2. Students will role-play taking turns being the new student in the classroom.
3. Students will learn how common interests can be a good way to make a friend.

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- Describe a friend
- Define friendship
- List qualities they seek in a friend
- Describe how to treat a friend
- Find common interests

Essential Question:

A friend is... (Use printable worksheet on next page)
My Favorite... (Use printable worksheet on next page)
A Friend Is...

What is a friend?

What is friendship?

What do you want from a friend?

How do you treat a friend?
My Favorite...

Person

Animal

Toy

Food

Book

Activity

Game

Movie