

## Healthy Friendships

The key thing to remember with friendships is that they are reciprocal relationships. While doing the above will help maintain a friendship, it is important that your friend makes an effort to do these things too.



It can be difficult to tell whether or not someone is a real friend. This can be particularly challenging for people with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism as we have difficulty reading non-verbal signs such as body language and tone of voice and it is hard to tell whether someone is being dishonest.

Here are some characteristics of a healthy friendship:

- Friends make you feel comfortable with yourself, so you don't need to act like something you're not. Your friends know you and accept your shortcomings.
- A friend should be honest with you, but without hurting your feelings.
- Good friends won't necessarily always agree, but they are able to talk through their disagreements and accept that each person may have different opinions. This is sometimes referred to as 'agreeing to disagree'.

- A true friend will not hold long-term grudges following a disagreement or argument but will work with you to find a compromise, forgive and move on.
- A true friend is not selfish. They will be happy for you to find other friendships or a romantic relationship, and will make an effort to get along with other people who are important to you.
- A healthy friendship is based on trust. It is important to know that you can confide in your friend and know that they won't talk about you to others behind your back or break any confidences.
- In healthy friendships, there are mutually agreed boundaries. Your friend should know what you are and are not comfortable with and should not push you to do things that make you uncomfortable.
- There should be a degree of balance in the relationship. If one person wants to spend a lot more time together and you are not comfortable with this, or if you feel that they are trying to distance themselves from you or have more time apart, this suggests that there might be a problem in the friendship.
- A good friend will want you to be happy and will be pleased when you achieve and do well.
- In a healthy friendship, your friend will always listen to you and care about and be interested in what you have to say.

- A friend will always say they are sorry when they make a mistake.

## **Peer Pressure**

This is when people around you (including people you may consider to be friends) combine to pressure you to do something. Peer pressure can be a positive, thing, for example if you are feeling low, your friends may get together to convince you to go to an event you might enjoy, or to seek additional support.

However, when your peers are pressuring you to do something you are uncomfortable with or that you know is wrong, unsafe or inappropriate, this is not acceptable and demonstrates that they are not your true friends. In this situation, it



is best to distance yourself from these people and if you are worried or afraid, tell someone you trust what has happened, such as a relative, another friend or a support worker.

You have a right to say “no” and a true friend will respect this.

## **Disagreements**

Even in the healthiest of friendships disagreements and arguments sometimes occur. If this happens, it doesn't necessarily mean that the friendship is over.

Talking through disagreements is a good way to resolve them. Sometimes you and your friend can both take a moment to calm down and then discuss your disagreement and try to compromise. At other times, a cooling-off period may be necessary before you try to resolve things.



Friends won't always agree but as long as you respect each other's opinions and are prepared to listen to each other and compromise, you should be able to work through any argument or conflict.

### **Here are some steps for working through conflict:**

#### **Calm down**

- If you are feeling angry or upset, try counting backwards from 10 or taking some deep breaths.

#### **Ask yourself what is really bothering you:**

- Do you not agree?
- Did someone say or do something that made you mad or hurt your feelings?
- Are you feeling the way you do now because of something else that upset you in the past?
- Is this a one-time problem or one that keeps happening?

#### **Discuss the problem**

- Find a time when you can talk in private.
- Keep your voice calm and your body relaxed. Try to make eye contact.

- Say exactly what is bothering you. Share how you *feel* by using sentences that start with “I.” Don’t blame or accuse the other person. Check out the following examples and then practice changing “you” statements to “I” statements.

**Instead of:** “You never want to hang out with me anymore.”

**Try:** “I feel left out when you hang out with Tracy’s friends.”

**Instead of:** “You always pick on me in class / at work.”

**Try:** “I feel singled out when you call on me more than other students / colleagues.”

**Instead of:** “You’re so bossy.”

**Try:** “I feel upset when you don’t listen to what I think.”

- Keep the conflict between you and only the others involved. Don’t ask friends to take sides.

### **Listen to your friend**

- Make eye contact. This shows you are interested in what the other person is saying and willing to solve the problem.
- Don’t interrupt, get angry, judge, or be defensive.
- Try to see things from your friend’s perspective.

Discuss ways of settling the argument that will meet both of your needs. Be prepared to change your ways and keep an open mind. Be willing to say you’re sorry and to forgive each other and move on.