



Fitting In

It can be heartbreaking if your child doesn't get invited to a classmate's birthday party, isn't chosen for the lead role in the play, or sits alone at recess. Though it's not easy being left out, how you help them deal with it can make all the difference in the world.

So what can you do? First of all, acknowledge their feelings and assure them that they are loved and supported at home.

Consider whether social skills need to be taught and/or reinforced to help her make connections with her peers. Help her identify her strengths. Suggest she joins a team or club that interests her. Let her know that in time she will find her niche.

Encourage her to stop trying to be part of the "in crowd," but rather take the initiative to make friendships with other children. Undoubtedly, there are many kids who may feel the same way she does. She will feel empowered by being an active participant in her own world.

Being the new kid in school is never easy. But it does give your child a wonderful opportunity to start out with a clean slate. If he was left out, ignored or bullied before, that's unknown history at a new school.

Reassure him that it takes time to meet new kids. Remind him that his new classmates may have been friends with one another for quite a while, and at first may not be too open to a new person joining in.

One way kids learn to cope in a new situation is by relying on their strengths. So remind your child of his talents. "You made friends back home whenever you played basketball. The kids saw how good you were and wanted to be on the team with you."

If your child has special needs let her know it's okay to be different. Of course, she probably doesn't feel that way. But you can put a positive spin on it with your actions.

Don't isolate her from interactions with other children. While you may want to help her avoid being teased, or fear that being treated differently will hurt her, preventing social connections will only hinder her.

This doesn't mean to keep her in a negative situation where teasing or unfair treatment is occurring, but to let her know there are friendly and accepting environments where she can play, have fun, and express herself with other children.

When your child has food allergies it's hard not to stand out. The social aspect of food allergies can't be ignored, because food is a key element of almost every celebration. Check in advance if food is being served to see if there are options for your child.



You can help by arming your child with the tools he needs. Make sure he knows what he can and can't eat. Remind him not to trade food with others. Provide him with safe snacks. Make sure he (or a supervising adult) knows what to do if he has an allergic reaction. Most of all make him as feel as comfortable as possible about the situation.

Ways to make friends:

- Make the first move.
- Be positive and friendly.
- Be yourself.
- Don't forget to smile.
- Be a good listener.
- Be sincere.
- Shake off rejection.
- Remember that there's a "U" in unique.

How you can help your child:

- Acknowledge his feelings.
- Be reassuring.
- Identify his strengths.
- Keep communication open. Even if he won't talk to you—keep talking. "Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable?" "Do the kids wear or have anything different from the kids back home? Do you need anything?" "Would you like me to talk to your teacher?"

Tips:

- **Tips to Help Your Child Fit In.** Is your child not included in activities or invited to play games at recess? If so, here are some ways you can help them.
- **Acknowledge your child's concerns.** Let her know and understand that what she is going through is hard for her and that you will do whatever you can to help. Suggest searching the Internet or finding a book together that might be useful. Or set up a meeting with her school guidance counselor or teacher.
- **Reassure your child.** If your child comes to you to talk about not fitting in or being picked on, be comforting and supportive. Help him develop the tools he needs to learn social skills and read social situations. Let him know that many children have experienced similar feelings or situations and try to help him come up with some tangible solutions.
- **Be your child's coach and teacher.** As a coach, you need to reinforce and remind her of the skills she already has. Meanwhile, just like a teacher, help her identify and develop the skills she needs to solve an individual problem. This will help your child identify and solve her problems, because you're giving her the tools that will serve her for the rest of her life.



- **Look for new social outlets for your child.** Sign him up for a team or activity such as an art or dance class outside of his school, and observe whether he experiences some of the same patterns of isolation, social withdrawal or exclusion with a new group of children. If so, as objectively as you can, try to determine whether others are excluding your kid because of any socially unacceptable behavior, or other things that might discourage friendships from forming.
- **Get involved.** Consider volunteering or helping out in her class. That will allow you to observe interactions between the other children. Seeing what the kids most enjoy, talk about, or play can give you enough information to help your daughter better fit in

Helpful Links:

- Helping Your Child Fit into the New Social Scene:
 - <http://www.familiesonlinemagazine.com/kids-fit-in.html>
- Help Your Kids Fit:
 - http://www.relocation.com/library/family_moving/help_kids_fit_in.html
- When Your Child Says, "I Don't Fit In.:"
 - <http://www.empoweringparents.com/When-Your-Child-Says-I-Dont-Fit-In.php>
- Helping the Child Who Doesn't Fit In:
 - <http://www.childrensdisabilities.info/books/bkhelpingthechild.html>
- *How Kids Make Friends: Secrets for Making Lots of Friends, No Matter How Shy You Are* (book):
 - <http://www.amazon.com/How-Kids-Make-Friends-Secrets/dp/0963815210>