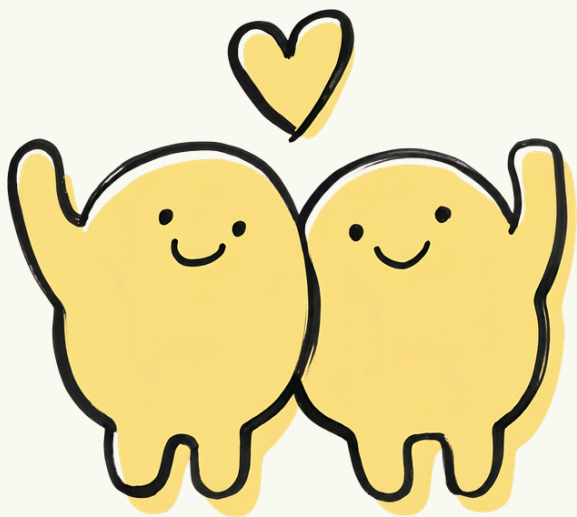


HI, LET'S BE FRIENDS!



A QUICK GUIDE TO **EARLY** **FRIENDSHIPS** AND **SOCIAL** **PLAY** IN TODDLERS



EARLY FRIENDSHIPS: WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT

From ages 1–3, your child is still learning basic social skills like sharing, cooperation, problem solving and self regulation.



Their friendships may look different but they are already learning how to enjoy being with others and form meaningful connections.

Playing alongside other children, even without much direct engagement, is already teaching your toddler how to exist with others. These early experiences lay the groundwork for **empathy, emotional intelligence and effective communication.**

PLAY: YOUR TODDLER'S FIRST SOCIAL LANGUAGE



Before toddlers have the words or emotional awareness to consciously build friendships, they use play as their primary outlet for exploring the world and people around them.



Toddler play follows a general timeline that evolves as they grow. and it is reflective of their cognitive and emotional development.

Note: Every child develops at their own pace. Some toddlers may move between these stages depending on the setting, their temperament and who they are playing with.

These are just general guidelines!



STAGES OF PLAY:



Unoccupied Play: Babies engage in sensory play, focusing on their own movements and taking the environment around them.

Solitary Play: Toddlers play alone, exploring their environment while developing their motor & cognitive abilities.

Onlooker Play: Toddlers observe other children playing, but may not necessarily join in or play in the same way.

Parallel Play: Toddlers play alongside one another, sometimes with similar toys but without direct engagement.

Associative Play: Children start to engage in play that involves more collaborative behaviours (sharing, turn taking etc.)

Cooperative Play: Children play while showing interest in both the activity and the other kids involved.



HELPING YOUR TODDLER BUILD THEIR SOCIAL SKILLS



There are many things that you can do to help prepare your child for social interactions during everyday playtime at home.

You are their first playmate! **Model** kindness, patience, and respectful communication when playing together.



Use phrases like:
"Now it's your turn!"
"Shall we share this and play together?"
"Thank you for sharing, that's very kind."



Use stuffed toys to **role play** scenarios where your toddler can act out sharing, caring behaviours in a comfortable environment.



Read picture books on sharing and making friends with your toddler; kids absorb a great deal of information through books!



GETTING PLAYDATE READY

TIPS ON MANAGING PLAYDATES AND KEEPING THEM FUN.

1

Timing: Keep them short and sweet (45 mins to an hour), and at the time of day when your toddler is the most settled.



2

Have the children's favourite snacks on hand to keep them contented throughout the playdate.



3

Allow your child to put away any toys they feel strongly about beforehand to reduce anxiety around sharing.



4

Stay close by to intervene quickly when and if necessary. If the children are playing calmly, just let them be.



Keep expectations realistic. Making friends is a skill and it will take some time for your toddler to get the hang of it! 😊

PLAYDATE ACTIVITY IDEAS

At this stage, it is likely that the best activities for toddlers are those that allow them to play alongside one another without pressure to share. Here are some ideas:



Simple arts & crafts,
painting, or
colouring



Building blocks: they
can use their own set
of blocks to build
their own things

Set up a few
different puzzle
sets for them to
choose and work on



Sensory play:
toddlers can
experiment with a
variety of different
textures alongside
each other



Playing with dolls
encourages
imaginative play



SOME TIPS AND THINGS TO REMEMBER

1

Try naming emotions during play:

"You look excited!"

"Your friend is sad because the toy broke."

2

It's normal for toddlers to grab toys, get frustrated or wander away during playdates. Stay calm and help them practise simple skills like taking turns and using words.

3

Friendships and social skills can grow through everyday interactions with siblings, cousins, neighbours and classmates too.