I f you’re like most people, you wake up each morning and go to work for more than just a paycheck. You work to fulfill personal goals, to demonstrate responsibility to your children, to be challenged and to add balance to your life. Balance includes having relationships at work with people you can depend upon for personal and professional support. Hopefully, you have a best friend at work – and if you’re lucky, you have a number of work relationships that provide both support and friendship. According to experts, employees report higher job satisfaction when they feel an opportunity to develop a friendship at work. Establishing work relationships also increases an employee’s sense of involvement with the job – thus boosting their commitment to the employer. But it’s important to remember that nurturing relationships does take work and mutual respect. And relationships are, by their nature, deep and complex. How can you develop friendships at work when you have so many other pressing obligations in your life? And, how close should you get to a colleague? The following list may help you develop and nurture work relationships.

- **Be trustworthy.** One way to hurt a relationship is to break a person’s trust. Avoid lying to or gossiping about a colleague.
- **Be a friend.** In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.” Open the lines of communication by listening and being supportive. Remember to respect each person’s point of view – even if it differs from your own.
- **Treat your colleagues with respect.** No matter what title a person holds within your organization, all colleagues deserve respect. If you believe this and act upon it daily, you’ll attract and nurture strong alliances and relationships.
- **Keep your promises.** If you say you’ll do something, do it. Whether it’s a project deadline or a personal lunch, make it a priority to fulfill your promises.
- **Resolve conflicts.** While it’s normal to have disagreements with colleagues at times, it’s important to deal with issues. If dealt with constructively, conflicts and their resolutions can enrich relationships. Be open to discussion. Avoid letting hurt feelings or issues fester. Problems may be difficult to resolve without open, honest communication.
- **Spend quality time with your colleagues.** Time is the fertilizer that helps relationships flourish. Try to make it a priority to spend time with your colleagues. Without regular interaction, it’s difficult to provide or receive the support necessary to nurture the relationship. When it comes to close relationships, you get what you give.
- **Set boundaries.** According to Dr. Jan Yager, author of *Business Protocol*, casual – not close – friendships are preferable in business. Casual relationships tend to be safe, but carefully managed close ones also can be rewarding. When developing a relationship, discuss how your friendship coincides with your work relationship and develop distinct boundaries.
- **Use common sense.** While at work, try to make it a practice to keep discussions within close relationships professional and non-threatening to other colleagues. Be discreet about your friends’ confidences and think carefully about the types of information you choose to divulge. If you think that a relationship puts you or the other party in a compromising position on the job, talk about it and remove yourself from any situation that may involve a conflict of interest.

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You've Got a Friend
In addition to being enjoyable, healthy relationships also can have a profound impact on your career. A friend on the job can provide feedback on your performance or act as a sounding board. Relationships at work can make a job more enjoyable by helping to enhance creativity and productivity. In addition, many people get new job opportunities within the company as a result of relationships — and some companies reward employees for referring friends for employment.

With Friends Like That, Who Needs Enemies?
Although we treasure relationships when they are good, how we deal with relationships that fizzle also is important. Before conflicts arise, basic proactive ground rules help to protect relationships with colleagues:

• Be honest
• Admit your mistakes
• Refrain from blaming or shaming

When relationships become strained or distant, knowing when to redefine the relationship and move forward on a new level is key. Although a close personal bond may no longer exist, it’s possible to form an amiable business relationship with the colleague by communicating and setting parameters.

No matter whether your child is starting the first day of kindergarten, or returning to school for sophomore year, making (and keeping) friends is one of the most important aspects of the school experience.

Although academic progress is vital, socialization and relationships are key factors in your child’s development. Friends provide children with opportunities to spread their wings and develop a sense of self with their peers. Kids with friends at school tend to enjoy going to school and participate in school activities.

Listen and ask questions. Even though children may find it difficult to talk about complex issues like relationships, you can learn a lot through observation — especially during the formative elementary and middle school years.

The following are ways parents can remain involved:

• Get connected. Know your child’s friends. Give your child opportunities to tell you about their friends to get a feel for the type of person your child is drawn to. Be involved in your child’s activities at school and watch them interact with their friends and classmates
• Ask teachers about your child’s social relationships, as well as academic progress, during parent-teacher conferences
• If your child is having trouble making friends, encourage him or her to get involved in activities or clubs.

Friendships are born among individuals who share common interests.

How You Can Help Your Child Make (and Keep) Friends

• Spend as much time listening as you do talking
• Put yourself in the other person’s shoes

If your child is having trouble keeping friends, play with your child and observe his or her behavior — this is the best way to find out what kind of playmate he or she is.

Teach conflict resolution. When friendships fizzle, don’t automatically blame the other child. Talk with your child about steps he or she can take to become a better friend. Explain to your child that he or she will encounter difficult people. And although it’s impossible to get along with everyone all of the time, help your child learn to deal with difficult people.

Nurture positive self talk. Highlight your child’s successes and help him or her to be confident and to draw on unique talents to build greater self worth. Challenge children to maintain a hopeful outlook by pointing out their strengths.

The observation and interaction doesn’t stop after middle school. During high school, when the friendship process becomes more selective, it’s even more important for you remain observant and involved. For teens, when hardships arise, remind him or her to look at ways they’ve previously overcome problems. Help them keep things in perspective by encouraging them to look to the future, beyond the current situation. Teach them to pay attention to the negative messages they, or others, are saying and flip these messages to a more positive outlook.

With a little guidance and a watchful eye, you can help your child build and maintain healthy, lasting relationships — which, with a little luck, will last a lifetime.

Resources:

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<th>Friends in School by</th>
<th>How to Make Friends and Influence People</th>
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<td>Robert Needham, M.D., F.A.A.P.</td>
<td>from PageWise, Inc. by Michael Pollick</td>
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For additional resources and assistance, see the Employee Assistance Program Web site at www.mutualofomaha.com/ea or call an Employee Assistance Program representative at 1-800-316-2796.