

Play dates, organized activities help children build friendships

Yvette:

My first-grader is very social and friendly and has been since she was a toddler. The problem is that she doesn't seem to have any best or close friendships. Is it OK that she doesn't have a best/close friend at this age, or should I be concerned? We live in a neighborhood where she is the only first-grade girl with three other boys. Initially, they played well together, but now she usually plays second fiddle to her male counterparts. This usually makes her very upset, and an adult must intervene and "force" fair play.

At school, she has a male and female friend with whom she spends recess. When questioned about her days, she's only had a "few" bad days without a playmate. She enjoys going to school and seems happy. I am wondering whether I should go out and scout girlfriends for her or leave the situation to resolve itself.

Vicki

Vicki:

I would suggest involving your daughter in activities that she enjoys. Joining a Girl Scout troop is a great way for her to be around other girls and engage in activities that may be more to her liking. Dance and soccer also help build friendships. Since she lives in a neighborhood full of boys, try scheduling play dates with school friends. Play dates will build relationships that carry over to the playground.

Yvette

Yvette:

My daughter just turned 4 years old and is unbelievably picky about her clothing. She will not wear anything with flowers. Her jeans have to be plain, and she refuses to wear any kind of sweater. She wears a plain jogging suit almost every day. Yuck!

She seems way too young to be so picky about what she wears, and I am tired of fighting with her about this. Is this normal for a child her age? Can you suggest a way for me to get her to wear some of the things on which I have already spent my hard-earned money?

Michelle

Michelle:

Your question made me smile. What parent hasn't been through a battle of wills with their child? I suggest that you choose your battles. Your daughter is trying to assert her independence. This is a good thing — as long as she does not become too rigid or restrictive. Dr. Nancy Cunningham, from Children's Behavioral Health, suggests that you

Families are encouraged to send their parenting questions concerning their children's challenging or difficult behavioral issues to Brown at columbusparent@thisweeknews.com or Columbus Parent, 670 Lakeview Plaza Blvd., Suite F, Worthington, OH 43085.

watch for signs as she grows older. If she appears to be rigid in other areas of her life, you should consult your pediatrician about whether her behavior is outside the norm. It is very likely that this is just a phase for your daughter. My advice: Let her wear her jogging suit. Kiss her every day, tell her you love her and instill the values that are really important for your family.

Yvette

Yvette:

I have a 22-month-old daughter who only accepts food from the commercial food jars that are purchased in the grocery store. We don't know what to do. We put the food that we prepare for her in the jar, but if she sees that her food isn't coming out of the jar, she refuses it. She does the same thing at daycare. Help!

Esmerina

Esmerina:

I referred your question to the Clinical Nutrition Department at Columbus Children's Hospital. Lynda Peel suggests putting the table food next to the jar food. Put a little of the jar food on the plate, and feed the child from both the plate and the jar. Let her watch you put the jar food on the plate and offer it to her. Gradually make the transition to table food once she becomes comfortable eating the jar food off of the plate. I suspect that your daughter is just being stubborn. However, if the problem continues, you can contact Children's Hospital for an evaluation by our feeding clinic at 614-760-1600 ext. 268. Best of luck.

Yvette

Yvette:

My son is 7 years old, and for some reason I think he has symptoms of ADD or ADHD. He is a very good boy who has received citizen of the month and honor roll achievements at school. Although I am very proud of him, there are some behavioral issues that I continue to deal with and wonder if they are normal or should be addressed.

My son has hyper tendencies at times, and his attention span is four on a scale of 10. He jumps from one conversation point to another in a manner that I often say, "OK, that's enough." He constantly is unable to fulfill direct

instructions because it seems as though he only hears part of what's being said. I have observed this behavior for some time now and have struggled with how I discipline him and work through some of the issues I mentioned above. And when I speak with my family, they agree that he's hyper, but they think that he's just not listening. In the parent-teacher conference, his teacher expressed her concern over my son "zoning out" in class. As a mother, I would like to know if my concern warrants a professional evaluation?

Nikki

Nikki:

The behavior that you describe sounds normal for a 7-year-old little boy. Many 7-year-olds are nonstop energy. They also talk a lot and change subjects frequently. I am hesitant to label children. Before you head off to the doctor, try these techniques. If they don't work, then talk with your pediatrician and ask for his or her guidance.

- Make sure that your son has a structured routine that includes regular bedtimes (even on the weekends, but the time can be later) and regular meal times (limit sugary foods, particularly for breakfast) A good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast should help with his concentration at school.

- When asking your son to do something, give him one task at a time. If you want him to clean his room, say to him, "I need you to put your dirty clothes in the hamper." After he has done that, say, "I need you to make your bed." Making the task simple and easy for him to remember ensures the greatest opportunity for success.

- When speaking to your son, stop what you are doing and look directly at him. Be at his eye level, and speak in a normal tone of voice. Be clear on what you want him to do, and ask him to repeat it back to you so you're sure that he understands.

- Allow adequate playtime to burn off some of his energy.

- Finally, when disciplining your son, the key is consistency, and the discipline must fit the behavior. Be clear with him on your expectations in relation to his behavior and what the consequences will be if he misbehaves. And follow through every time. Discipline should be progressive until the behavior you are trying to correct ceases. All children are different, and just because a child has a lot of energy and personality doesn't mean he is ADD. He just may be rambunctious.

Yvette



Yvette McGee Brown is a former Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court Judge. She is currently the president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Columbus Children's Hospital.