NO PREP

Friendships and Peer Relationships

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Friendships and Peer Relationships

Friendship Is Not a Minor Subject

Friendship gets treated as the light topic in a relationships unit, sitting somewhere below family and dating in seriousness. The research does not support that ranking. A large body of work links social connection to physical health outcomes at a scale that surprises people the first time they see it. One widely cited analysis combining data from well over a hundred studies found that people with strong social relationships had roughly a fifty percent greater likelihood of survival over the study periods than people with weak ones, an effect researchers compared to major medical risk factors. Loneliness is associated with higher rates of heart disease, weakened immune response, poorer sleep, depression, and cognitive decline in later life. The

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How Friendships Actually Form

Friendships look spontaneous and are in fact fairly predictable. Researchers identify a small set of ingredients. Proximity comes first, since people become friends with those they physically encounter over and over, which is why school, a team, a job, or a bus route generates friendships so efficiently. Repeated unplanned contact matters more than any single meeting, because familiarity itself increases liking. Similarity contributes, though the popular version overstates it; shared interests provide something to do together, but shared values matter more over the long run

than shared hobbies. Reciprocity is essential and frequently missing, meaning that both people initiate, both invest, and neither is permanently the one who texts first. Self-disclosure is the ingredient that turns an acquaintance into a friend, as people gradually share things that carry some risk and find that the information is handled well. Time is the least glamorous ingredient. One study of how friendships develop estimated something like fifty hours of interaction to move from acquaintance to casual friend and roughly two hundred hours to reach close friendship, which explains why school friendships form so easily and why replacing them later is so much harder. Understanding these ingredients converts friendship from something that happens to you into something you can deliberately build, and the deliberate version is exactly what adult life ends up requiring.

Peer Influence Runs Both Directions

Peer influence has a bad reputation earned largely from a narrow slice of it. The pressure is real: adolescence is a period of heightened sensitivity to social reward, and research using driving simulators found that teenagers took significantly more risks when peers were watching than when alone, while adults showed no such effect. That is a genuine finding worth knowing about yourself. But the same mechanism operates in the other direction and receives far less attention. Teenagers whose friends value school attendance attend more. Friend groups shape exercise habits, substance use, volunteering, and college applications, all through the same social channel. Much of the influence is not pressure at all; it is norms, meaning the quiet assumption about what people around here normally do. Norm-based influence is powerful precisely because nobody experiences it as being pressured. Two practical implications follow. First, the most consequential decision a person makes about peer influence is usually the choice of who to spend time around, because that choice sets the norms that will operate on them without any conscious effort. Second, resisting direct pressure is a learnable skill with concrete techniques: a plain no with no explanation, an exit line prepared in advance, a code text to a parent, or simply leaving. Practicing the words before they are needed matters, because in the moment the difficulty is rarely deciding what is right. It is producing a sentence quickly.

Conflict, Drift, and Endings

Friendships are ended more often by neglect than by argument. Researchers who study friendship dissolution find that most friendships simply fade as circumstances change, since the proximity and repeated contact that created them disappear when someone changes schools, jobs, or schedules. This is worth knowing because people frequently interpret a fade as a verdict on themselves when it is usually just logistics. Conflict is the other route, and friendships handle it worse than families do, largely because the relationship is voluntary and both people know it. That makes avoidance tempting: it is easier to drift than to say I was hurt when you did that. The result is a quiet ending nobody chose. Repairing a friendship uses the same tools as any other relationship, meaning a direct statement about a specific behavior and its effect, rather than hints or a third party. Some friendships should end, though, and the signals are recognizable: consistent one-way effort, a friend who is competitive about your successes, someone who shares things you told them privately, or a pattern where you leave interactions feeling worse. Ending can be explicit or gradual, and for most non-harmful situations a gradual reduction in contact is both common and humane. Ghosting, meaning disappearing without any signal, is easier for the person leaving and harder on the person left, which is worth weighing honestly rather than pretending the choice is neutral.

Making Friends After School Ends

The hardest thing about friendship is a fact almost nobody warns students about: school is the last environment that manufactures friendships automatically. School supplies proximity, repeated contact, shared activity, and enormous quantities of unstructured time, all four ingredients at once and at no cost. Adult life supplies almost none of them by default. Workplaces provide proximity but often not the unstructured time. Cities are full of people and short on repeated encounters with the same ones. This is a large part of why adults commonly report their friendships peaked in their late teens and early twenties and then thinned out. The solution is not complicated, but it does require doing on purpose what school used to do automatically. Choose activities with a recurring schedule and the same people each time, such as a recreational league, a class, a volunteer shift, a faith community, or a standing group, since a one-time event almost never produces a friendship. Initiate rather than wait, and accept that initiating means occasionally being turned down.

Convert an acquaintance into a friend by proposing something specific, because let us hang out sometime reliably produces nothing while are you free Thursday at seven works. Keep the friendships you already have with low-effort maintenance, since a message every few weeks is enough to keep a relationship alive across distance. None of this is charming, and all of it works. It is worth adding that the same principles apply to keeping the friendships already in place, which people neglect because existing friendships feel permanent. They are not. Friendships decay quietly when nobody initiates, and the decay is almost never anyone's actual decision. A recurring standing plan, even a monthly one, protects a friendship better than good intentions do, because it removes the need for someone to decide to reach out each separate time. Distance is manageable with low-effort contact, and a short message costs nearly nothing. The friendships people still have at forty are usually not the ones they felt closest to at eighteen. They are the ones somebody kept scheduling.

Key Information: Friendship and Peer Relationships

Detail	Information
Health Link	Strong social ties are tied to roughly 50% greater survival odds
Surgeon General	Issued a 2023 advisory on loneliness as a public health concern
Ingredients	Proximity, repeated contact, similarity, reciprocity, self-disclosure
Time Estimate	About 50 hours to casual friend, about 200 hours to close friend
Peer Risk Finding	Teens took more simulated driving risks when peers were watching
Norms	Quiet assumptions about normal behavior, more powerful than pressure
Most Endings	Drift caused by lost proximity, not an argument

Detail	Information
Adult Friendship	Requires deliberate recurring activity with the same people

Case Study: Kofi Counts the Hours

Kofi transferred in November of his junior year and by February had decided something was wrong with him. He knew a lot of people, ate lunch with a rotating cast, and had no one he would call on a Saturday. In a family life unit on friendship he read the estimate that casual friendship takes around fifty hours and close friendship around two hundred, and he did the arithmetic on the back of the handout. Lunch is twenty-five minutes. Since November that was maybe thirty hours spread across nine different people. His note to himself was blunt: it is not that they do not like me, it is that I have spent three hours with each of them. He picked two people and joined the same intramural team they were on, which added four hours a week with the same faces. By May he had two people he would text on a Saturday. His reflection reads, I thought I was bad at this. I was just early.

1. Kofi concluded he was early rather than bad at friendship. Using the reading's ingredients, explain which ones his lunch arrangement was missing.

2. Kofi joined an intramural team instead of attending a one-time event. Using the reading, explain why that choice was more likely to work.

Multiple Choice

1. What does the reading identify as the ingredient that turns an acquaintance into a friend?

    a) Having attended the same school together since elementary grades

    b) Sharing an unusual hobby that few other people have

    c) Self-disclosure that is handled well by the other person

    d) Living within walking distance of one another

2. What did the driving simulator research find about teenagers and peers?

    a) Teens took more risks when peers were watching them

    b) Peer presence had no measurable effect on either group

    c) Adults and teens changed their risk-taking by the same amount

    d) Teens drove more carefully when friends were in the car

3. According to the reading, how do most friendships end?

    a) Through a specific argument that is never repaired

    b) Through a betrayal involving shared private information

    c) Through a deliberate conversation ending the friendship

    d) Through drift after the shared proximity disappears

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ proximity	A) Quiet assumptions about what people around here normally do
2. ___ reciprocity	B) Physical closeness that produces repeated unplanned encounters
3. ___ self-disclosure	C) Ending contact by disappearing without any signal
4. ___ social norms	D) Both people initiating and investing rather than one carrying it
5. ___ ghosting	E) Gradually sharing things that carry some personal risk

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Research suggests about _____ hours of contact to reach close friendship.

2. Friendship research finds that quality matters more than _____.

3. School is the last setting that supplies friendship ingredients _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why does the reading say norms influence behavior more quietly than direct pressure?

_____

_____

_____

2. Explain why making friends is harder after high school than during it.

3. Why should someone avoid reading a friendship fade as a verdict on themselves?