

New Lego Friends lineup features diverse new characters with complex emotions

A decade on from the launch of Lego Friends, the Lego Group has re-imagined the Friends Universe with a new lineup of characters and accompanying TV series hosted on the brand's YouTube channel.



Source: Supplied

The 2023 Lego Friends Universe includes characters with a wider variety of skin tones, cultural backgrounds, disabilities and neurodiversity, all with more authentic personalities and relationships. By launching this new generation of products, the Lego Group said it hopes that when kids play in the Lego Friends Universe, they'll see more of themselves in the characters and gain a better understanding of others, helping them navigate their own experiences and in turn, become better friends.

Lego said the development comes at a time when the ups and downs of friendship are not widely shown on TV or in the online content kids consume, meaning many young children are left to navigate these complex feelings, without understanding that it's completely normal and that others are feeling the same.



Source: Supplied

To support the launch, the Lego Group conducted global research to understand more about the diversity and complexity of modern friendships amongst young children around the globe. Focusing on 18,000 kids aged 6-12 years old from 19 different countries, the research shines a light on the importance that friendships have on the well-being of kids in early childhood.

The study revealed that:

- Kids rely on friendships to deal with the complex emotions of modern life, with eight in 10 (87%) saying that they turn to friends as a source of comfort when they have problems
- Kids value 'having fun' and 'being happy' as main elements of friendship, with more than three quarters (67%) wanting someone to have fun with and six in 10 (60%) wanting someone to laugh with and the majority (94%) said that friends made them feel happy
- Kids also see the value in diverse friendships with nine in 10 (93%) agreeing that it's good to have a diverse friendship group who can teach you different things

- Kids don't often experience complex emotions portrayed in the content they view, with just two in five (40%) saying they have seen friends have ups and downs on TV or content they are consuming and only a third (32%) saying they have seen friends having problems or arguments
- When asked if it would be good for more toys to feature characters that embodied different emotions, more than two in three children (68%) agreed. Over a quarter (27%) said this is because everyone feels this way sometimes and 22% of kids said it would help children know that others felt the same
- Two in three kids (68%) said they want to see more toys and characters portray different emotions to better reflect real life

"The Lego Group recognises the importance friendships have on child development and how it plays a huge part in helping kids understand diversity," the company said.

Further to the launch of the new generation of characters, the storylines within the Lego Friends universe have been refreshed in collaboration with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, helping to develop content narratives that ensure they're relatable, inclusive, and reflective of the real-life experiences of children today.

Reflecting modern real-world friendships

Child psychologist Laverne Antrobus commented on the research saying: "The research findings give a fascinating insight into the complexities of children's friendships in the modern and increasingly diverse world that we are living in. It's encouraging that children want to see diverse friendships represented in the content they watch and the toys that they play with.

"These changes will help children understand difference and give them the confidence to make relationships with others who are not the same as them. Learning from friends about how they are similar and different will ultimately help children to be accepting of others as they navigate friendships and relationships in the world that they are living in.

"It's great to see the new Lego Friends universe will be fully inclusive and a better reflection of real-world friendships in 2023, so young people can play, explore and express their emotions with a more diverse range of characters and replicate these experiences in their everyday friendships."



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Tracie Chiarella, head of product, Lego Friends at the Lego Group said; “Children are our role models and guide everything we do here at the Lego Group. After an incredible 10 years on Lego Friends, this re-imagination has enabled us to push the boundaries not only in the content and the storytelling, but also in the reflection of modern, childhood friendships so that children can truly see their experiences reflected in the world around them.

“From the research released today, it's great to see that kids acknowledge the importance of friendship for their mental health and it's encouraging to hear they want more emotional diversity to be represented in the content they consume and the toys and characters they play with.”

The new generation of Lego Friends is available to buy now with a *Lego Friends* TV special available to watch on the Lego YouTube channel.

Lego South Africa will also be celebrating friendships with a range of global activities to help children experience the joy and benefits of play themselves. Locally, these activities will include a two-week play experience taking place from 14 February to 21 February 2023 at Sandton City with activities available for kids.

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