

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL PRESENTS:

PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC

Special Thoughts on Raising Kids

Friends

There is nothing more saddening to a parent than hearing, “*Nobody likes me,*” or “*I don’t have any friends.*” And, most parents feel unsure about what to do when this sort of thing happens.

What does research say about childhood friendships? Studies have shown that children unable to build and maintain friendships often have serious mental health problems as adults.

Do not panic if your child does not have a lot of close friends! Everyone is different. Some of us need and have a lot of friends. Some of us need, and have, just one or two.

What is important is that a child has at least one same-age friend who gives them the feeling of being important and valued.

When should a parent be concerned? If a child has no friends, this is a problem. Also, if a child’s only friends are much older or much younger than the child, this is a concern. When children play only with much younger children, it’s a sign that the child lacks the skills or maturity to develop relationships with kids his or her own age. When friends are much older, the child may be learning things he or she shouldn’t – and may be being harmed by kids who enjoy the control they get from manipulating a younger child.

What can a parent do if their child is having problems making friends his or her own age? The first step is trying to understand why the problem exists. There are two general reasons kids have problems making friends. First, the child may simply lack the skills necessary for building friendships. What are these skills? Children need to know how to smile. They need to know how to introduce themselves in a friendly way. They need to know how to share. They need to know how to compliment others. They need to know how to joke and be silly when it’s appropriate. The best way to teach these skills is modeling them and having brief discussions with your children about their importance.

The second general reason children have trouble making and keeping friends has more to do with how the child feels about himself, and the world. When a child feels poorly about self, angry at the world, depressed, anxious, or fearful, it’s obviously quite difficult for them to learn and use friendship skills. What’s the solution here? Children who hurt in this way need someone who can listen and care. They also need someone with the training and expertise necessary for helping them overcome these emotional obstacles. If your child is too angry, anxious, or depressed to make friends, please take the time to consult with a qualified mental health professional.

Childhood friendships are essential for a happy, healthy life.