

God: Our best friend forever!

Every Catholic parent wants to raise children in God's friendship. That's the best way we know to keep our children safe and on the right path to Heaven. Still, we don't always encourage children to think of God as a friend — yet he wants to be our very best friend.

Consider talking to your children about becoming friends with God.

Friends care for each other.

God's love for us is active, alive and real. The Bible is chock full of ways he has proven his love and friendship to us. The most important way Jesus showed his friendship is by taking on our humanity and dying on the Cross for us. *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* (John 16:13).

And, Jesus assured us that God will always care for us. *"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?"* (Matthew 6:30).

Friends share secrets.

The Bible holds all of God's secrets and he wants us to know every one of them. *"I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father"* (John 16:15). But it's no fun to



have a friend who hears all your secrets and doesn't share any of his. Yes, God knows all of our secrets before we tell him, but it's more fun to hear it directly from us. God can be trusted to respect all of our secrets.

Friends spend time together.

Imagine how it would feel if your best friend didn't call you, talk to you, or seem to want to spend time with you. In any warm friendship, spending time together is the whole point. That's why God asked that we visit him at his home every Sunday for Mass.

Friends trust each other.

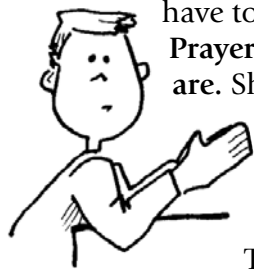
Have you ever had a friend abandon you when you were in trouble or upset? Even the best of friends can lose heart but we don't have to worry about that with God. Jesus promised that God will never leave us. *"And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). God is a friend we can trust.

Try this ...

Like and good friendship, our friendship with God needs care and attention. Here are some ideas to help your children become forever friends with God:

Visit your friend. Wouldn't you feel sad if a friend you liked often turned down your invitation to get together? God has asked us to visit him at his house every weekend. Don't say "no" to play dates with God.

Talk to your friend. In any solid friendship, spending time together is the whole point. That's what prayer is for God's friends – a way to spend time with your best friend. But sometimes children don't know how to pray or think they have to pray in a certain way.



Prayer can be as individual as we are. Short, heartfelt prayers throughout the day help children connect with God in a simple way. Think of it as a divine Instant Message.

Then encourage them to take some time each day for a longer, friendly conversation with God, just as they would talk to a friend during a play date or on the phone.

You can teach a lot about prayer in your family prayer time. Also, let children hear you pray throughout the day in personal ways such as, "Lord, let me do my best today," or "Thank you for this beautiful weather."

Get to know God's other friends. One of the best ways to get to know a friend is to meet his or her other friends. The same is true of God. Get to know his other friends, such as the saints,



and you'll learn more about him, too.

Give small gifts to your friend. We all have chores and

tasks we perform every day. They many not seem important, but when we do little things well and offer them to God, they become prayers. For example "Jesus, I won't complain about taking out the garbage because I love you" or "Lord, I will get right out of bed in the morning because of all you do for me."

Ask your friend for help. Good friends are always ready to help each other. It's part of being a friend. God is ready to show his friendship and help us with anything we ask. Teach children to trust God with all their needs, little or large.

Be a fearless friend. Experts say that bullying is showing up



earlier in schools than ever before and even young children engage in unkind behavior to avoid being bullied themselves.

Practice ways to say "no" when your child is asked to join in unkind behaviors such as talking badly about other children, excluding those who are different, or taking others' things. Doing it in practice makes it easier to do it for real.



Even better—encourage children to be good models for their peers. For example, practice being friendly to someone who is sad or alone, showing kindness to classmates, or using respectful language when talking to others. Remind children that God wants us to treat all his friends with love.

Respect your friend's backyard. What if you were at your friend's house and accidentally messed up his bike or lost her favorite ball?

You'd feel terrible and offer to replace it or pay for it.



Think of the earth as God's backyard. Everything in it belongs to him. We can show respect for it in small but meaningful ways such as not using more than our share of electricity or water and picking up our trash.

Put your friend first. Sometimes being a good friend means thinking of others instead of ourselves, like giving up your last cookie to a friend or offering him the window seat. In a friendship with God, putting him first may mean spending time in prayer when we'd rather be outside playing. Or we may choose to read the Bible instead of our favorite book. After all, this is what God did for us: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*" (John 3:16).

Share your friend. Most youngsters trust their parents' friends. Talk to your children about your friendship with God, what you do to keep it strong, and how much it means to you.