

# **Friends – Who Needs Them?**

## **Background**

Close relationships with peers are an important element of health and well being at every stage of life. Friendships play an even more key role during adolescences. During adolescence, students begin to reinvent themselves and to make friends with others they see as having similar interests and values. Students need help differentiating between true friends and more superficial relationships, and they need adult guidance in productive social interactions. While most students this age have several friends, be especially aware of students who have no close friends. These students are more likely to feel socially isolated and are at higher risk for being bullied by their classmates.

## **Learner Outcomes**

By the end of this session, students will be able to

- List four reasons why it is important to have at least one friend
- List qualities to look for in a friend
- Describe how to show respect to others who are not in their friendship circle
- Describe how friendship circles will change as they change

## **Materials Needed**

- Pencils
- Whiteboard and markers
- Job description for a Close Friend (end of document)

## **Preparation Needed**

- Pencil for each student
- Copy of the handout for each student

## Class Meeting Outline

1. On the board write “acquaintance,” “friend,” and “best friend.” **What is the difference between an acquaintance and a friend? Do you behave the same way with best friends as with acquaintances? Why or why not?**
2. **Those people we call our best friends may better be described as our closest friends. I want you to think about traits or qualities you look for in a good friend and to write a job description for an ideal close friend.** Give a handout to each student and briefly review what each element of the job description means. Allow students to work individually for a few minutes.
3. **The traits and qualities you expect in good friends should also be traits and qualities you expect in yourself. On your job description, put a check mark beside those traits you believe you possess and circle those that may need work.**
4. Have students refer to their job description to process this activity.

## Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

1. **What things do you look for in a close friend? Is it hard to find someone who meets all these qualifications? Have your ideas or expectations changed over time?**
2. **What are the most important things about having at least one friend? What is most important about having a friend here at school?**
3. **What are some possible challenges of finding a really close friend?**
4. **What are some of the challenges of being a good friend?**
5. **What are the risks of choosing the wrong friend? What might make a person the wrong friend for you?** (Answers might include he or she may not be available when you need a friend, doesn't keep confidences, may use you to get what he or she wants, isn't always nice to you, or is involved in risky activities.)
6. **For students your age, how can friends be a positive influence on behavior?**
7. **In your opinion, how can peer pressure from friends have a negative influence on the behavior of students your age?**

8. **What are some examples of ways you can be a positive influence on your friends? How can you influence them positively when it comes to the issue of bullying?**
9. **Are friendships different for boys and for girls? How does gender affect ways you interact with each other?**
10. **Over time, friendships can change. This is a normal part of growing up, and it even happens with adults. But when it happens, it can really hurt! How can you be considerate of a former friend?** (Answers might include keeping the secrets that you know about that person, never using information to bully or gossip about that person, keeping old confidences private, being polite/saying hi when you pass the person in the hall, or not “dissing” the person.)
11. **If you know of people (no names) who are isolated or who have no close friends, what are some good ways to include them or look out for them?**
12. **It is unrealistic for us to think that everyone at school has to be friends with everyone else! But we all need to be able to coexist and find ways to be respectful and accepting of each other. How can you treat other students kindly even if you don't consider them to be a friend? Even if you don't like them?**

## **Wrap-Up**

1. **Friendships help us during life's ups and downs. Friends are people to share and do things with. Friends provide emotional support when we need it. We need friends in order to stay happy and healthy.**

**But there are times when all of us (adults too) feel let down or hurt by our friends. So our challenge this week is to think about how we can be a better friend to others and try to include people who might be feeling left out.**

2. **Encourage additional questions and comments.**

# **Job Description for a Close Friend**

## **1. Duties, Responsibilities, or Tasks**

(What kinds of things do you expect a close friend to do in order to demonstrate his or her friendship?)

## **2. Qualifications Needed**

(What interests, qualities, or traits are you looking for in a close friend?)

## **3. Experience Needed**

(Do you expect this person to be a proven good friend to others?)

## **4. Hours available**

(Do you expect this person to be available whenever you need him/her?  
Or only when it is convenient for him/her?)

## **5. Benefits of the Position**

(What can this person expect from you in return?)