



# Counselor's Corner

May 2012

## The Unwritten Rules of Friendship: Simple Strategies to Help Your Child Make Friends

Social relationships are an important component of every child's world, especially at school. Through friendships, children learn about leading and following, arguing and making up, sharing and feeling empathy. Some children navigate social situations with ease, while others may struggle with establishing and maintaining peer relationships.

According to Dr. Natalie Madorsky Elman and Dr. Eileen Kennedy-Moore, every social interaction is governed by "Unwritten Rules," which explain how to interpret social cues and how to act appropriately in these situations. These rules are rarely stated, but most adults have an intuitive understanding of them. Children's friendships are a critical training ground for learning to get along with other people. Children are not born knowing how to build friendships. Instead, they learn these fundamental skills through personal experiences, over time. Families can help children to establish these important relationships with peers. Below are general guidelines to keep in mind when teaching your child to relate well to others.

**1. Talk with your child's teacher.** If you suspect your child is having social difficulties, it is essential you talk with his or her teacher, in order to get an objective opinion on the matter. The teacher sees your child "in action" everyday and could provide you important information about your child's behavior around other children. What you see at home may not be typical of how your child acts at school. Also, the teacher can be a wonderful resource to help your child build positive relationships at school.

**2. Provide opportunities for socializing.** Short play dates that focus on a planned activity, such as going bowling or going out for ice cream, work best for children who are struggling socially. In addition, your child may be able to form additional friends outside of school through structured special interest activities, such as horseback riding, an arts and crafts class, or activities offered by your local recreational department.

**3. Proceed slowly and consistently.** There are no quick fixes for helping children to relate better to others. You can discuss unwritten rules and expectations in different social settings and practice using them with your child. In addition, you may want to role play and offer reminders before your child enters a social situation, which he or she anticipates to be challenging. Your child may benefit from your social coaching, but he or she also needs to feel your love and acceptance, as well.

**4. Share your confidence.** Children often have trouble with perspective. If your child expresses feeling discouraged, listen, empathize, and try to understand his or her point of view. Express your confidence that, with assistance, your child will be able to find a way to deal with the situation. Focus on giving your child the knowledge, skills, and support he or she needs to independently solve a problem.

**5. Emphasize Kindness.** True friendships grow from a sense of connection. Place a high value on kindness. Don't tolerate cruelty between siblings. Point out the impact of your child's thoughts and words on others. Insist family members speak to one another in a respectful tone of voice. Let your child experience the joy of giving. Avoid putting other people down. Talk about how you can understand someone else's point of view, even if you don't agree with it. Express appreciation when your child does something thoughtful or helpful. These actions demonstrate the fundamentals of social relationships.

*\*Adapted from the book, **The Unwritten Rules of Friendship: Simple Strategies to Help Your Child Make Friends**, by Natalie Madorsky Elman, Ph.D. and Eileen Kennedy-Moore, Ph.D. Additional information and strategies about encouraging positive peer relationships can be found within this resource.*

For further details or information contact your child's guidance counselor:

**Mrs. Kelly B. Maire**  
Angelo L. Tomaso School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5305  
kmaire@warrentboe.org

**Mrs. Patricia Morris**  
Central School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5205  
ppilat@warrentboe.org

**Dr. Kelly Stankiewicz**  
Mount Horeb School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5405  
kellystankiewicz@warrentboe.org

**Mrs. Diane Langworthy**  
Woodland School  
(908) 7730-5300 x 5505  
dlangworthy@warrentboe.org

**Mrs. Midge Johnson**  
Middle School- 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5005  
mjohnson@warrentboe.org

**Ms. Helen Scully**  
Middle School - 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5007  
hscully@warrentboe.org

**Miss Melissa Kurlan**  
Middle School - 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5009  
mkurlan@warrentboe.org