

# BAMBI

SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN BANGKOK SINCE 1982

**WHAT SIBLING  
BONDS TEACH  
ABOUT FRIENDSHIP**

**FIRST FRIENDS**

**DISTANCE MAKES THE HEART  
GROW FONDER**

JULY-AUGUST 2025

Cover photo by Jana Capek

A project of Childbirth and Breastfeeding Foundation of Thailand



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- Mel Habanananda



We are a group offering support and companionship to families through the early years of parenting.

We offer prenatal and postnatal support, regular playgroups, fundraising for charities and more. If you wish to join, come to our New Members' Coffee Morning or any other regular BAMBI activities. To volunteer or serve on the committee, email [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org) or visit [bambiweb.org](http://bambiweb.org).

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The CBFT is a non-profit networking and resource center dedicated to ensuring the best possible start in life for our babies. We believe that this can best be achieved through:

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- Supporting parents through the pregnancy, birth and postnatal period.

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in the magazine?*



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SCAN TO APPLY



Hello BAMBI members,

I hope you're all doing great and have been refreshed by the summer break!

I spent the summer with three groups of friends. After my beloved family, my friends are the most vital part of my life, and now my son's life too. I'm so grateful for the people I've got to meet in my life. When I was a child I made so many friends, and when I grew up, I got to know so many incredible people too. Some of these became my best friends, and now our children are also friends.

This month's issue is all about friendship and has reminded me to think about all the wonderful friends in my life. I believe that the law of attraction brought us together. We have a lot of common interests that drew us to each other and keep us together now.

Four years ago, I joined BAMBI to volunteer and make friends for my son and also myself. I'm still volunteering and making friends now, and I get the chance to work with so many amazing mothers. We all have the same love for our children, and we share so many of the same values.

Sometimes being a mom can feel hard, but I try to remember this: you don't have to build the perfect world for your child, but you can build a world with comfort and support from the beautiful friends you surround yourself with.

Best wishes for a positive second half of the year.

Lynda Suchintabundid  
Executive Board Member







As the school year ends and I sit down to write this letter introducing our theme for the month, "The Art of Friendship", I can't help laughing at my own naivety in thinking that by now in my mid-thirties, I would have mastered the art of friendship. As a mother to two little girls with very different personalities and approaches to making friends, I often find myself trying to remember what worked for me when I was their age, and whether my friendships were ever as complicated as those of my expat children. Or am I, a parent of the modern age, so invested in my children's relationships and social well-being that I inadvertently make friendship more complex than it needs to be—projecting my own hopes, worries, and past experiences onto the connections they are still learning to navigate?

Friendships play a pivotal role in our lives, shaping our children's growth and enriching our journeys. They offer comfort, belonging, and a sense of identity, becoming the threads that weave us into the fabric of our communities. This issue celebrates the art of building connections—from childhood friendships to parental support networks. Turn the pages to explore how friendships evolve, how to nurture them, and the vital lessons they teach in creating a harmonious community.

In "First Friends: How Early Friendships Shape Emotional Development", Archana Yadav reminds us that kindness, support, and trust—the basic pillars of friendship—from the people they engage with in toddlerhood greatly influence our children's social interactions well into adulthood.

In "Building Bridges", Rachel Ofo shares how she teaches her daughter to create and nurture connections, embrace differences, and identify when it's OK to give space or let go of a friend. For more on the subject of letting go and how to help your child manage unhealthy friendships, check out Anatta Zarchi's insights on the subject in "Breaking Up With A Friend".

Natasha Duffin-Jones and Sonali Vongchusiri look into the impact of sibling bonds on children's abilities to navigate social interactions and connections outside their homes. In "What Sibling Bonds Teach About Friendship", Sonali explores how interactions between siblings provide a safe "practice ground" for children to develop essential relationship skills they'll carry into the wider world; in "Sibling Rivalry", Natasha shares the strategies she uses at home to help her children get along with each other and enjoy a more positive relationship.

"Balancing Screen Time With Soul Time" talks about teaching kids to form genuine person-to-person connections in today's digital world. Sheena Low brings expert insights on why parents play a vital role in modeling offline and online behaviour, and age-appropriate recommendations to achieve this.

Life as an expat certainly comes with its share of challenges, and perhaps the greatest of these is having to say goodbye to friends who move away. In "Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder", Joe Barker reflects on the imminent changes in his life from the relocation of a close expat friend, while Laurie Charusorn explains how she learned to manage the pain that comes with this in "Seven Tips to Help Cope With Being Left Behind".

In Readers' Corner, Kit Lang reviews "Best of Friends" by Kamila Shamsie and "Frog and Toad are Friends" by Arnold Lobel. The former is a beautiful story about two childhood best friends whose bond is tested as they grow up and life pulls them in different directions; the latter is a sweet and funny book for children about two best friends, Frog and Toad, who share adventures and help each other through all kinds of little problems.

The course of friendship is not always the easiest, but it's one that makes our journeys all the more meaningful. Whether we're a child starting at a new school, a new mom trying to survive one more sleepless night, or simply someone unwinding after a long day at work, we could all use the comfort of a friend. Here's to the connections that lift us up, the friendships that grow with us, and the simple joy of knowing we're not alone!

Sanam Rahman  
Editor



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BAMBI Committee, 2025

Want to have fun, work together with other great parents, brush up on your professional skills, and do something for the BAMBI community? This is your chance.

BAMBI is run by a group of lovely and dedicated volunteers, and from time to time, a number of critical roles need to be filled to ensure ongoing service to our members. BAMBI is a fun and welcoming community of like-minded parents trying to support and improve the parenting experience for all families in Bangkok. If you have some time and passion to spare, come and join us. To apply or if you have any questions about these volunteer opportunities, please email [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org), detailing which position(s) you are interested in. Please note that as per BAMBI's constitution, interested candidates are required to have an active membership at the time of applying.

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# FIRST FRIENDS: HOW EARLY FRIENDSHIPS SHAPE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kids are never too young to start learning to be kind. Archna shares how the gentle kindness her daughter received as a baby from her young cousin taught her how to be kind, gentle, and a good friend.

Photo courtesy of the author

## About the Author



Archna Yadav is an IT professional, a devoted follower of Lord Radha Krishna, and a proud parent to a spirited, delightfully unpredictable three-year-old daughter. A passionate nature lover, she finds joy in travel, spiritual exploration, and life's little adventures—always embracing new experiences with curiosity, gratitude, and a smile. Hare Krishna!





*Photo by cottonbro studio from Pexels*

When we think about friendships, we often picture schoolyards, birthday parties, or teenage heart-to-hearts. But the seeds of friendship are planted long before those milestones—sometimes even before children fully grasp language or understand what friendship means. For my daughter, the journey began within our family, with her very first friend: her cousin.

Watching her form that early bond opened my eyes to the quiet, profound ways children grow emotionally. It wasn't just about playing together—it was about how they treated each other, learned from each other, and built unspoken trust. Those early experiences shaped how my daughter empathized, connected, and eventually led in her own gentle way.

Through the years, from cousin cuddles to classroom friendships, I've seen firsthand how those first connections serve as a foundation for emotional development. And as a parent, it's been a gift to witness

how a child raised with empathy becomes someone who shares it freely.

It started so simply. My daughter was still finding her balance on her tiny feet, wobbling from chair to couch, still clinging to fingers for support. Her cousin, several years older, had long outgrown those early milestones and moved with the confident energy of a preschooler.

Despite their age gap, something beautiful happened. Her cousin didn't just tolerate the baby—she embraced her. She'd kneel down to her level, take her hand without being asked, guide her carefully across the room, or bring her toys that were safe and soft. Sometimes, she'd even help feed her or make space for her during family gatherings.

I didn't realize it at the time, but those small gestures were powerful. They showed my daughter what it felt like to be loved, protected, and included.

She was still too young to fully understand words like "sharing" or "kindness", but she didn't need to. She was feeling them and storing those feelings deep within her heart. These early emotional experiences were quietly shaping her capacity to connect and care.

A year or so later, a new baby joined our extended family—my cousin gave birth to a little girl. We often visited their home to meet the baby and spend time as a family. This time, my daughter was no longer the baby. She had grown, and now she had someone smaller than her to watch over.

To my amazement, she stepped into this new role with warmth and instinct. She'd sit near the baby's crib, sing songs in her soft, off-key toddler voice, and bring her little toys—ones she thought were fun or comforting. She would gently stroke the baby's head and alert us if she stirred in her sleep.

No one taught her to do that. She simply remembered what it felt like

to be cared for, and now she was mirroring it. That early example of kindness from her own cousin had already taken root, and she was passing it on in the only way she knew how—through love, attention, and imitation. It struck me how effortlessly children absorb emotional truths when they are lived, not lectured.

Time moved on, and soon my daughter started preschool. The change brought a mixture of excitement and anxiety for both of us. How would she adjust to a bigger world, one without the comfort of familiar faces and routines? Would she find her place?

It didn't take long to discover that she carried the spirit of those early friendships with her. Her teachers shared something that made my heart swell with quiet pride: "She always looks after the younger kids."

Whether it was holding hands with a nervous classmate, offering snacks, or helping someone who had dropped their crayons, she was showing up with the same empathy she had once received. It wasn't about being the loudest or most popular. It was about being present, noticing who needed help, and offering it with no expectation in return.

That feedback wasn't just a note on a report card. It was a reflection of the relationships she had built at home, the emotional language she had learned through experience. And now, in her own way, she was becoming a gentle leader—someone who others felt safe around, someone who could be trusted.

Reflecting on these years, I see more clearly than ever how deeply those early relationships have shaped my daughter's emotional compass. They weren't random moments or sweet coincidences. They were lessons—quiet, powerful, and lasting.

She became kind because she was treated with kindness. She became nurturing because she was nurtured. The emotional intelligence we often try to teach through books and lessons is often best learned through simple, human connection. And for children, those connections begin earlier than we realize.

Some of the most meaningful friendships don't start at school—they begin right at home. Whether it's with siblings, cousins, or even family friends, those early bonds become a rehearsal space for all future relationships. They teach children how to trust, how to give, how to receive, and how to lead with heart.

As parents, we sometimes feel pressure to structure everything: enroll them in classes, teach them manners, explain empathy. But sometimes, the best thing we can do is simply create opportunities to let them be around others who care, to let them observe kindness in action, to let them feel what it's like to belong.

When we do that, we give them more than just friendships—we give them a foundation. One that will help them navigate the world, not just with confidence but with compassion.



*Photo courtesy of the author*





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# BUILDING BRIDGES

Rachel reflects on the ways her friendships have changed over the years and on the lessons she's learned that she is now teaching to her daughter so that she can confidently build secure bridges of friendship.

Photo by Pavel Danilyuk from Pexels



## About the Author

Rachel Ofo moved from the US to Bangkok in 2016 and spent six and a half years there. She has a daughter, whom she loves dragging around on various adventures like hikes and fishing trips. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and trying new restaurants. She also enjoys being out in nature





Photo by zaid isaac from Pexels

**M**My daughter is a Nigerian-American-British girl who was born in Thailand, where she spent the first five years of her life. This meant those first, very important years were built on four very different cultures, beliefs, and experiences. On top of that, I began taking her to playgroups as a baby, so hearing conversations, instructions, and laughter in several different languages was normal. We even went to one playgroup where they spent about 30 minutes teaching the two-year-olds Mandarin. Now my daughter and I know how to say “thank you” if needed. Thanks to playgroups, playdates, religious services, and random bump-ins, my daughter had a very diverse roster of friends. Those closest to her were Malian-Swiss, Filipino, and Indian. All of our families were very different, but all of us had one common goal: fostering a strong friendship among the parents and the children.

### TOOLS FOR BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

Friendship is based on mutual interests, respect, and trust. I often repeat to my child, “You can’t force someone to be friends,” when she runs to me on the playground, upset that another child refused to play with her. Friendship means both parties have to be in agreement

about what they’re looking for in the relationship. With children, it’s as simple as liking dinosaurs and swings and wanting to play tag. However, adults require a bit more. Either way, the success of a friendship is based on this idea that we’re willing to be free with each other, while sharing ourselves with each other, and respecting each other, and trusting that those bits we’ve given will remain safe with the other person. Friendship means we love each other, even when we’re mad at each other. However, all of this doesn’t pop up like a new condo in the middle of the city. It takes time, energy, and a specific set of skills and tools.

I would argue that building bridges, boundaries, and support systems in the physical world is easier than building them in a relationship. The physical world is tangible, countable, and measurable, with a strict and unchangeable set of laws. However, with relationships, people and ideas change, and there’s a level of uncertainty, especially when people feel, learn, and understand differently. To build a solid friendship, one must not only understand oneself but also those around us. To set up and respect boundaries, we have to know what makes us tick and why. To put up a support system that will hold you,

even when you have no strength to hold yourself, is essential. Even as adults, our bridges sometimes falter, despite our years of experience. So how much more important is it to give our children the right tools to set up friendships that will withstand their ever-changing lives?

### EVOLVING FRIENDSHIPS

Throughout my life, I’ve made many friends, I’ve adjusted many friendships, and I’ve had friendships dwindle to a fond memory. One of the most important lessons I’ve learned is to give my energy to where there is life. Trying to rebuild a bridge that’s been burned is exhausting and futile. So through the years, I’ve had to learn when to let go. And for the friendships that have remained, understanding how to adjust to life changes has been beneficial. Moving to Thailand, getting married, and having a baby were examples of life changes that tested the friendships I had and paved the way for new ones. Even after returning to the US, many of the friends I met—both parents and nonparents—during my time in Thailand have remained thanks to our shared experiences and struggles. So we work to keep them going, even if our texts have reduced to a quick check-in every few months. These shared moments



*Photo by Stefano Oppo from corelens*

abroad are the extra bolt needed to hold those friendships together.

A way I've helped my daughter understand this concept is to simply remind her on a daily basis what makes a good friend. She recites, "Friends are kind. Friends don't force you to do things you don't want, nor do they make you feel bad about things you want to do." This has allowed her to know when to stay and repair a friendship and when to walk away. Like bridges, friendships must be maintained. But also like bridges, friendships may not be needed for where you're going in life at this moment. As friendships evolve and we change as people, we'll often find ourselves in new spaces, meaning there will be a new set of potential friends to meet. So, which tools do we give our children to help them navigate this without messing it up? You have to get your child exposed to different cultures and experiences.

### **APPRECIATING DIFFERENCES**

It was easy and such a blessing to be in Bangkok and teach my daughter about other cultures. We would take walks, try new restaurants, and run around parks. Through this and traveling, she had her fair share of cultural exposure. Within her first few years, she traveled to the US, Nigeria, the UK, Laos, and Malaysia. Even

when we weren't able to step out, there were fun and engaging shows she could learn from. One of her favorite shows growing up was Super Wings, where a little jet plane would fly around to other countries, learning about their culture. All this helped her with learning about different people, but I also had to reiterate proper etiquette when someone has a slightly different accent or likes an unfamiliar type of food.

Being polite about differences goes a long way in forming relationships. One rule I learned from a teacher was that if it's not something that can be fixed in 10 seconds, don't talk about it. The idea of this is to help children keep from hurting feelings. If there is a piece of spinach in someone's teeth, tell them because they can fix it. If their eyes sit differently than yours, we won't mention it because it's something that can't be changed, but also something that makes them uniquely them. As our children grow, develop, and understand social cues, we can then teach them about complimenting versus criticizing. Reiterating that there is nobody in this world who is exactly the same helps my daughter think before she talks.

### **MODELING FRIENDSHIP**

As parents, we have to be the

friends we want our children to be. This doesn't mean only befriending other adults. This means fostering the same respect and trust with our children. We are our child's first experience with friendship, so let's ensure we lay a strong foundation. It's one thing to tell our kids, "Go say hi. Go make friends", but it's another for them to actually see us being kind. I find myself chatting with children all the time at the park. Sometimes I even step outside to play with my daughter and her friends. That way, she understands the importance of being fair and kind to those around you, despite differences of culture, age, gender, and so on.

As much as I'd like to teach my daughter not to point out differences in others, it's not practical when it's clear that everyone around us is different. Everyone is wonderfully unique. Everyone has something beautiful to bring to the table. So yes, build those bridges to new cultures and set those boundaries for healthy relationships. Allow the beauty of friendship to enrich your child's life. Friendship is a deeply human desire that creates sense in a confusing world. Our ability to learn, love, and even let go adds to a more harmonious and understanding community. Bridges are two-way. So let's make good friends and be good friends.





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# BALANCING SCREEN TIME WITH SOUL TIME

Sheena interviewed Mila Devenport, founder of the Kigumi Group and an expert in digital literacy and character education, to get her advice on raising resilient and kind digital citizens. Here's what she had to say.

Photo by Mizuno K from Pexels

## About the Author

Sheena is a mother to three-year-old August, runs Super Fly Honey, a brand that makes technical activewear for pole dancers around the world, and dreams about writing children's books. After three years with a lot of yoga, deep friendships, purposeful retreats and IFS therapy, she realizes that becoming a mother is actually a superpower.







Photo by Ksenia Chernaya from Pexels

With screens as children's constant companions, how do we ensure our kids find "soul time" for genuine relationships? This concern grows as parents navigate childhood friendships in the digital age. For clarity, I consulted Mila Devenport of the Kigumi Group, a digital literacy and character education expert.

## REAL RELATIONSHIPS START OFFLINE

While many assume online interactions equal offline emotional connection, Mila explains that "sufficient psychological, child development, and neurological research shows us offline interactions have to precede online ones in terms of developing a child's literacy about what it means to have a meaningful relationship."

This is rooted in neurobiology. "We are still evolutionarily wired to respond meaningfully to eye contact and verbal communication with a caregiver from age zero. Technology like AI won't change that cognitive makeup." This principle underscores protecting space for offline connections.

## PARENTAL HABITS AND CONNECTION

Our digital habits deeply impact young children. Mila advises that when we're on our phones during

interactions, or averting our gaze, "children log that as disconnection." A fleeting glance isn't traumatic but consistent distraction is. If a child frequently sees a parent prioritizing a device, they make the assumption that they must be less important than whatever is on the phone and try high-risk behaviors to regain their parent's attention. A four-year-old might grab the phone or throw things. This distress signals that their environment needs adjusting. For digital-native parents, self-reflection on personal tech habits and core values is vital—not to induce guilt, but to foster awareness and understand our responsibility.

## A HEALTHY APPROACH

### Building the "inner fortress" (ages 0–6)

Preparing for a healthy digital life starts at birth.

#### Prioritize face-to-face, eye-to-eye:

A child's brain is "evolutionarily wired to develop empathy skills and interpersonal skills and secure attachment—through eye contact," says Mila. Specifically, this means present, engaged, direct eye contact—not just FaceTime.

"Frequently every day, make eye contact and have conversations." This isn't just directives like "clean up your room". Ask: "What did

you do when you got home from school?" "How was your day?" "Tell me what you enjoyed most about [activity]." Mila adds that this teaches children they are "valuable in and of themselves, without having to perform for you [...] or be liked on social media."

### The world is their—offline—

**oyster:** According to Mila, "every offline experience [...] is a learning experience. Prioritize a wide array of outdoor play that exposes [children] to sensory-diverse environments, [and] allow self-led, exploratory play [...] with an attentive caregiver." These experiences foster lifelong skills like exploration, problem-solving, and collaboration.

### Model the silent (and spoken)

**curriculum:** Children absorb our tech habits, so explain why your device use is necessary and how long it will take. For example "It's going to take me about three more minutes to finish this email, and then I'm going to come outside and play with you." Then, stick to it. Or, "I'm taking out my phone so we can schedule this playdate, and then I'm going to put it away." This teaches children that "technology is a tool that you are using to achieve a very specific purpose. It's not that you're hanging out with your technology, and the technology is not taking you away from real life."

## Navigating the digital stream (ages 6+)

In primary school, digital curiosity and desire for independence grow, so you need to have a plan.

**The family tech plan:** Mila advises all parents to create a family media use plan—not a static document, but “a cornerstone of all future conversations.” Start this early and frame it by asking: “How do we spend time as a family? What won’t we compromise on? How can tech facilitate our well-being?” Invite children to co-create these values.

**Not all screen time is equal:** Quality screen time matters, so research content. Use resources like Common Sense Media and look for evidence-based programs like Sesame Street, designed with child development experts. Avoid screens as default babysitters.

**Active engagement:** Discuss what they’re watching: “Hey, what did Bluey do?” or “That reminds me of something we read about yesterday!” If they’re watching kittens, ask, “What do you think the kittens are doing? What could they be feeling?” This active engagement “is actively developing [skills] the same way that you would do if you were reading a book [...], using the screen as a jumping-off point for meaningful interaction between you and the child,” says Mila.

**Red flags:** Mila reminds us of two pitfalls to avoid: “Don’t use screens as a reward [and] don’t use screens to defuse emotional tantrums.” Rewarding with screens creates unhealthy extrinsic motivation. Using them to stop tantrums teaches that screaming gets screen access, hindering self-regulation.

**Recognizing unhealthy balance and potential addiction:** By observing transitions you can see if there is a problem. A self-regulated child may have a brief, difficult screen transition but will rebalance and engage offline. Concerns arise if a child “repeatedly cannot make that transition after an extended amount of time and cannot self-regulate to find an interest in other real-life things.”

**Gaming addiction:** Schools report gaming addiction as a significant mental health issue from around age seven. Signs to watch out for include being unable to prioritize in-person relationships; losing sleep or skipping/refusing meals for games; and losing offline friendships or preferring solo gaming over interaction.

## THE PARENT’S ROLE: HUMILITY, CONVERSATION, AND CRITICAL THINKING

Parental humility is key in the digital age. “In terms of actual volume of knowledge about what’s going on online, we are way behind our teenagers, pre-teens, even our eight-year-olds,” continues Mila. This isn’t a failing but an opportunity for engagement. If your child wants to join a new platform, respond with curiosity, not a knee-jerk “no”. For example: “That’s interesting. Thanks for raising this—can you share more with me about what this platform is about and how your friends are using it?” This technique of inviting your child “to think critically and almost teach you [...] is going to build trust and communication [...] and it’s going to develop critical thinking for both of you.”



Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko from Pexels

## Danger: “it’s online so it’s not real”

A danger arises when children lacking offline empathy believe online actions have no real-world consequences. For instance, an eight-year-old cyberbullied a grieving classmate, believing, “But it’s online. It’s not real, right?” This underscores why early face-to-face interaction and empathy-building are non-negotiable. If children don’t grasp offline friendship and respect, they can’t apply these values online.

## A final word: the frontier is here

“We’re all at a frontier together,” Mila concludes. Parenting in the digital age is new, demanding we guide children while examining our own digital lives and values. The goal isn’t a perfect, rule-laden existence but fostering open conversations, critical thinking, and prioritizing genuine human connection. This empowers children not just to survive the digital age, but to shape it—and themselves—with integrity and heart.

## Resources

**A word of caution from Mila:** I would urge parents to stick to either licensed medical providers or government websites, because I’ve seen a few “parenting” websites popping up that are funded or co-owned by big tech companies, who are not really incentivized to tell the truth when it comes to the impact of devices on child development.

- Raising Children Network, Preschoolers: Media & Technology. [raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/media-technology](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/media-technology)
- Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital, Family Digital Wellness Guide. [digitalwellnesslab.org/family-digital-wellness-guide](https://digitalwellnesslab.org/family-digital-wellness-guide)
- Kigumi Group on Instagram. [instagram.com/kigumigroup/](https://www.instagram.com/kigumigroup/)



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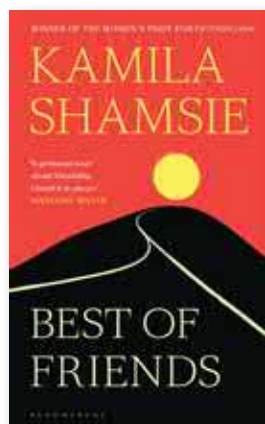
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### BEST OF FRIENDS

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Kamila Shamsie's "Best of Friends" explores the complexities of a lifelong friendship between Maryam and Zahra, set against the socio-political landscapes of 1980s Karachi and contemporary London. Their bond, rooted in shared experiences and contrasting backgrounds, faces trials that test its resilience over decades.



The narrative delves into the intricacies of female friendship, highlighting how personal growth and external influences shape relationships. As the characters mature, their paths diverge. Their differing careers and ethical dilemmas strain their connection, prompting reflections on loyalty and moral choices.

Shamsie masterfully intertwines personal narratives with broader societal themes, illustrating how friendships influence individual identities and decisions. The novel underscores the profound impact of early relationships on one's journey, emphasizing that friendships are not merely supportive but pivotal in shaping one's path and understanding of the world.

"Best of Friends" is a compelling exploration of how enduring bonds navigate the complexities of life, offering readers a nuanced perspective on the interplay between personal relationships and societal forces.

*From the acclaimed author of "Home Fire", "Best of Friends" by Kamila Shamsie was first published in 2022 by Riverhead Books. You can find a paperback copy in the non-fiction section of Neilson Hays Library.*

### FROG AND TOAD ARE FRIENDS

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*"Frog and Toad Are Friends" was first published by Harper & Row in 1970. You can find a hard copy in the Children's Corner of the library.*



Prepared by Kit Lang @mskitlang for Neilson Hays Library, Thailand's premier English-language library. The Children's Program offers Saturday Story Time, a cozy Children's Corner, and special holiday events. Adult programs include concerts, art exhibitions, book club, and book sales. The library is located in a beautiful historic building with a garden and cafe on site: 195 Surawong Road, Bangkok 10500, Thailand. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook.





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# SIBLING RIVALRY

Her children's arguments drove Natasha to research the importance of sibling relationships and seek out tips for helping them develop more positive ways of getting along. Here, she shares what she's learned.

Photo by PNW Production from Pexels



## About the Author

Natasha Duffin-Jones is a mother of two and an Early Years and Primary Teacher with a Masters Degree in Early Childhood. She is a Children's Yoga Teacher with her company, Story Time Yoga specialising in teaching yoga with children's stories developing literacy and emotional literacy. She likes visiting different places in Bangkok with her children and documenting their adventures on her Instagram page @bangkokmamayogi





Photo by Vika Glitter from Pexels

**M**My husband and I were always set on having two children. We both have siblings and value our relationships with them immensely, so when we began discussing starting a family, we knew we wanted that for our own children. I adore my brother and we're very close now, even across the continents, but it wasn't always like this. When we were growing up, we fought a lot over absolutely everything.

Just as we'd hoped, my husband and I had two of our own children, who are just 22 months apart. We (somehow!) made it through the baby and toddler stages and finally, they were old enough to play together. I was delighted—until the fighting started!

My children are still very young, so I want to give them the best start at developing a positive and productive relationship with one another. When they play together happily, it's the most wonderful thing I've ever witnessed and brings me unparalleled joy. However, when they hurt each other, it brings out a rage I didn't realize I could ever feel towards them!

Currently, the parts of the day they spend playing nicely together are unfortunately not that long—it

feels as if they're always wrestling, wanting the same toy, screaming at each other, or fighting for my attention. So I started wondering about how to promote positive sibling relationships.

In childhood, children spend even more time with their siblings than with their parents. As expats, we live far away from our extended family; therefore, having healthy relationships within our close family unit becomes even more vital. In fact, sibling relationships help develop life skills.

The many positive benefits of sibling relationships include building empathy and emotional development, enhancing social skills, and creating a lifelong support system. Furthermore, siblings play a key role in the development of children's minds, particularly their beliefs, emotional development, and self-belief. Unlike other relationships, they are a constant, and the one relationship that they cannot simply walk away from—unlike friendships. Therefore, children have to develop strategies and techniques to navigate them.

Conflict between siblings is actually healthy. Allowing siblings time and space to resolve their conflicts

without parents interfering is good for their long-term development, giving them skills to resolve conflicts with their friends. One method some parents use is to take a "sportscaster" approach to narrate their disagreements without getting involved, enabling children to resolve their own disagreements. I find this particularly difficult as I want to solve problems for them, but I know I need to sit back and support them in solving some disputes for themselves.

#### **FOUR STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE SIBLING BONDS**

##### **Avoid favoritism and comparisons:**

No favoritism or direct comparisons of siblings from parents or extended family is essential. Findings demonstrate that up to 85% of siblings believed that their parents had a favorite child (1). This perceived favoritism is the largest area of sibling conflict as children often feel they are being treated differently from their siblings. Fairness is hugely important to children, so it's vital not to compare them. If different rules are needed based on their ages, for example, then it helps to explain the reasons behind the difference and promote fairness over perceived equality. Additionally, when one child

achieves something, it's important to celebrate children's individual achievements as a family so everyone feels involved.

**Foster a team mentality:** Rather than pitting siblings against each other, for example, "Who can tidy up the toys the fastest?", create a team for the siblings so they have to work together. This reduces tension between them, creating a more harmonious life for everyone. Other ways parents can help to create a team environment is through shared activities including family dinners, joint projects, and planned shared outings. These kinds of activities help to create a bond between siblings.

**Praise positive interactions:** It's easy to turn to constant negative reinforcement of unwanted behavior, particularly if you have siblings who are constantly bickering. However, one of the simplest ways to support sibling relationships is to praise their positive interactions with each other. This might mean occasionally purposefully ignoring negative interactions and trying to focus on positive interactions only. Ways to do this are by praising turn-taking and complimenting children on following the family rules. This can really help in developing a positive mindset. Parents can praise siblings when they problem-solve independently or figure out a game together; then hopefully children will turn to positive interactions more and more.



Photo by cottonbro studio from Pexels

**Teach and model conflict resolution:** It's important parents take the time to teach children how to resolve conflicts, solve problems, take turns, and negotiate. Make sure there are clear boundaries and consequences, then use positive reinforcement when children observe the boundaries. Also ensuring that adults take the time to validate children's feelings, and teaching them how to articulate their feelings so they can express themselves in difficult moments, helps to aid conflict resolution.

My research has helped me find some areas to work on with my family. One change working for us at the moment is giving the children some one-on-one time with each parent. Now, this is obviously dependent on life and

work schedules. How it works for our family is my husband and I mostly split who cares for each child on a Saturday morning. This gives each of us some special one-on-one time with each of our children and time to form a relationship with them outside of the family unit, and it's also a break for the children from each other, which is really positive. They are excited to see one another after time apart, and their play is much more collaborative—at least for a short time!

While I'm committed to implementing these strategies, I also remind myself that sibling conflict is both normal and healthy. It will never disappear completely—and that's OK. But if you do discover a magic formula to end sibling rivalry forever, please let me know!

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# BREAKING UP WITH A FRIEND

While making friends is a vital skill for children, knowing what to do when friendships go wrong is just as important. Anna shares her guidance for helping children identify unhealthy friendships and how to move on from them.

Photo by Mary Taylor from Pexels



## About the Author

Anna works for New Counseling Service (NCS), an internationally recognized mental health center in Bangkok with a diverse team of licensed counselors. NCS has provided counseling services in Thailand and surrounding regions for over 20 years, with therapists specializing in a wide variety of issues such as anxiety, depression, work stress, relationships, and more.





Photo by Studio Germany

As children learn to navigate social relationships, friend trouble is almost unavoidable, whether on a small or large scale, and whether or not parents and teachers know about it. Sometimes, even children themselves might not realize that the dynamic of their friendship has taken a turn, which means they might not convey it. Teaching children early on about what healthy friendships look like can be crucial. This doesn't mean teaching them to be paranoid of everyone around them, but to know the balance between right and wrong, and how to handle such situations.

### COMMON FORMS OF TOXIC FRIENDSHIPS

NCS's children's counselor Savinee shares some of the most common forms of toxic friendships in her experience:

- Talking behind each other's backs. For example, telling different things to different people, causing conflict or misunderstanding. Having secrets between friends can be fun, but when done in this way, it often brings more harm than good.
- Telling other kids that they need to do certain things in order to be accepted as part of the group.

When I was in kindergarten, there was a group of girls that would only let you play with them if your favorite color was pink—which I lied about so that I could be included. And though friends shouldn't exclude you for something like that, sometimes children will go further and tell their peers to make fun of someone else or call them names as a condition of acceptance. Refusing to do so might mean that they themselves become a target.

- Bothering another kid and then telling a teacher that the other person started it. Here's an example: person A starts making fun of person B and calling them names, but when person B reacts in anger, person A runs to tell a teacher. The teacher, seeing that person B appears visibly angered, or that they shoved or pushed person A, automatically believes person A without asking for the other side of the story.

Unfortunately, many children tolerate these scenarios because they think this is normal or because they want to be included. Some get angry and push back, and unfortunately teachers may misunderstand this reaction as instigating conflict. When these

scenarios occur, the best thing for the child to do is tell their parents about it, take a step back from these friendships, and make new friends.

### IDENTIFYING TOXIC FRIENDSHIPS

It's important to proactively teach children to understand what a healthy friendship looks like—that way they can look out for themselves and are more likely to communicate it to you. Here are some good ways to do this:

- Ask them, "How do you feel when you're with this friend?" or "How does this friend make you feel?" Questions like this can be beneficial in helping children identify both healthy and unhealthy friendships. If your child says, "I feel happy when I'm with this friend," about one person and "This friend makes me feel nervous," about another, you might ask, "How do you think good friends should make us feel? Happy or nervous?" This helps children reflect on what it means to be a good friend, and to realize that they do not have to pursue or maintain friendships that have a negative impact.
- Help them associate healthy friendships with words like



Photo by Kampus Production from Pexels

“caring, sharing, nice, happy, supportive, respectful”, and unhealthy friendships with “mean, not nice, nervous, scared, unsure, and so on.” Young children are still learning how to identify their emotions, and guiding them into understanding which words correlate with which emotions can help them learn this. “Toxic” is a relatively difficult term often used by adults, so we would encourage you to use words that children are more familiar with.

- Teach them about boundaries. “Your friend pushed you to do this even though you didn’t want to, and now you feel bad about it. What can we do if this happens again? If this makes you feel bad, then do you think you should do it?” or “We don’t always have to do what others tell us, especially if it doesn’t feel right or hurts someone else.”
- Check in with them regularly. Being interested shows them that you are supportive and empowers them to make healthy decisions. Ask them how school is, what they’ve been doing with their friends, and so on. Other than bullying and exclusion, children might be encouraged to engage in bad behavior without understanding why this is bad. Checking in can help you become aware of such situations.

- Teach them that violence is not the answer. Some children may push, shove, or react in other physical ways toward someone that is making fun of them or trying to get a reaction out of them. Feeling angry is completely normal, but reacting physically is not OK. Instead of retaliating, you might suggest they go to their teacher instead.
- If you can sense that something is wrong, reassure them that it is safe to confide in you. Communication is essential in preventing further incidents. Many children are understandably afraid of telling a parent or teacher for fear of being bullied or left out. Understanding your child can be key to knowing how to approach the subject.

### **“BREAKING UP” WITH A FRIEND**

So how do you help your child break up with a friend? Counselor Savinee has some tips:

- Firstly, listen to your child without interruptions—let them feel heard and understood.
- Support them in building other friendships.
- Set boundaries by finding respectful ways to distance themselves from the toxic friend. For example, slowly reduce time

spent with said friend. Let them know they have a “choice” in playing with other classmates.

- While it might be tempting to address the issue with the other child’s parents, this approach can sometimes escalate the situation. It’s often more effective to focus on empowering your child to set boundaries and make decisions that prioritize their well-being.
- Parents should highlight to their child that this is not about them. It’s about different values and unhealthy behaviours. This is not happening because they are not good enough or because there is something wrong with them. Internalizing the idea that this is about them could lead to low self-esteem and anxiety.
- Help your child develop the confidence to express their feelings towards their friends, such as: “I feel sad when you make fun of my hair.”

### **THINKING OF THE FUTURE**

Like with many other childhood habits and circumstances, children who aren’t taught what healthy relationships look like might get stuck in toxic relationships when they’re older. If they’re used to unhealthy relationship dynamics, they may simply think that what they’re experiencing is normal. This can make them conflict-avoidant—they might be scared of setting boundaries, confrontation, or speaking up for themselves. “If you haven’t done these things as a child, then they become hard to do in adult relationships,” counselor Savinee says.

Sometimes children think they’re in this alone, but it’s up to parents and teachers alike to show them they’re not. You cannot be there to look out for your children all the time, but you can teach them to look out for themselves while checking in and observing from a distance, and to foster an environment where they feel safe to come to you for advice and help.



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# SEVEN TIPS TO HELP COPE WITH BEING LEFT BEHIND

An expat struggles when close friends leave. Laurie is a long-term expat who has said farewell to many friends. While the goodbyes don't get any easier, she has learned ways to manage when staying behind.

Photo by Marcus Aurelius from Pexels



## About the Author

Laurie is the mom of a spunky seven-year-old daughter and has made Bangkok her home for over 16 years. She loves her job as an admissions and marketing manager for Bangkok Prep International School, where she has been working since 2020. She is very lucky to have friends living all over the world as a direct result of being an expat in Bangkok.





*Photo by Ron Lach from Pexels*

**T**he first six months of my life in Thailand were hard, isolating, and lonely. I moved to Bangkok with my now Thai husband whom I met while in university. At first I was optimistic and excited to embark on a whole new adventure halfway across the world. But I had left behind the comfort and familiarity of a wonderful, large, and close-knit family, many friends, and a successful career in America. Culture shock is real.

During those early months, 95% of my days were lost in translation. I found that my Thai relationships, although wonderful, were tough at the same time. When in a group, even when fluent in English, most Thais still preferred to speak in Thai. I never worried about being the subject of gossip; it was much more about feeling left out because I couldn't connect on a deeper level. The same was true with my Thai colleagues at the office and with my in-laws at dinner time and during family outings.

And then I met Tasha. For those expats who have been here a while, I think many of us have a first friend who helped us come to grips with new surroundings, and figure out that being an expat isn't so bad after all. Tasha appeared like a beam of sunshine at the desk next

to mine and literally changed my life overnight.

I was able to talk to someone who not only spoke English natively, but also actually understood and could empathize with what I was feeling. She encouraged me to join a local netball team, and I had a social life again. I learned that I could explore the city, and successfully navigate Bangkok by myself. Tasha became my lifeline.

And, just like that, one year later, she moved on. I don't normally cry, but I cried. My Thai husband, although sympathetic, didn't quite grasp the extent of my sadness. I did not know how I was going to survive without her.

And then, another good friend leaves, and repeat.

Even though I still struggle when close friends leave, here are a few tips I can offer that have helped me cope with being left behind after more than 16 years in Thailand.

**1. Learn to embrace your emotions, work through them, and come through the other side stronger.**

A close friend leaving is hard. It can almost feel like a loss. Expat friendships are often extra special

because there is a sense of shared experiences that naturally creates a closeness for inside jokes, misunderstanding the local culture together, and crazy stories. It happens much faster than when you're at home because everyone is "in the same boat".

It's OK to cry. It's healthy to allow yourself to feel your emotions, to be upset, and to go through the grieving process. The trick is to go through the process and still come through the other side appreciating the friendship that you had, and have realistic expectations about the friendship that will continue. You will still be friends, just not in the same way.

**2. Say a proper goodbye.**

Make time for a farewell lunch, dinner, or coffee. Buy a small gift that means something to both of you, or write them a card. Tell them what their friendship means to you, and thank them for being a part of your life. Don't make promises you know you can't keep.

**3. Find some friends that have been and will be in Thailand for a long time.**

Seek out some core friendships with other people less likely to leave. I joined a group of other expat women who were also with Thai



Photo by RDNE Stock project from Pexels

partners. I connected with other expats who grew up in Bangkok or had strong connections to the country. This is not a guarantee—many long-timers do leave as well—you just mitigate the risk.

#### **4. Do not shut out the short-stayers.**

After Tasha left, for a few years, I gave in to the all-too-common reaction of shutting out new friends to avoid being hurt again. When introduced to someone new, after the normal pleasantries, my next question was always: “How long are you planning to stay in Bangkok?” Anything under five years, the person was an automatic out. But, I eventually learned this isn’t the way to go.

If you close yourself off, you are likely to be the one missing out. One of my closest but short-staying friends, Sophie, lived in the apartment building across the street, so it was super easy to pop by for a cuppa at each other’s houses. We had a lot in common and could spend hours discussing documentaries, books, family, and what we felt about the world. She provided a sounding board for me and truly kept me sane during a very difficult time in my life.

Besides, it’s fun being the person who “knows everything” already.

I had gone through all the initial struggles of where to find this or that, what to do in various situations, and I could help connect friends with other expats or resources that I already knew about.

#### **5. Take advantage of technology to stay in touch.**

The world is smaller than it’s ever been before. It’s now free to call and text via Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, LINE, or any other social media channel of choice. Take advantage of them! With time differences, plan ahead for convenient times to call or chat. Set reminders on your phone if you need to.

#### **6. Don’t get too upset or beat yourself up if you drift apart. And give grace to friends who’ve left and don’t stay in touch as much as you’d like.**

Life goes on, and it doesn’t stop for anyone. There’s something about being in the same city that creates a closeness that is just hard to replicate when you’re countries apart. In my experience, my closest friends are those who I can pick back up with no matter how long we’ve been apart.

#### **7. Remember, your kids will likely experience the same challenges within their own friendships.**

I work at Bangkok Prep International

School, and I see the revolving door of international families moving on every few years. For kids who grow up in an expat family, and especially if they attend international school, it’s nearly impossible to avoid making friends who will eventually leave.

I believe these tips also apply to kids, but they need your help to facilitate. Help them understand and work through their emotions. Talk to them and support them through the grieving process. Seek out long-term friends for yourself that have kids of similar age(s). This way, when classmates inevitably leave, they still have some stability. Coordinate with leaving friends’ parents to allow the children to stay in touch via technology, or even by becoming pen pals.

Living abroad is an amazing opportunity that opens so many doors, and allows for a chance to see the world from a bigger perspective. It also creates unique challenges that our friends and family back home may not truly appreciate or understand. Now that I have my own daughter to consider, I’m doing my best to take my own advice, help her through the loss of close friends, and establish some long-term friendships along the way.

Fellow mamas, we’ve got this!





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# DISTANCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER

This month, Joe laments as he bids adieu to a dear expat friend while also reflecting on parenting without a village of family and close friends nearby.

Photo by Mizuno K from Pexels



## About the Author

Joe and his wife Diane moved to Thailand in 2018. Since the arrival of their son Martin in 2021 and daughter Alice in 2024, Joe has been a stay-at-home father. The whole family enjoys BAMBI playgroups and Thai beach holidays.



Oh, woe is me! The normally lovely wife of my best Bangkok buddy has stabbed me in the back and accepted a job in Europe without any consideration for my feelings. It may be great for them: closer to home and better paid with a more relaxed and family-friendly lifestyle, but I call it downright selfish; doesn't she realise that I need Oliver in Bangkok? Who else will pop round for coffee when I need some help with childcare? Or take me climbing so that I can vent about the petty but oh-so-overwhelming trials and tribulations of my privileged parenting experience? Before this shocking betrayal, I could rely on Oliver to meet me and the kids in the park, where he'd let Marty chase him around and then happily chat over the shrieks of my attention-seeking monsters. Best of all he'd nod and say, "This age is tough; it gets easier," which was just the kind of reassurance I needed. To make this mammoth change without even so much as a consultation process seems wrong; surely I've a right to appeal to someone before the move can be finalized?

Oliver assures me that we'll still be friends and that he's only a phone call away, but frankly, what good is that? I've already got enough European-time-zone friends who I constantly fail to call. I don't need another person's messages to feel guilty about not replying to; nor do I need another friend who I plan to call when I wake up, only to find that by the time it's morning in Europe, childcare has eroded my energy and enthusiasm and the call is postponed until tomorrow—a tomorrow that in reality never actually comes.

## HOMEGROWN FRIENDS

I hope it comes as no surprise to learn that I have friends in the UK—friends who, given how I tend

to ignore them most of the time, may well be surprised to learn that I treasure them. They might also feel that if I really treasured them I would be nicer to them, perhaps by remembering their birthdays and giving them little gifts, rather than treating them to backhanded compliments and months of silence. When I moved to Bangkok, I knew I was terrible at keeping in touch with people. What I was shocked to discover was how much worse many of my friends were: if I didn't

send a message every six months or so, we'd probably never speak. Of course, I'm assuming this is because they're terrible at communicating and not simply that they're hoping I'll eventually learn to take a hint...

When I do manage to communicate with my UK friends, it invariably brings me a bittersweet joy. Joy as I delight in renewing our friendship, but sorrow at the distance between us. Parenthood has only strengthened these mixed feelings.



*Photo by idea photo from Pexels*



Photo by Alena Darmel from Pexels

I've lost count of the number of times I've sent despairing messages after a disastrous day of daddy duty, safe in the knowledge that they'll reach a sympathetic ear and that tomorrow I'll wake up to find messages reassuring me that parenting is tough and that today will go better. Reassurance that my children will start sleeping through the night, or stop biting or pooping on the floor or hitting each other. Until I asked some friends, I thought the nightmare that is brushing Marty's teeth was unusual, but apparently it's not uncommon to require two parents to hold down a wriggling, toothbrush-resistant child, nor to spend twenty minutes of sweat and tears for a measly twenty seconds of ineffectual brushing. Ours are not the only toothbrushes to have been hurled across bathrooms, nor are we the only parents to temporarily abandon toothbrushing in the interests of family harmony and the prospect of ever leaving the

house again. Being able to share my parenting problems with my friends has made me appreciate them even more.

But the bitterness to my joy comes from realizing that I don't get to parent with my friends. Much as I appreciate their messages, they are a very poor substitute for standing shoulder to shoulder with them at the swings or drinking coffee together while our children dig in sandpits and hit each other with sticks, just like we used to do.

### **BREAKING THE ICE**

When I arrived in Bangkok, I realized I needed to make new friends, but how to go about it? What I needed, I decided, was an icebreaker—something to get conversation started. After careful consideration, I thought, *Perhaps a child would help?* After all, parents are always chatting to each other at the playground, or going for

coffee, and sleep deprivation makes them much less discerning about who they'll talk to. Now obviously I didn't need my wife to point out that we weren't going to have children just to make new friends, but when, a few years later, I found myself with children, I thought, *Hurrah, at last I'll be able to make some new friends.* Alas, it turns out that my children aren't that helpful for making new friends. I may get chatting to parents at the playground, but any conversation is invariably curtailed by our children dragging us in opposite directions. If I do end up standing next to another parent while pushing Alice on a swing, her excited screaming is so loud that we're reduced to smiling and nodding at each other. Then, just as I'm plucking up the courage to suggest a playdate to my potential new friend, I'm dragged away to deal with a toilet emergency and by the time I return, they've snuck away.





*Photo courtesy of the author*

## FIRST FRIENDS

But you're not reading this to hear me whinging about the difficulties of making friends when you're naturally curmudgeonly and antisocial. You want to hear about Marty and Alice's friends. Given my un-predisposing nature, it is not unreasonable to fear that my children will prove similarly unskilled in the art of making friends. Certainly, Marty's reluctance to respond to the cheerful "hello"s of the local taxi drivers, and Alice's tendency to burst into tears whenever strangers smile at her, suggest they've inherited my social graces (or lack thereof). But despite this genetic hindrance, they've made a few friends.

The girls next door are a few years older than Marty, and they've been playing with him since he was a baby. Many an afternoon has been spent running and screaming around their apartment

block as they attempt to teach Marty some complicated new game. I can only assume the building is very well soundproofed, or we'd surely have long since been banned from the property. While the girls love Marty's visits and have been very tolerant of his loudness and reluctance to follow their instructions, Alice has quickly become their favorite guest as she totters up their driveway with a huge smile on her face, emitting slightly quieter shrieks of excitement.

If the girls next door are out, Marty and Alice love to visit the nearby building sites, and they've been adopted as mascots by most of the local builders. This means they've spent a lot of time clambering into diggers, exploring partially constructed houses, and whiling away the hours with buckets and spades in the builders sand. I'm not sure if their help is why the neighbor's house is three years

behind schedule, but the joyful time spent playing on the building site has been some compensation for the drilling and hammering we've been subjected to.

Whether they will prove as successful at making friends at school as they have been with the local stallholders and taxi drivers remains to be seen, but Marty can always be relied on to find a smile for any children who have exciting-looking toys he wants to play with, and Alice has learned well from her brother and will overcome her aversion to strangers if they offer her a high five. Meanwhile, I remain hopeful that once they start school, my children will finally help me make those new friends I've been searching for, and then Oliver's desertion will sting a little less.

*Here I am!*





# WHAT SIBLING BONDS TEACH ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

Sonali explains that while it may seem like siblings are constantly bickering, what they're actually doing is learning valuable lessons about friendship and sustaining relationships.



Photo by Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels



## About the Author

Sonali is a parent coach, speaker, and founder of Forward Together Parenting. She's been where you are with her own sensitive, strong-willed kids and has worked with thousands of parents worldwide. Her work is dedicated to sharing how you can confidently parent, have fun, and create lasting change that feels good.





Photo by Polesie Toys from Pexels

When you think of your own childhood, what do you remember most? For me, I think about playing in the area behind my childhood home with my siblings. I remember make-believe games with my sisters, and my older brother rough-housing with us when he returned home from college. I also think about meeting my childhood best friend in first grade. I was sitting on the steps outside our school; it was her first day, and I told her I liked her dolly. I think about how we were too loud in the library as teenagers, and stayed up late on the phone “studying” but actually gossiping.

What I’ve noticed is we tend to think of friendships and sibling relationships as two separate tracks. But the truth is, they’re deeply connected.

For many kids, siblings are a space where they practice relationship skills that will last a lifetime. Even when the sibling bond is rocky, it can still offer rich, hands-on lessons in what it means to be a good friend. Let’s explore how sibling dynamics shape the way children approach friendships outside the family.

### **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR BALANCED RELATIONSHIPS**

Playdates happen for a few hours. Even school-time is limited. And so children will often bend over backwards for their friends. They may say “yes” to things they don’t want to do, feel pressure to like a game just because their friend likes it, or struggle to tell their friends “no”.

But siblings—well, they’re around each other all the time, whether they like it or not. Which means that the pendulum swings the other way with siblings, and you may hear a lot of “no”s. The challenge is that often these “no”s are communicated harshly. You may hear: “That’s my shirt”, “Stop talking!”, “Don’t come into my room!” These are all “no”s and mean sibling relationships are naturally a great place to practice supporting your children to communicate “no” kindly.

This is important for friendships because the fear in saying “no” to friends for many children is that they’ll be thought of as mean, and that then their friends won’t want to be their friend anymore. Learning

kind “no”s and practicing them in sibling relationships gifts your child the security to communicate healthy “no”s to their friends. And we definitely want that for them now, so that they’ve internalized it by the time they are teenagers.

Healthy relationships include both “yes” and “no”, and children need to be able to communicate these in ways that are supportive of their relationships.

To do this, teach your child to balance a boundary (“no”) with empathy. A key to communicating kind “no”s is to share what is a “yes”. Here are two examples:

1. Instead of “That’s my car! Put it down!”, have your kids share what their sibling/friend can play with: “I’m not ready to share my car. Would you like to play with my truck or this ball?”
2. Tell their sibling/friend when they can do the thing, so that the “no” now contains a “yes” for later. For example, my daughter’s friends sometimes want to play with her when she needs a moment of quiet at school. She can say: “Thank you for asking

me. Right now I'm going to read and I'd really like to play during our next break."

### **CONFLICT WITH SIBLINGS TEACHES REPAIR—AND THAT FRIENDSHIPS CAN SURVIVE HARD MOMENTS**

One of the hardest things about friendship for kids is what to do when things go wrong. A friend says something mean. A game turns unfair. Someone stops inviting you to play.

Many children feel overwhelmed by conflict and don't know how to respond. Some shut down. Others lash out. Or they may even abandon the friendship altogether. But kids who've experienced—and worked through—conflict with siblings often have an edge.

Why? Because they've learned that relationships can weather rough patches.

Ask any parent of more than one child—sibling fights are inevitable. But because they still live in the same house, they still sit across from each other at dinner, and the situation nudges them toward repair.

And this pattern of rupture and repair is incredibly important.

It teaches kids that a relationship doesn't have to be perfect to be worth holding onto. That people can mess up and make it right. That apologies, forgiveness, and trying again are all important parts of any relationship.

These are the exact tools kids need to sustain deep, lasting friendships. Repair teaches kids not only how to connect but how to also reconnect.

One of my favorite tools to share with parents about repair is to move from forcing an apology to inviting repair—giving kids the chance to connect genuinely, rather than just saying words they don't mean.

Support them first in realizing something has gone wrong with a friend/sibling and that neither they nor the other child wanted it to go that way. Then, a simple "Is there anything you'd like to do to make things right?" can go a long way.

### **SIBLING INTERACTION TEACHES KIDS THAT THEY IMPACT EACH OTHER**

One of the most powerful things siblings learn from each other—often without anyone explicitly teaching it—is that what they decide to do affects someone else.

They see it in real time. One child knocks over a carefully built LEGO tower, and their sibling bursts into tears. A door slams in frustration, and suddenly everyone is on edge. A kind gesture—like sharing the last cookie—brings a smile.

These everyday moments of living closely with siblings help children begin to understand something foundational to all relationships: I affect you, and you affect me.

That awareness is the beginning of empathy. It's the seed of emotional responsibility. This matters enormously for friendships.

Many kids struggle with empathy, not because they don't care, but because they haven't yet realized the impact they have on others. They might dominate play, interrupt frequently, or hurt feelings without understanding why their peers pull away. Kids with siblings grasp this concept intuitively, and we can support them in going even deeper and recognizing they can choose how they impact a room.

Here are a few ways we can slow things down and narrate the emotional impact:

- "Look at your brother's face—when he showed you his drawing and you decided to pretend you were driving the car he drew, his eyes lit up!"
- "Did you see how your sister smiled when you helped her with that puzzle?"
- "You screamed because you needed quiet, and then your



*Photo by Elina Fairytale from Pexels*



brother just yelled louder.  
Oof—that didn't go as planned!  
How could you ask for what you need in a way that helps people listen?"

These reflections don't need to be lectures. They can be 10-second nudges that help our kids connect the dots between their choices and someone else's experience. Over time, this builds their ability to read the room, tune into others, and care about how their actions impact others.

And that's not just useful at home. That's the foundation of friendship.

### **SIBLING DIFFERENCES TEACH KIDS THAT LIKING DIFFERENT THINGS IS OKAY**

One of the hidden gifts of growing up with siblings is discovering that people you care about don't have to be just like you.

Siblings often have different temperaments, interests, and rhythms. One might want to build LEGO towers while the other prefers imaginative play. One might love constant activity, while another thrives in quiet. These differences can be hard in the moment, yet they bring something important: the knowledge that you don't have to match someone to love them.

This is an especially important lesson for friendships.

When kids are younger, they tend to bond over sameness: "You like unicorns? I like unicorns too!" As they get older, the pressure to conform can grow. Kids might feel like they have to like the same games, wear the same clothes, or act a certain way in order to stay connected. That's how peer pressure creeps in. Children may worry that if they're too different, they won't be included. This comes down to their need to belong.

But when kids grow up alongside a sibling who's different from them—and they're supported in noticing and respecting those differences—they learn a deeper truth: you don't need to be the same to belong.



Fitting in and belonging are not the same.

They get early practice in holding onto their own preferences and personality while acknowledging the other child within a relationship—saying, "I don't like that show, but I'll sit with you while you watch," or "You want to play dress-up, but I'm going to finish this puzzle first."

This is the beginning of real relational confidence—being able to stay connected while also staying true to yourself.

Siblings also offer a safe, everyday place to practice this kind of boundary-honoring. If one child wants to wrestle and the other doesn't, you can coach them both through naming what they like and listening to what the other prefers. Those micro-lessons slowly shape kids who can do the same with friends: respect differences without needing to change themselves or the other person.

The result? Kids who are better equipped to resist peer pressure—not because they don't care what others think, but because they've had practice staying grounded in who they are, even in close relationships.

And that's one of the greatest gifts of a sibling bond: the chance to be deeply connected, even when you're not the same.

### **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR FRIENDSHIPS**

Sibling relationships are a space where everything can exist—affection and frustration, closeness and conflict, sameness and difference. And because they unfold in the day-to-day moments of family life, they offer kids an unmatched opportunity to learn what it really means to be in a relationship with someone else.

These early bonds are not just background noise. They're shaping how our kids show up in their friendships, how they honor boundaries—their own and others—handle hard moments, care for others, and stay true to themselves.

So the next time your kids are bickering over who gets the last blueberry muffin or navigating a sibling stand-off over the remote, take heart. These are the micro-moments where relational skills grow. With our solid, sturdy guidance and support, they're building the foundation for healthy, connected friendships that can last a lifetime.

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