

## Meeting New People

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caretakers\*

\*NOTE: The word "Parent" will be used throughout this module, but includes all of the above

## Meeting New People

- It is important for children to learn to positively interact with others and make friends
- Some parents worry their child's injury, disability, or visible difference may impact relationships with others
- Meeting new people, making friends, and keeping friends requires a set of behaviors (social skills) to interact and communicate with others

## Meeting New People

- Social skills development depends upon a variety of things, such as:
  - Age
  - Personality style – shy or outgoing
  - Skills previously learned and practiced
  - Past experiences
- You and your child can assess their current skills to identify areas they may need to develop and practice

## Meeting New People

- Social skills can be learned and practiced. Your child needs social skills to effectively:
  - Meet and interact with new people
  - Make friends
  - Maintain friendships
  - Interact appropriately with groups or in classrooms
  - Deal with the reaction of others to their injury
  - Answer questions
  - Present themselves in a confident and relaxed manner

## What You Can Do



1. Learn strategies to help your child meet new people and make friends
2. Build social skills
3. Practice new strategies and social skills

## #1 Strategies to Meet People and Friends

- Take your child out into new settings where they have the opportunity to meet new people (playgrounds, swimming pools, shopping malls, etc.)
- Coach your child on how to smile in a friendly way, greet others, and make friendly comments
- Teach your child how to engage others by asking polite questions

## #2 Building Social Skills



- There are 5 basic steps that you can teach your child to help build social skills:
  - **LISTEN** to what others say
  - **LOOK** at the other person when talking with them
  - **REPEAT** the last few words the other person says
  - **USE NAMES.** Use the other person's name throughout the conversation
  - **REPEAT AGAIN** what you heard them say in your own words

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## #2 Building Social Skills: LISTEN



- **LISTEN to what others say**
- People (especially children) love attention. Teach your child to pay attention to others.
- Talk with your child about how to give and receive attention
- Praise and encourage your child as they demonstrate listening and interacting with other people

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## #2 Building Social Skills: LOOK



- **LOOK at the other person when talking with them**
- Model this behavior for your child
- Ask your child to look at you when you are having a conversation
- Have your child notice when other children have paid attention to them and ask how that made them feel

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## #2 Building Social Skills: REPEAT



- **REPEAT the last few words the other person says**
- Model this behavior for your child
- Use the last few words of a sentence your child just said to start your next sentence or question, such as:
  - Child: "I want to ride my bike to the store."
  - Parent: "To the store?"
- Praise your child when during conversations you hear them repeat the last few words someone has said

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## #2 Building Social Skills: USE NAMES



- **USE NAMES. Use the other person's name throughout the conversation**
- Using another person's name during conversation shows you are interested in them
- Encourage your child to use the other person's name in conversation:
  - Instead of saying "Let's play basketball" say "Tom, let's play basketball"

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## #2 Building Social Skills: REPEAT AGAIN



- **REPEAT AGAIN: what you heard them say in your own words**
- Repeating lets the other person know you are listening to them and understand what they said
- Model this behavior for your child
  - Child: "Mrs. Brown is a good teacher. She tells us fun stories."
  - Parent: "You like teachers who tell good stories."

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### #3 Practice New Strategies and Social Skills



- Take your child out into new situations or settings to provide the opportunity to practice new skills for meeting people and making friends
  - Talk about how to deal with new situations
  - Discuss where are you going and what you will be doing
  - Suggest things your child might share with others to initiate conversation in this setting

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### #3 Practice New Strategies and Social Skills



- Talk with your child about:
  - Their thoughts and feelings on interacting with others
  - What they heard others saying during the interaction
  - Selecting friends who share similar interests and values

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### Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old



- Anticipate that children in this age group are very curious and direct. They will show curiosity by touching, staring, making bold or direct statements, invading personal space, etc.
- When this happens:
  - Speak in a calm, confident manner
  - Use simple one to two word responses

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### Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old



- Provide opportunities to practice meeting new people by:
  - Setting up play dates
  - Scheduling community outings (library, playground, park, grocery store, etc.)

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### Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old



- As children grow older, they often want to participate in groups with their peers in the school and community
- They are more thoughtful, can have stronger emotional reactions, and may worry more about their body image. Social skills building will help to deal with these issues.
- Discuss importance of friendship and making friends

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### Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old



- Provide opportunities for your child to meet new people in the community
- Encourage your child's participation in groups at school and extra-curricular activities
- Books, TV programs, and movies can be used to discuss how others meet people, make and maintain friends, and deal with social interactions

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**Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old**



- Actively involve current friends to participate in activities that will lead to meeting new people
- Identify particular skills or interests that your child has and encourage use of that as a means of meeting new people and dealing with new situations
- Find a joint activity that you and your child can participate in together and involves socializing with others (scouting, camping, rowing, clubs, etc.)

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**Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old**



- Consider having your child join a peer or support group that promotes social skill development
- Encourage participation in a sponsored burn camp experience
- Continue to use discussions of books, movies, and TV programs as a means of talking about meeting new people and interacting with others

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**Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old**



- Suggest that your child keep a journal. Encourage them to write about topics related to friendship:
  - Meeting new people
  - What makes a good friend
  - How to end a friendship when it no longer works
  - When a friend moves away
- Have your child write a short story about someone making a friend

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**Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+**



- Young adults have considerable life experience in meeting and dealing with new people
- They may already have a strong social group to help with support and encouragement
- Encourage them to use their existing peer support system to meet new people

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**Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+**



- Recognize that young adults may have concerns about the potential impact their injury or appearance may have on:
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Future relationships
  - Life goals (can I live on my own, can I do what I planned to do with my life, etc.)

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**Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+**

- Assure your young adult it is normal to have questions and feelings about how their injury may impact their life
- To help them deal with their concerns, listen and reflect back what feelings your child is expressing
- Be cautious about developing and imposing your feelings and solutions

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### Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- Remind them of their skills, strengths, and experiences
- Encourage independence and the continued pursuit of life plans and goals
- Suggest use of a self-help or support group
- Consider attending the Phoenix Society's World Burn Congress as a family

