



Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust: Information for Families

Tourette syndrome and helping your child make friends

Making friends is an important part of growing up and an important skill to have. Some children find making friends harder than others – children with Tourette syndrome (TS) may find it particularly difficult. This information sheet contains suggestions for how you can help your child with TS make friends. It forms part of our information pack about TS for young people and families.

Finding friends

Your child can start to make friends when they come into contact with other children their own age. School is the usual place to find friends initially – this is particularly helpful if your child is at a local school but not impossible if they attend one further away. Talk to your child about their classmates and approach their parents about getting the children together.

Local activities, clubs and groups are also a good place to make friends. You may have started early in your child's life with toddler groups or play school but as your child gets older you may have to look further afield. If your child has a particular interest, for instance, nature and wildlife, see if you can find a children's club in your local area – your library will be a good place to start. Alternatively, look at age-group based activities, such as Scouts and Guides. Again, your local library will be able to give you details.

Getting ready to make friends

You may be worried that your child won't fit in or get on with other children – this is a normal worry for any parent, particularly if their child has TS. It can be helpful to talk to other children's parents or the group leader before introducing your child to the group. You could tell them the basics about TS and how you will be preparing your child for joining the group.

It can be helpful to set out some ground rules for your child too – especially if they have not had much experience of joining in and playing nicely. Explain the concept of 'taking turns' and sharing toys and activities. You could also talk about how to behave when other people are there. Some children may be nervous about going somewhere unfamiliar so you could get them ready for this by visiting a friend's house together a few times or showing them where the new activity will take place.



Keeping friendships going

After each play session or activity, talk to your child about how they feel it went. Ask them about particular bits they enjoyed and what they didn't like. You could also ask for feedback from the other child's parent or activity leader to get another view.

When you understand how the session went, you can use this to work with your child on things they find difficult. If they find sharing toys difficult, you could decide in advance of the play session which toys they don't want to share and hide these away in another room. It is important however to keep some toys for sharing – taking turns is an important life skill to learn.

If the session or activity went well, think about how you can build it in to your child's regular routine. If it is a weekly activity, make sure that your child isn't too tired by other activities to enjoy it fully. You may have to drop other activities to make time but this is fine. Play activities can be planned for every so often, sometimes at the other child's home and sometimes at yours – again this is important in learning to take turns.

Dealing with fall outs

Children will always fall out – usually over something trivial – but they need to learn how to deal with it ready for adult life. The key to this is helping them deal with fall outs on their own – with you in the background – rather than taking over yourself.

If your child is being teased, may be because they have TS or for other reasons, teach them how to defuse the situation. They could talk to the other child about their TS – see our information sheet Explaining your TS to other

people for ideas – or use humour to deflect the unwanted attention. Teaching your child a response to use when they are being singled out can be very helpful.

Some children will say that they want to stop doing an activity or seeing a particular friend rather than explain that they have fallen out. Before you take them out of the activity, try to find out why they want to stop. It could be that you could have a word with the activity leader or parent to solve the problem. Particularly during teenage years, children don't want to do anything that is 'uncool' – again find out why they think the activity is uncool.

Model being a good friend

It can be hard to help your child to make friends if you find this difficult yourself. If you feel too shy to speak to the parents of your child's friends, be brave and overcome this so you are setting a good example. It can be difficult to fit in your own activities with everyday life and all it demands but again it is a good idea to arrange some time with your friends so that your child sees this as a normal part of adult life.

For more information

The following book contains lots of helpful suggestions. If it is not available at your local public library you may be able to order it from another branch.

Frankel F (2010). Friends forever: how parents can help their kids make and keep good friends. Jossey Bass Publishers. ISBN 0 470 624 507