

36 QUESTIONS TO HELP KIDS MAKE FRIENDS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **1 HOUR**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

This 36 questions activity can help children build closeness with someone they don't know well, including a child from a different ethnicity.

Childhood friendships are important to **well-being**. Having just one friend can help kids be more **invested in their schoolwork** and protect them from **being bullied**. Friendships across ethnicities are especially valuable and lead kids to be more adaptable and socially confident. For example, kids with cross-ethnicity friendships tend to **be better liked by other kids, be more self-confident, have a more positive mood, and feel safer at school**.

But making friends can be awkward. Knowing how to talk to others in a way that fosters genuine connectivity and paves the way for real friendship—particularly with those who are different from us—is a valuable life skill. This exercise helps you guide your child to talk to other kids in that way.

This exercise is particularly useful at transition times, like when your family moves to a new place or when children start middle school with many students they don't know.

TIME REQUIRED

30 minutes for each session.

HOW TO DO IT

Encourage your child to identify another child, perhaps of a different race or ethnicity, whom they don't know well and would be open to becoming friends with.

Find two 30-minute periods when the children can meet up. If you're a teacher, you might even want to find a time during class or lunch when the whole class can do this practice—especially at the beginning of the school year, so that kids who might not otherwise connect can get to know each other better.

During each meeting, have kids take turns asking and answering the sets of questions below, which become a bit more personal as the practice goes on.

Encourage children to spend relatively equivalent amounts of time talking and listening. At the outset, children can be reminded to only disclose information they feel comfortable with and to refrain from sharing information they feel is too personal.

Your child can also use some of these questions to help them become closer to an existing friend or get to know an acquaintance better. The questions below were **designed** for middle schoolers, but they could probably work for children in late elementary and early high school, too.

Meeting 1 (Partner 1)

1. What is your favorite subject in school?
2. What is your favorite dessert or flavor of ice cream?
3. What is/was your favorite pet? (If you've never had a pet, what pet would you choose if you could?)
4. What's your favorite thing to do during summer vacation?
5. What is your favorite TV show or movie?
6. Do you like to get up early or sleep in on the weekends?
7. What foreign country would you most like to visit and why?
8. If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
9. Describe your worst haircut ever.
10. Describe your best friend (without saying his/her name).
11. If you had to move from your school, what would you miss the most?
12. If your house was on fire and you had time to safely grab one thing before running out, what would it be?
13. If you could be famous for something, what would it be?
14. Describe one quality you wish you had.
15. What would a perfect day at school be like?
16. What would you like to change about your life if you could?
17. Name one thing that would make your parents/family proud of you and one thing that would make them disappointed in you.
18. Name one thing you and I appear to have in common.

Meeting 1 (Partner 2)

1. What is your favorite thing to do after school?
2. What is your favorite restaurant and what is your favorite food there?
3. Of all the places you've lived or visited, where was your favorite and why?
4. What is your favorite song?
5. What is your favorite holiday and why?
6. Who was your favorite elementary school teacher and why?
7. What state in the United States would you most like to visit and why?
8. If you had a lot of money and could do anything you wanted with it, what is one thing you would do?
9. Describe a time you got hurt (e.g., broke a bone).

10. What is the best gift or present you have ever received and why was it so special?
11. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about one thing in your future, what would you want to know?
12. If you could have dinner with anyone in the world, who would it be?
13. Think about your greatest dream or wish. What is your biggest obstacle in making it come true?
14. What would your worst day at school be like?
15. How would you describe a true friend?
16. If you could choose one thing about your life that would never change, what would it be?
17. Name one thing you like about your parents/family and one thing you don't like about them.
18. Name one thing you like about me.

Meeting 2 (Partner 1)

19. Do you think boys or girls have it easier?
20. If you had a magic mirror that allowed you to see exactly what was going on anywhere in the world, where would you look?
21. Imagine that the principal told you he wanted to make the school better and would change it in any one way you suggested. What would you tell him to do?
22. Name one thing about this school you think is unfair.
23. If you could be the most attractive, the most athletic, or the smartest student at school, which would you choose?
24. If you could make a TV show or YouTube video about anything you wanted and you knew millions of people would see it, what would it be about?
25. If you had to choose right now what job you would have as an adult, what would it be?
26. What is one thing you wish you were better at?
27. What is the biggest difference between what happens on TV and what happens in your life?
28. Describe a time at school when you were mean to someone else. What would you have changed about the situation if you could?
29. Would you rather your mom or dad give you more presents or spend more time with you? Which would make you feel more loved?
30. If you woke up tomorrow and you were grown up with kids of your own, how would you treat them differently than your parents treat you?
31. What is your biggest regret?
32. When you think about the future, what worries you the most?
33. If you could change one thing about the way you look, what would it be?
34. Describe your biggest failure.

35. What do you think your friends like most about you?
36. If we became friends, what is one thing we might enjoy doing together?

Meeting 2 (Partner 2)

19. Do you think it would be easier to be an only child or have lots of siblings?
20. If you could be invisible for a day, what would you do?
21. Imagine you had the opportunity to give a 10-minute speech to all the students in this school. What would you talk about?
22. What is the hardest part of middle school?
23. Describe one good thing and one bad thing about being popular at school.
24. If you could do one thing that you're not allowed to do now because you're too young, what would it be?
25. What is one job you hope you never have as an adult?
26. If you could be really talented at one thing, what would you choose?
27. Name one thing you think you could do better if you were the principal.
28. Describe a time at school when someone was mean to you. What would you have changed about the situation if you could?
29. If you could give your parents one tip on how to be better parents, what would it be?
30. Name one thing someone in your family does that really gets on your nerves.
31. If you could travel to the past in a time machine and change one thing, what would it be?
32. What is your biggest fear?
33. What do you dislike most about yourself?
34. What is the most embarrassing thing that has happened to you at school?
35. What is your proudest moment?
36. Name one reason we would be lucky to have each other as a friend.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Echols, L., & Ivanich, J. (2021). [From "fast friends" to true friends: Can a contact intervention promote friendships in middle school?](#) *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 1-20.

Middle schoolers paired with an unfamiliar partner of the same age and gender met once a month for three months. Pairs got to know each other by taking turns asking the 36 questions, and then competed with other pairs to cooperatively build a block tower. At the end of three months, middle schoolers felt they had a closer relationship with their partner than other classmates. This was true for both male and female pairs, of the same ethnicity and different ethnicities.

WHY TO TRY IT

The 36 questions are a mixture of opportunities for fun and self-disclosure. Mirroring the emotional journey of friendship, they become increasingly intimate, requiring partners to reveal more about themselves as they answer questions. Each series of 36 questions ends with one that plants the suggestion of friendship, such as: “Name one thing you like about me” or “What’s one thing we would do together if we became friends?”

Taking turns listening with genuine interest and curiosity, and the experience of feeling seen and heard, allow feelings of closeness to develop. Although there are no guarantees, this exercise creates fertile grounds for true friendship to blossom.

SOURCES

[Leslie Echols, Ph.D.](#), Missouri State University

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

