

# Here to help you take great care of your kids: The *Parent* Page

## BACK TO SCHOOL

### How to help children make new friends

(MC) Students learn lessons each day. While many of these lessons pertain to their coursework, kids first learn to cultivate friendships and build lasting relationships.

In addition to a new curriculum, new teachers and new schedules, kids also might make new friends once a school year begins.

While some familiar faces carry through from grade to grade, chances are youngsters will meet new students who will soon become good friends. While

many kids find it easy to make new friends, others might need some assistance so they can make the most of opportunities to socialize and form friendships that might last a lifetime.

**\* Offer opportunities for socialization.** Children should be given the opportunity to explore friendships outside of the classroom where peer pressure might not be so prevalent. Establish a carpool or invite a classmate over for a play date. Unstructured time to play or get to know each other is a great way to estab-



lish friendships. Invite new children over each time to see which friendships are the strongest, but make sure you are not pushing a friendship on your child.

**\* Discover common interests.** One of the quickest ways to build friendships is through common interests, says Kirk Martin, a behavioral therapist and author. Encourage your child to join a club or sports group where he or she can meet other kids with similar interests. Sometimes finding reasons to talk other children is the most difficult step to making new friends. Sharing a common interest removes this barrier.

**\* Teach proper manners.** Children who are polite, well-mannered and know how to follow direction are better equipped to attract friends. Children who misbehave may be shunned by other kids and their parents who do not want the hassle



of an unruly youngster coming over to play. Respectful children who are honest, trustworthy and capable of sustaining eye contact and making small talk may find it easy to make friends.

**\* Take the friendship lead.** As parents, you can improve your child's chances of making friends by getting friendly with their classmates' parents. Making connections with fellow parents can reinforce the value of friendship to your children. Socializing as families also presents other opportunities to get together and solidify relationships.

**\* Boost confidence levels.** As a parent you can talk to your children about their strengths and positive attributes. Emphasizing kids' best traits will increase their self-esteem, and that sense of self-worth can make it easier for them to make friends. A child who is shy and insecure may retreat when meeting new people,

but a child who can proudly stand behind his or her accomplishments may attract friends easily.

School is about more than just hitting the books. It's also a prime opportunity for kids to develop their personal skills and make new friends.

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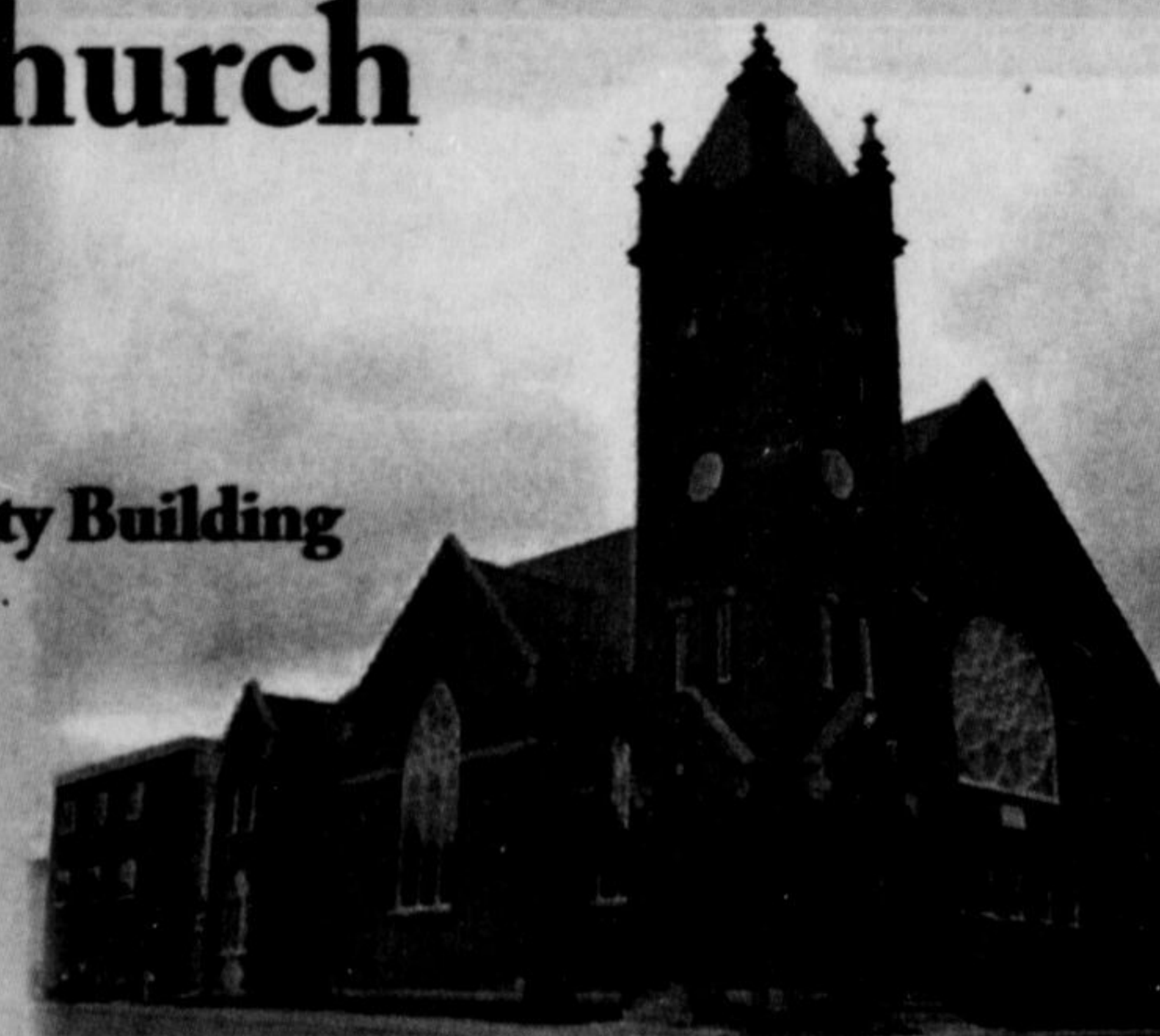
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