

Supporting Your Child Through Friendship Conflict (Ages 5–6)

Friendship struggles at this age are *very normal*. Children are still learning how to share, include others, and handle big feelings. Your role is not to fix the friendship, but to **coach your child through it**.

What TO Say (Helpful Coaching Language)

When your child feels left out:

- * “That’s a really hard feeling.”
- * “What could you try if you want to join in?”
- * “Do you want help thinking of something to say?”

When your child is excluding others:

- * “Look around—who can you make space for?”
- * “How would you feel if that happened to you?”
- * “Let’s think of a way to include everyone.”

When there’s a disagreement:

- * “Did everyone get a turn to share their idea?”
- * “What’s a fair way to solve this?”
- * “Can you take turns or combine your ideas?”

When your child is upset:

- * “I’m here to help you figure this out.”
- * “You can handle this—I believe in you.”

What NOT to Say

Try to avoid:

- “They’re being mean to you.”
- “You don’t have to play with them anymore.”
- “I’ll talk to their mom/teacher.” (right away)
- “That’s not fair!”
- “You should only play with kids who include you.”

*These responses can increase conflict, create labels, or make it harder for your child to build independence.

What Your Child Is Still Learning

At this age, children are developing:

- * Taking turns in play
- * Handling not getting their way
- * Including others
- * Speaking up for themselves
- * Flexibility (“going along” with others’ ideas)

They will not get it right every time—and that’s okay.

What This Looks Like in Real Life

Scenario 1: “They wouldn’t let me play!”

Instead of: “That’s so mean!”

Try: “What could you say if you want to join?”

Scenario 2: Your child says, “We don’t want her to play.”

Instead of: “You have to include everyone.”

Try: “How can you make space so everyone can play?”

Scenario 3: “She only played with her, not me.”

Instead of: “That’s not fair!”

Try: “Sometimes friends play in different ways. What could you do next?”

When Kids Use Hurtful Language

At this age, children often use hurtful words without fully understanding their impact. These moments are important opportunities to teach empathy and better choices.

If your child uses hurtful language:

- Stay calm and matter-of-fact

- “Those words can hurt people. Let’s try that again in a kinder way.”
- “What could you say instead?”
- Have them redo the moment using kind or respectful words

If your child is on the receiving end:

- “What did you hear? How did that feel?”
- “What could you say back?” (e.g., “I don’t like that” or “That’s not kind”)
- Reinforce that they can ****get help from an adult when needed****

If it happens during play (with peers):

- Keep it **simple and immediate**
- “We use kind words when we play”
- Guide a quick repair: “Can you try that again in a kinder way?”

The goal is not punishment, but helping children learn:

- * Words have impact
- * They can repair mistakes
- * There are better ways to express frustration

How You Can Help at Home

- * Keep playdates ****short and structured**** (1–2 hours works best)
- * Practice through ****role play**** (“What could you say if...?”)
- * Read books about friendship and talk about choices
- * Encourage a variety of friendships, not just one group

A Helpful Mindset

- * Not every moment will feel fair
- * Feeling left out sometimes is part of learning friendships
- * These situations help build important social skills